Life and Death

Full Circle

Swami Yogakanti Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Swami Niranjan

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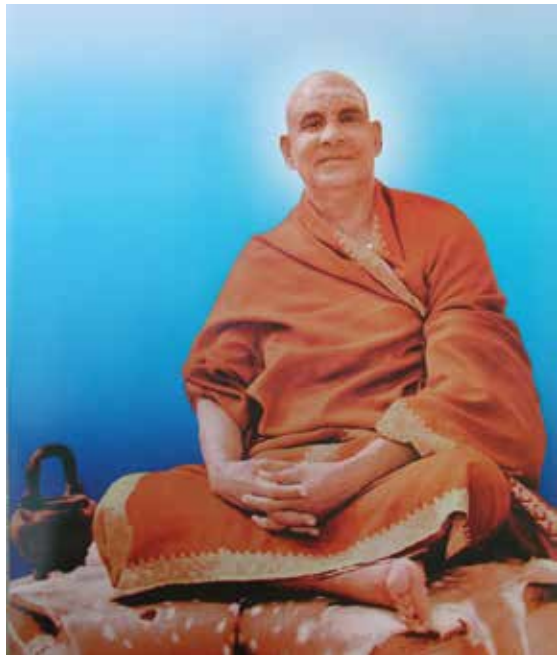
Published by Yoga Publications Trust
First edition 2020

ISBN: 978-81-943598-9-0

Publisher and distributor: Yoga Publications Trust, Ganga Darshan, Munger, Bihar, India.

Website: www.biharyoga.net

Printed at Thomson Press (India) Limited, New Delhi, 110001



Dedication

In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.



Dedication

To our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our yogic and spiritual journey.



Kill this little I, die to live, lead the divine life.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

Aastikyam naama vedoktadharmaadharmeshu vishvaasah.

Faith in the lines of conduct and misconduct as laid down by the Vedas is what is known as faith in the existence of the other world.

—*Varaha Upanishad* (1:2:4)

THANKS

Many thanks to Swami Satyananda Saraswati for giving the inspiration for this book, which evolved naturally from learning of the tradition of Sri Adi Shankaracharya.

Thanks to Swami Niranjanananda for giving the space for it to take shape, and making it a treasure house in the form of the meditations in the last section.

Thank you to the whole lineage from Swami Sivananda, Swami Satyananda, Swami Niranjanananda and Swami Satyasangananda for guidance through their satsangs.

Thank you to the whole lineage of wisdom that runs through the spiritual traditions of the world, and is just hinted at here, guiding us through life and death.

Thank you to Dharmaraj, Death, who guides each one of us into the next dimension, and to Terry Pratchett for introducing such a simple way of speaking to the Lord of Death.

Thank you to all who have contributed their personal expertise and experiences of death and dying.

Thank you to Swamis Nirmalratna and Madhumati for their perceptive editing of the manuscript and insightful suggestions.

Thank you to the authors and researchers who have granted permission to use their work.

Thank you to all who have contributed.

As the tile *Life and Death – Full Circle* suggests, this book looks at the full picture of human experience. Traditions of all times emphasize that a change in attitude is necessary to journey through life with peace and harmony and to prepare for the onward journey past the gates of death.

The book presents the teachings of various scriptures, scientific research and practical guidelines to increase awareness and understanding of the whole process of building up the right attitudes in life and death. Studying all the teachings and research systematically is invaluable for this. If, because of your situation, you want to begin with the practical guidelines and meditations of Parts 4 and 5., and can and then read the scriptural references later, or read them more slowly while practising the meditations.

The detailed content pages are designed to help you enter the 'circle' according to your own need and inclination.

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Introduction

While researching the life of Adiguru Shankaracharya, I became intrigued by what appeared to be authentic evidence of him living at quite different times. It began to be clear to me that this great yogi had taken birth several times over the last three and a half thousand years or so. Each time he had been recognized as a great authority by his contemporaries, and had continued the work of preserving and teaching the ancient wisdom or *vidya*. This led to renewed reflections on rebirth, and how rebirth is accepted in many eastern traditions but is often rejected or regarded skeptically in the west. I wondered if many of the emotional problems of people in the west, and the way western society has become so estranged from nature, could be traced to this view that our present life is the only dimension of consciousness that we will ever experience. It's a very isolating perspective; in fact, it's hardly a perspective at all.

A much wider perspective is that reality encompasses and transcends this present existence, and that death is a portal into the next phase of our evolution.

To look more closely at death and life, to look at both sides of this circle more fully, this book presents teachings from some of the ancient scriptures aimed at helping us to understand what is going on in life and death. I felt fortunate that I had, through working in hospitals and by chance, quite a lot of experience of being with people as they

were dying, and was well aware of how people die differently. Also, several of those people, and some animals too, had been kind enough to contact me after their deaths. These undeniable experiences did not 'fit in' with my western cultural background and were therefore ignored for many years. Though unconscious, they caused me to gravitate to the eastern philosophies and spiritual disciplines which frankly aim at expanding the consciousness into deeper areas that continue after dropping the body.

Reading Myers, Professor Stevenson, Moody and other western researchers makes it clear that these insights are re-emerging now in the western scientific mind-set. The deeper time-tested understandings of the scriptures regarding the nature of existence should therefore be consulted and incorporated into the way we live. Dying becomes a different experience when one realizes that death is a transitional stage of existence necessary for the evolution of the consciousness.

Humans and human society do not have to be ruled by materialistic concerns, the consciousness of humankind can be expanded to incorporate concern for all human beings and for all of nature. It's an unsettling experience to come face to face with embodied consciousness in the form of a dog, an elephant, or some other animal that society treats as unaware, and to realize that this denigration of other life forms is happening routinely around the world. Human sensitivity needs to evolve beyond 'me and mine', and we need to be able to maintain this sort of expanded awareness if we wish to evolve into human beings who are ready for the next step in evolution.

The scriptures speak of the soul evolving as it takes birth in the form of various creatures, and in various dimensions. It's a long journey through expanding states of consciousness, but we can start work on ourselves right away. Swami Satyananda Saraswati in 1976 had the slogan, 'Yoga is the way to uplift the consciousness of mankind.' He was speaking about how one can live with more awareness – but to complete the circle, we have to die with more awareness

too. And in the end, he demonstrated how to do that also – transforming death into mahasamadhi.

How to deepen and expand awareness

We so often avoid communicating with people on the subject of death, even if they are dying, or suffering because someone they love has just died, but we need to learn how to die well, as a peaceful conclusion to a well-lived life. Death is not defeat, and the attitude towards death that people have as they are dying is crucial to the actual process of dying, and to what happens to the spirit after death and in the next birth. We should embrace the perspective that life and death are part of a full circle. We may not be able to approach such mastery in life or death right now, but even lesser yogis, who are not enlightened but who have experienced out of body experiences, or faculties such as telepathy and clairvoyance which operate beyond the senses, are more likely to understand and accept the scriptural view that the body is merely a dwelling place for a spirit that is multi-dimensional.

Ramana Maharshi and Paramahamsa Ramakrishna remained peaceful and concerned with the welfare of others throughout their long and painful fatal illnesses – and transformed their deaths into mahasamadhi. Swami Satyananda voluntarily, willfully, raised up his pranas while chanting *Aum* and dropped his body while his consciousness achieved mahasamadhi. His mastery was such that, when he died, he used the opportunity to perform this greatest of all the kriyas as a teaching for all of us. It led to wanting to know what the teachings concerning death are in our own tradition of yoga and Vedanta. The longer we live, the more often we meet death, whether of family or friends or of people we hardly know at all, and our own experience of death is coming closer each day. Why not look into this subject of death more closely? Why not try to overcome our fears and build up sure understanding of how we can help ourselves and others through death into new dimensions of consciousness?

Once I began talking with people about death, I found many have had out of body experiences, or experiences communicating with the dead, or have remembered past lives, but have not 'put them together' to form a larger picture of reality. It is necessary to integrate this deeper understanding of who we are so that we can live this life better, and so that we can help those who are suffering as death approaches. In this learning process, I particularly found the satsangs of living masters to be most helpful; hardly surprising as they are not here because they have to be; they have chosen to return to preserve the ancient teachings and wisdom about the journey of the soul, and to establish goodness. They not only give techniques from their different traditions that we can practise, to strengthen the mind and increase our awareness and concentration in life and death; they emanate wisdom, confidence and joy in life, and unshakeable faith in the divine connection guiding us through.

So in this book, Part 1 starts by looking at various scriptures, in search of what they have to say about the process of living, dying and rebirth. The scriptural guidelines advise us that for all of us tied to the samsara chakra, trying to avoid the fact that we are mortals is silly, non-productive, and even harmful. Then they make another very interesting point. The scriptures claim that everyone definitely gets reborn. Due to their karma they get heaven or hell, both in after-death dimensions (*lokas* or *bardos*) and here on Earth. The enlightened ones are those who have no longer any karma. They are so selfless no karma accrues to them, so they no longer have to be reborn. Some of them choose to take birth again, so they can help people to develop spiritual awareness. Those ones are called gurus, or maybe other names in different traditions, and they act as a bridge from one dimension of consciousness to another.

In Part 2, various researches into death and dying are presented. They are included because they can help one to really enquire into the subject of what life and death is all

about, rather than avoiding the issue. Because we can't avoid the issue. And we need to be able to cope with the way death is handled in our present society.

Part 3, the section on transcendence, is included because I have had the good fortune to know Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati and Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati, who have all performed the Panchagni sadhana which gives mastery of death. It gives the perspective of those who are free from the *samsara chakra*, the circle of life and death, in their own words.

Part 4 discusses ways to help the families and friends of those who are dying or who have died. It contains some well-known and time-tested guidelines on how we can ready ourselves to die well when the time comes. This is the practical section: things we can do, and attitudes we can hold on to and share, in order to help people to die well, if we find ourselves (and most of us do, sooner or later) the one on the spot as somebody dies – whether it be a stranger in a car accident, one's own parents as they age and die, or a child, or a friend, and ultimately, oneself.

This section contains the personal experiences of several people encountering death, some of whom had made efforts to train themselves as helpers to the dying, and it calls upon the sadhanas given by the scriptures of various traditions. The yogic view is clear: death has been over-dramatized, turned into a catastrophe, feared and ignored, when actually it is a natural part of existence and a most important event that should be looked at squarely and prepared for practically and calmly, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Seers from all cultures maintain the actual process of dying can be mastered.

Part 5 is the gift of Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, who read and guided the manuscript containing the first four parts and offers these practical meditations that will help when we are preparing for death. Very few people in our modern world specialize in exploring the vast realms of consciousness open to human beings as we prepare for

the next stage after our journey through life. We may feel that psychology and psychiatry have such a specialization, but actually, those sciences relate mostly to the mind-set of Europeans or Americans in the last one or two centuries. The much wider and deeper knowledge of consciousness systematically acquired over centuries by rishis, rimpoches and shamans living in the ice or jungles, practising diverse disciplines, has not been valued for what it is: an outline map of the regions of consciousness that they have travelled through. It shows consciousness extending far beyond the intelligence prized today. Consciousness no doubt extends far beyond the map also, as various sources report that even trees, animals and planets have consciousness – but maybe we can leave exploring that to another birth.

Swami Niranjanananda has undergone the training and tapasya required by the vedic tradition to win the ability to discriminate between reality and unreality, and to understand the many states of consciousness beyond, and quite different from, the states of consciousness we know in our waking life. He is a guide who has travelled the path and can thus help us recognize what is important as we seek to stabilize ourselves, and to hone our awareness of the different states of consciousness encountered as we live and die again and again. Simply.

So, as we never know when death will call, we can start these meditations to guide us through death right now, as a way to enhance this life itself. Also, as the blocks and attachments that we come to see are released, we will find a new surge of energy and understanding in our lives – and a healing on many levels.

From all of this comes the understanding that this life is very important, because the samskaras that we build in our lives from our own efforts, are carried with us from life to life. We are here now, and we should live fully, happily, positively and creatively. That is the best way to live life and to train ourselves as a preparation for death. The concentrated effort to evolve eventually frees us from the

circle of life and death just like a stone flung from a sling. The Lord of Death was known as *Yamaraj* – indicating that he knows the disciplines needed for a good life. He was also sometimes known as *Dharmaraj*, the King of Dharma, indicating his ability to connect us with the eternal cosmic consciousness. Just remembering him, and the way that in his kingdom, we can move from experiencing the projections of our own nature to direct perception of reality, helps us to live righteously. At death, we want to be able to look back on life and be happy with the way we lived, the people we helped, and the things we had the opportunity to learn. Then we need the ability to look inward steadily, focus on our real nature and draw closer to the inner light of consciousness. That inner stability and goodness helps us in life and death, and is the foundation of transcendence.



Part 1
Scriptural Perspective

1

The Bridge

I often pray to God for another birth and early departure because at this advanced age, I am not as effective in serving people as I would be if I get a new life. When I see the young people fully absorbed in their own selfish ends, I crave more for a new life because I do not aspire for pleasure and riches, nor do I crave a kingdom. My only craving is to serve those who are deprived and living in want. Therefore, I pray to God to bless me with a new birth, in a poor family where one feels the pangs of hunger, where one undergoes the torture of cold without clothes, and where one lives and dies in sickness without proper treatment. The pangs of the illiterate mother whose son takes birth and lives in scarcity are difficult to fathom. I intend to have a life like that and rise from there in hardship.

My guru, Swami Sivananda, used to say that most sannyasins and sadhus are wasting their time because they are in pursuit of their own salvation. It is strange that while the majority of people are dying of hunger, these mendicants are pursuing their own salvation. When I asked my guru what to do, he said that he had already said what he had to say. Now I fully understand his vision. Therefore, I only pray for the health and prosperity of everyone. Let everyone be kind and caring to all, and may no one ever come across any distress in life.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Assuring us of his return with these words, often repeated in the years before he left us, Sri Swamiji took mahasamadhi and left his body and this life.

Swamiji's inspiration

His disciple and spiritual successor, Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, has described what happened in simple terms:

> We pay our respects to Sri Swami Satyananda who is our guru and the light of our life. At midnight of 5th December 2009, he attained mahasamadhi. This was not a sudden decision; it was predestined. Sri Swamiji was waiting for this opportunity. On 2nd December, the last day of Yoga Poornima in Rikhiapeeth, Sri Swamiji said in a satsang, "I am waiting for my return ticket. I have booked my ticket at the railway counter, but the return ticket is not confirmed. I have received a one-way ticket, but I have filed an application that I want to come back. Until and unless I receive my return ticket, I am not going to go from here. The day I receive it, I will go instantly."
>
> Early morning of 3rd December, people started to leave Rikhiapeeth, and I also left and came back to Munger. On the 5th morning, a program had been arranged: I was to go to the Shiva temple in the evening and perform a pooja. Before entering the *garbhagriha*, sanctum sanctorum, I did pranam from outside and looked in, and there I saw the *shringara*, the decoration of Shiva, in a very different form, something I had not seen before. I asked Sri Arun Goenka, my host, "What kind of a decoration is this? Shiva looks like Bhairava." He said, "This is the shringara of Mahakaala. It has been done for the first time here at the temple." *Mahakaala* means the Lord of Death. Somehow the word triggered a feeling of being suspended in the void of unknowing in my mind. I said, "I'm not going to go in to perform worship to this form." I did pranam and walked away.

People came up to me saying, "Swamiji, won't you go to the pooja, won't you do the arati?" I said, "No, I will not do anything today." Back in the ashram, I found that I was very agitated, and there was immense discomfort. I shut myself up in my room, but I could neither sit nor lie down. All I could do was pace back and forth from one end of the room to the other, not able to fathom what was the cause of the disturbance. At the same time, the tears just flowed. I kept pacing until about 10.30 pm, when there was a phone call from Swami Satsangi. She said, "I have a message from Sri Swamiji. He is going to take samadhi now. Can you come?" I said, "Yes, I am coming. Just give me the time to get the driver and the people together. I'll be on the road." When the phone call came, all the agitation left my mind and it became crystal clear. I could see everything that had to be done, step by step, one by one. Then I got in the car with two people, Swami Shivaraj and the driver. Nobody at Ganga Darshan knew that Sri Swamiji had taken the decision to leave his body.

People ask me, "How come you were not there at Sri Swamiji's samadhi time?" The answer is that Sri Swamiji had said, "When I go, it will be in the absence of Niranjan, as he is the only one who can hold me back." He had said that many times prior to leaving, and I reached forty minutes after he had gone.

We reached Rikhiapeeth in two hours, driving at full speed. Upon reaching there, I immediately went to Sri Swamiji's room and asked, "What happened?" Swami Satsangi said, "At ten o'clock, Sri Swamiji called me to his room and when I came here he was sitting in a meditative posture and he said, 'I have received my return ticket and I have to leave now'." She said, "How will you leave?" He said, "*Ticket aa gaya, ham ja rahe hain* – The ticket has come, I'm going." He asked for *Ganga jala*, Ganges water, and tulsi leaves. As Swami Satsangi and a few residents of the ashram watched, he

placed the tulsi leaves in his mouth, drank the Ganga water, chanted his guru mantra, and at ten to twelve, he joined his hands together and prayed, "*Bhagavan, ham taiyaar hain, hamko le chalo* – Lord, I am ready. Take me now." Then he chanted *Aum* three times, and he was gone. The chanting of *Aum* terminated his life. He raised the pranas and departed.

The rest of the night was spent in making all the preparations: preparing the area for his samadhi in particular. Next morning, from five onwards, people started thronging the main gate and by nine there was a huge crowd of people who had come for his last darshan. We brought Sri Swamiji from Tulsi Kutir to Ganesh Kutir, where he gave darshan and blessings to everybody. The most incredible thing was, as people walked around him, each one felt that Sri Swamiji acknowledged their greeting and greeted them back.

Then we took Sri Swamiji out to the panchagni area and did a full abhisheka. Just as an abhisheka is performed on the Shivalingam with milk, yoghurt, honey, ghee, and so on, Sri Swamiji was also bathed with all the auspicious items, like an embodiment of Shiva. After the abhisheka was completed, we took him to the area where he was going to be given bhu samadhi. The entire pit was glowing, as we had placed auspicious yantras all across the floor and the walls. In the centre was Sri Swamiji's asana, along with his clock, sumerini, mala, yogadanda, towel; everything required for his sadhana was placed. Finally, we brought in the statues of Sri Rama and Sita, Sri Swamiji's ishta deva. As the statues were being placed before him, Sri Swamiji's head, which was until now looking straight ahead, gently bent forward as if he was offering pranam to his *aradhya*, the object of his devotion. At the end, three shivalingams were placed above him and the samadhi was made. This was on 6th December.

It has been said in the scriptures that one's attainment in yoga becomes visible at the time of death. This became

evident in Sri Swamiji's life. He was able to invoke death consciously and release his soul consciously. He only had a tiny time-slot. He said, "If I miss this window, then I won't go today. This window which has opened will allow me to go and come back." That particular astrological conjunction was there only for that 15 to 20-minute period, which allowed him to go with the knowledge that he would return.

He had said many times, "I am waiting to leave this body, but I am not going to leave it until I get my return ticket. I do not want emancipation, moksha, or any personal satisfaction which comes with spiritual enlightenment. My aim and aspiration in this life and in all future lives is to help others. To wipe the tears of suffering and pain from the eyes of every person who is seeking solace, peace, plenty and prosperity. That is the only purpose of my life."

Sri Swamiji lived this sankalpa all his life. Even before he came to his guru, Swami Sivananda, it was this thought which guided him. Swami Sivananda was also searching for the right person who could carry forward his vision to serve others. Sri Swamiji identified completely with the vision of his guru and the fulfilment of this vision became his sole aspiration.

We all seek divine intervention and desire divine grace in our life. We all look for inner strength, encouragement and inspiration to succeed and become fulfilled in life. Sri Swamiji showed us the way. To our guru and master, who has given us everything, and has shown us how to live life properly, today we express our heartfelt sentiments with a *sankalpa*, a resolve: we shall walk the path you have shown, we shall not falter, nor shall we lag behind.

Sri Swamiji is not present with us in body, but he lives within us in the form of inspiration and that is his greatest gift. He lives inside each one, in the form of a fiery inspiration to become creative and to excel in life, to connect with our environment, to bring happiness,

peace and to share our joy with everyone. Sri Swamiji has given us this trust and we shall fulfil it.

We bow our heads in thankfulness to this great personality. We are truly fortunate to have lived in an age when there was a person like Sri Swamiji. We have not seen Christ, Rama, Krishna or Buddha, we have only heard about them. However, we have had the great good fortune to see Sri Swamiji, to laugh with him, to sit with him, to listen to him, and to receive his grace. In him is the greatness that was in Rama, Krishna, Buddha and Christ. In Sri Swamiji is the peace of Buddha, the compassion of Christ, the clarity of Krishna, and the balance of Rama. His grace and inspiration, love and compassion is what we seek.

The prayer of our hearts is: O guru, guide us to fulfil your mandate, inspire us to walk the path that you have shown us, give us the strength to complete the journey which we have undertaken, and always be with us in our heart, mind and actions.



Gururbrahmaa, gururvishnu,
gururdevo maheshwarah,
Guru saakshaat parambrahma,
tasmai shree gurave namah.

2

Sanatana Dharma: Life, Death and Evolution

The *Sanatana dharma*, the eternal way of correct living, is the ancient spiritual basis of the culture of India. Over thousands of years, the *rishis*, or seers, realized truths about the structure of consciousness, and the nature of life and death, during their practice of meditation and in the samadhi states. This wisdom has been preserved in the four Vedas, which have also kept alive rituals, traditions and lifestyles which embody and express the ancient values of living righteously.

The four Vedas

The oldest of the Vedas is the *Rik*, it's called the *Rigveda*. The *Rigveda* speaks of a time when the river Saraswati flowed from the Himalayas through what is now the Rajasthan desert, to the sea. Satellite photos have revealed an old river bed following that route, but the river dried up before 5,000 BCE.

We still have about 250 to 300 Upanishads, written at different times during the history of mankind, when human beings were dealing with different situations, different needs, and all with different literary styles. The narrative prose of the older Upanishads does not differ widely from the *Aranyakas*, the forest teachings, of which they are often a part. The Upanishads are not always clearly defined as being a separate class of scripture.

> As Vedanta, or 'Veda-end', the Aranyakas, as well as the older Upanishads, belong to the various Vedic schools; they form, in fact, only component parts of the Brahmanas.[1]

However, they characteristically contain philosophical questioning and teachings that deal with the search for supreme knowledge. Thus the Sanatana dharma deals with those questions that are not limited by needs of the moment, or even by time and space.

Amongst the twelve 'major' Upanishads, the *Aitareya, Brihadaranyaka, Chandogya, Taittiriya, Kausitaki* and *Kena* Upanishads are often thought of as the oldest. Then came the *Mundaka, Prashna, Isha (Ishavasya), Katha* and the *Shvetashvatara* reflecting monotheistic understandings, and the *Mandukya Upanishad* which is particularly interesting in regard to yogic views on death. Until the advent of translation and the printing press, the Vedas were preserved for centuries, and in some cases, millennia, through the care of small groups of people who passed on the sacred knowledge with meticulous attention to detail.

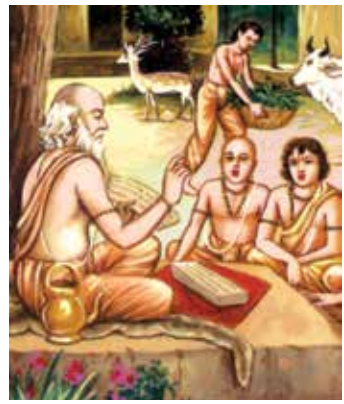
The *Rigveda*, the most ancient collection of humankind's poetry, is mainly in the form of hymns to the gods who can be seen as personifications of the powers of nature. The last of the ten *mandalas*, or books, describes philosophical doctrines or situations in life. Although one can understand people only reading the poems of the *Rigveda* as simple utterances of nature-loving primitive nomads, in poetry imagery is used to plumb the depths of human experience. One must understand that the vedic poets are capable of embodying sustained subtle spiritual insight in images we understand according to our capacity.

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[1] Winternitz, M, *Indian Literature*, University of Calcutta, West Bengal, India, 1959, p. 204

Appreciating life

A deep appreciation of life is integral to the vedic scriptures. The Vedas contain many references to instruments, songs and even dances. Along with this is a deep appreciation of the link between the environment, sound in particular, and the psyche. In the science of Indian music, each raga affects the mood of the listener profoundly, and traditionally is played in that quarter of the day or night which most enhances this particular mood. Similarly, some ragas are grouped according to particular times of the year and the longings they provoke. Intensity is built up through stressing one particular *rasa*, or mood: it is this which enables music to so strongly effect the emotions of humankind.



Music is just a tendril of the Vedas. Healing is another. Living in harmony with nature and all the other living beings is another – all these beautiful aspects of life are enhanced by the self-knowledge and goodness that the Vedas teach:

> What a person thinks of himself in relation to the things around him decides his attitude.[2]

Moving through death skilfully is another. The Vedas are like a huge peepul tree spanning different dimensions, preserving the insights and experiences of seers who are categorized by the number of *lokas*, or different dimensions of consciousness, they have access to. They are guidebooks to practices and states of consciousness that can help human beings to evolve.

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[2] Kulkarni Nirmala, Man and Nature Relationship Reflected in the Shukla Yajurveda, V. N. Jha ed., *Proceedings of the National Seminar On Environmental Awareness in Sanskrit Literature*, Center of Advanced Study in Sanskrit, University of Poona, India, 1991

Ancient wisdom

In the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, the realization of the interconnectedness of spirit, in oneself and throughout the manifest world is expressed in beautiful imagery (4:1–4):

> Although that Supreme Being is colourless Himself, yet by His own power He creates innumerable colours in many ways for His mysterious purpose and withdraws the whole world into Himself at last. May that Divine Being bestow on us auspicious thoughts.
>
> That Itself is the fire, the sun, the air, the moon and also the pure. That is the Brahman (Hiranyagarbha), the waters and the Prajapati.
>
> You are the woman, the man, the youth and the maiden also. You are the old man who is shaky and using a stick for support. You are born having turned your faces on all sides.
>
> You are the blue butterfly and the green parrot with red eyes. You are the thundercloud, the seasons and the oceans. You are everlasting and beyond all time and space. You are He from whom all the world has come into existence.[3]



[3] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Nine Principal Upanishads*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2004, pp. 185–186

This explanation of unity forms the basis for the understanding of that miraculous experience that comes sometimes in meditation – that our innermost being is in fact the light of consciousness, shining, beautiful, and completely separate from the mortal vehicle of the body-mind (4:10 and 18):

> In that case, know that Nature is Maya and the controller of Maya is the great Lord. The whole universe is occupied by living beings, who are nothing but His parts.
>
> When ignorance is removed there is no day or night, nor being or non-being. There remains that auspicious One only who is undecayable and deserving of being worshipped even by the Creator. From Him, the ancient wisdom (in the form of the Vedas) came.

Sanatana dharma

This wisdom concerning how to live this life and how to journey beyond it is embodied in the Sanatana dharma. A basic foundation of this *Sanatana dharma*, the eternal dharma, is the understanding that the spirit is immortal. When asked "What is death?" the Sanatana dharma simply explains that at death only the body is destroyed, not the immortal *atman*, the spirit or soul. Swami Satyananda says:

> Death is not destruction, but an entry into another state of experience. Just as one sleeps and dreams, in the same way one dies. The only difference is that in death the spirit leaves the body. Sri Krishna's vivid image in the *Bhagavad Gita* describing reincarnation brings dramatic simplicity to relieve our confusion (2:22):
>
> *Just as a man casts off worn-out clothes and puts on new ones, so also the embodied Self casts off worn-out bodies and enters others that are new.*
>
> Death is a natural incident in the course of physical existence when it becomes unfit for further activities and use. Death is necessary for evolution.

> Every human being is born with certain karma to fulfil, that is to say, one has come under deputation. Once the period of deputation is completed the body ceases to function. Therefore, death is an exit, not an end . . . This life is nothing but the play of karma. One has sown what one is reaping, one is sowing what one shall reap. Life is continuous and eternal; death is only a full stop before the next sentence. The physical body does not represent the whole truth of creation. Besides the body there is buddhi, chitta, ahamkara and *atman*, the spirit, which represents the totality of truth and existence.[4]

The significance of one's inner state of evolution, of one's character, aspirations and potentials, built up in this and previous lives by one's own karma is explained clearly by Swami Sivananda in his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*:

> The inclinations of men are moulded according to their quality or inherent nature born of their past samskaras.
>
> As is the tendency, so is the desire; as is the desire, so is the action; as is the action, so is the birth into another being after death. The body is like the seed of the tree, a perpetual train. Seed perishes in developing into a tree and the tree again produces the seed. This process or cycle continues eternally. Even so man takes a new body, does actions, develops tendencies, dies and puts on a new body in accordance with the nature or tendencies. This continues till he gets knowledge of the Self by transcending the three gunas, when ignorance, the root cause of birth and death, is destroyed.[5]

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[4] Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga, Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, pp. 7–8

[5] Swami Sivananda Saraswati, translation & commentary, *The Bhagavad Gita*, Divine Life Society, Tehri-Garhwal, Uttar Pradesh, Himalaya, India, 10th ed., 1995, p. 435

Evolution

The *Mundakopanishad,* from the *Artharva Veda*, gives a wide perspective on life and makes it clear that we are here as part of an evolutionary process (1:2:9–13):

> The ignorant, the truth being unknown to them, and all the time engrossed in their ignorance, fancy they have achieved their goal in life, and bound by attachment and passion they are reduced to misery and sorrow. They sink lower and lower, and when in the afterworld their good deeds are spent, they are again reborn on this earth.
>
> These ignorant persons lack real knowledge of the Self, and in their conceit think their sacrifices and other charitable works to be the higher good. After deriving enjoyment in heaven from their pious work, they return to human life or to a lower worldly form.
>
> But those who dedicate their lives to the practice of austerity and devotion in the forest and live on alms are released from virtue and vice and go via the sun to reside in Purusha, the Immortal One.
>
> The aspirant, who has by intensely studying the karmic worlds concluded that the eternal cannot be gained by karma, who is free of desires, for the sake of this knowledge, let him only approach with sacrificial fuel in hand, a teacher learned in the scriptures and established in Brahman.
>
> The teacher should clearly explain this supreme knowledge to that disciple who possesses controlled senses and equanimity of mind.[6]

Thus we can see that our 'modern' cynicism about the immortal self and evolution continuing through death is not a new state of mind. It is representative of a state of consciousness tied to the physical body/brain and the

[6] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Nine Principal Upanishads*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2004, pp. 68–69

external world of the senses – perceptual reality. It refers to the state tied by Brahma granthi and binds one to ignorance of subtler realties. Swami Satyananda says:

> If one goes deep within oneself, transcending the awareness of this physical body, one will find that one is much more than this physical body. There is a greater, wider and much bigger form of individual existence. One can exist even without a body. The ego, the individual principle of *jivatma bhava* as it is called, can exist without this physical body. The individual has karma, and therefore inherits this physical body, operates through this physical body . . . One experiences through this physical body, but if one is capable, if one can do it, one can exist somewhere even without this body . . .
>
> Life to me is an open challenge where I can grab as many things as possible. In this life I have become a sannyasin; in the next life I may become Prime Minister of England or the King or Queen. Why not? I have immense chances for growth. I shall not die, and this is not the first time that I have been born. A man who can think so much, who can analyze so much, who has the understanding of himself and of so many things, who understands love and passion and hatred and fear – how can one say that he is a baby in this universe? Can one learn this in just sixty years?
>
> Consciousness is the most important thing involved in the process of evolution. I am not using the words transmigration, incarnation and reincarnation. I am using the word evolution . . . How can someone say that as a baby I was someone else, as a child I was someone else and as a young man I was someone else? Death is not the end of the *jivatma*, the consciousness, the self or the spirit; it is only the end of the body. Therefore, death is not the last thing in life. Death is just one event in life and life is eternal.

This present life is just one link in a long chain. This is the fundamental philosophical truth which everybody has to understand.[7]

Insights into life and death

Long before he started his mission to spread the teachings of yoga all around the world, Swami Satyananda was already able to spontaneously explain the deepest aspects of life and death to his followers. He also spoke about different dimensions of existence, and the different types of beings. He explained that most people are bound to be born again due to their karma, but those who have perfected the Sanatana dharma in their life, who truly know their inner nature, the atma, will have attained *moksha*, liberation, and do not have to be born again – though some choose to due to compassion. He was asked: "Were Buddha, Christ, Mohammed and others compelled to come down to Earth and work in society again, not by their own karmas, but due to the natural flow of love or compassion?" And replied in a satsang on September 30th, 1967:

Buddha, Christ and Mohammed did not have any karmas. That is why we call them sons of God or incarnations of God. There are two types of human beings: one who is ascending the steps of evolution and the other who has descended from the supreme heights of evolution. Those who have descended from divinity are known as incarnations, prophets or avataras.

Avatara, the Indian term, literally means 'descending'. They came down because it was the will of God. Strictly speaking, they were not compelled to come down, because they had become one with that Will. In some previous life, they had attained a state of oneness with the divine flow and the eternal compassion of God

7 Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga, Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, pp. 89–90

flowed through them. Then they descended only once. They could not keep away from this suffering humanity due to cosmic compassion, and so their descent was not an obligation but a natural flow. At the same time, they had to perform some kind of *lila* or play. All great men play their part perfectly so that we can follow them. It was not necessary for Buddha, Christ or Mahavira to do so many austerities; they practised them to give us a guideline, an example.

Vedic guidelines on travelling through the lokas

We're all going to be born again; not as avataras, but we humans have written guidebooks of *lokas*, other dimensions of consciousness and existence. There are even particular sadhanas, such as Panchagni sadhana, to help us experience these other understandings in this life itself. This teaching is recorded in the centuries old Upanishads, and we will study some of them in greater detail. The *Katha Upanishad* says:

> He who lacks discrimination, whose mind is unsteady and whose heart is impure, never reaches the goal but is born again and again. But he who has discrimination, whose mind is steady and whose heart is pure, reaches the goal and, having reached it, is born no more.

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says:

> As a man's desire is, so is his destiny. For as his desire is, so is his will; and as his will is, so is his deed; and as his deed is, so is his reward, whether good or bad.
>
> A man acts according to the desire to which he clings. After death he goes to the next world bearing in mind the subtle impressions of his deeds; and after reaping there the harvest of his deeds, he returns again to the world of action. Thus, he who has desire continues to be subject to rebirth.

Swami Sivananda comments on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*:

> The Vedas tell us that the whole creation of the universe is a great sacrifice. Even as the various factors involved in ritualistic sacrifices such as the performer, his wife, the priests, the fire, the oblations, the results and so on are interconnected, in the universal sacrifice of creation of the cosmos, the several constituent factors are inextricably inter-related with one another.
>
> It is the absence of the knowledge of this inter-relation that is the cause of bondage and suffering. No event in this vast creation, be it the most insignificant, can be isolated from the rest of the events that take place here . . . Creation is a single process in which birth and death together with all that happens in between them are not isolated, disconnected events as we imagine in our ignorance. If we know the cause of birth and death, we would be released from their clutches.
>
> How is a child born? The grossest form of the knowledge of this subject is that it is born from the womb of the mother out of the combination of the sperm from the father and the ovum from the mother. This is binding knowledge, because it is partial and not the whole truth.
>
> The real fact is that not only the father and mother are involved in the birth of a child, but the whole universe is in action in this apparently simple and common incident. This is the fact in the birth of all beings, both the so-called sentient and the insentient.
>
> This is the fact that is to be known through *Panchagni vidya*, the meditation on the 'five fires' described in this section of the Upanishad."[8]

[8] Swami Sivananda, Translation & Commentary, *The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, Divine Life Society, Tehri-Garhwal, UP, Himalaya, India, 1985, p. 551 ff. Karmavipaka-Brahmana Section VI:ii: 9

Subtle forces in reincarnation

Death has been around as long as life . . .

WE'RE JUST LIKE BROTHERS REALLY. [9]

. . . but somehow, death has become closely associated with religions.

PEOPLE TRY TO CONTROL LIFE – THEY CAN'T CONTROL ME THOUGH.

Mmm. While on his world tours Swami Satyananda did not want to get side-tracked into any 'religious' areas, still, over the years he answered many questions on death in his satsangs. For example, on March 26th 1982, in Gwatt, Switzerland, he was asked: "If the individual ego is an illusion, how could there be reincarnation?"

> When the ego is disintegrated, is dissolved, there is no reincarnation.

He was sometimes pretty terse, but his teachings on life always remained true to the wide spiritual perspective of yogic culture.

To become masters of death, the ego-idea that we are basically separate mortal bodies has to be overcome. Essentially we are the spirit – the one eternal effulgent spirit, *atma*. This insight leads to a totally different view of life and its significance. It also leads to an understanding of the guru-disciple relationship which explains why the guru can lead us from life to life. To begin with, in the vedic tradition, the guru is one well acquainted with the sacred knowledge of the Vedas – not just intellectually but essentially – so he or she can explain the path, and what we need to follow it. Then the guru is also one who is so compassionate that they willingly take rebirth becoming a bridge across the ocean of samsara to guide their disciples safely.

[9] Pratchett, Terry, in the *Disc-World* series. This method of speaking directly with Death (Lord Yamaraj or Dharmaraj) was first observed here.

THE BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD

Swami Sivananda has written a commentary on the very lengthy *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. This is the one especially revered by the Saraswati tradition to which Swami Sivananda and his disciples belong. It contains instructions from Yama, the Lord of Death, on the Panchagni sadhana. Sri Swami Satyanandaji his disciple and spiritual successor Swami Niranjanananda, and Swami Satyasangananda, also his disciple and Peethadishwari of the Rikhia ashram, are the only people known to have practised this sadhana for any length of time in thousands of years, and of course they are from the Saraswati tradition. It is clear to observers that they are not performing the sadhana for themselves but to enable the successful realization of their missions. These quotations from the Upanishad are given to show the scope of the sadhana, and the calibre of the sannyasins undertaking it – they are resurrecting the vidya on death and evolution.

Swami Sivananda explains that its *Karmavipaka-Brahmana* section VI:ii instructs on the meditation on the five fires, the *Panchagni vidya*. To summarize the story which is told in the *Brihadaranyaka* and the *Chandogya* Upanishads: Aruni taught his son Svetaketu all he knew. Svetaketu went to the king Pravahana to exhibit his learning but could not answer the five questions with which the king tested him:[10]

1. What is the place from where those people who die take different routes? This implies that all jivas, excluding the Knowers of Brahman, on the death of this body, go along the same route to a certain point. At that point the path diverges, some go one way and others go by other ways.
2. How do those people who die and go to the other world return to this world?

[10] Swami Sivananda, Translation & Commentary, *The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, Divine Life Society, Tehri-Garhwal, UP, Himalaya, India, 1985, pp. 545ff. *Karmavikapa-Brahmana* Section VI:ii

3. How is it the other world never gets filled up even though so many people dying here, go there?
4. After how many oblations are offered does the watery portion rise up and assume the human form?
5. What is the means of access to the path of the gods and the path of the *pitris*, ancestors?

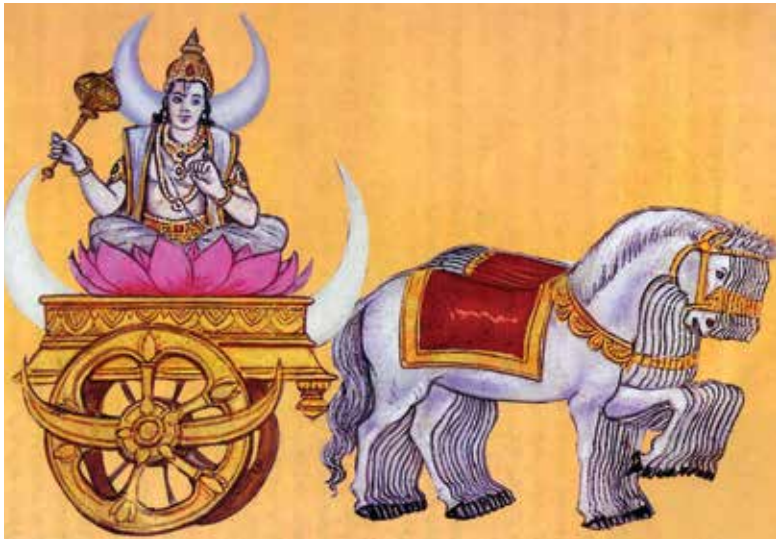
Angrily, young Svetaku returned to his father. Sage Aruni humbly confessed he had taught all he knew and did not know the answers to these questions, and he went to the king asking to be accepted as a disciple. The king was pleased by the brahmana's humility but was reluctant to teach him as the knowledge had been traditionally confined to the *kshatriya* (kingly) caste. The king says, "This is a divine boon. Ask for a human boon." But Aruni insisted as he had no worldly desires. Finally, the king agreed, and gave instruction on the meditation on the five fires, the *Panchagni vidya*.

This meditation helps us to free ourselves from erroneous thought and actions. Fire is symbolic of sacrifice performed through contemplation. When something is offered into a fire it is transformed and only purified ash remains. In this series of meditations, different theatres of creation are constructed, symbolized by the fires. By contemplating how things are inter-related, the consciousness understands the causal nature of things and becomes more and more refined. As one approaches the cause, one is less attached to the results, understanding giving release from desires and attachment to the mundane reality.



First meditation: heaven is the first fire

> Verily, that world (heaven), O Gautama, is fire. The sun alone is its fuel; the rays (are its) smoke; the day (is its) flame, the directions (are its) cinders; the intermediate quarters (are its) sparks. In that – in this fire – the gods offer faith. Out of that offering, King Soma (the moon) is born. (6:2:9)



Swami Sivananda explains the five separate meditations: one on each fire. The descriptions of the meditations in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* are very terse. Swami Sivananda does not explain them intellectually, rather he explains the similarities or interconnectedness between the different elements given for meditation. If we contemplate them even without the intensity of actually sitting between the five fires, we can get a hint of what work we need to do on our consciousness.

1. In this meditation on the five fires, heaven is to be meditated upon as the first fire.

2. The fuel for this fire of heaven is the sun, because it illumines the heavens, just as fuel illuminates a fire.
3. The rays emanating from the sun are to be meditated on as the smoke arising from the fire of heaven.
4. The four directions – the north, east, south and west – are the cinders. The similarity for contemplation is that both are devoid of heat and light.
5. The intermediate directions – the north-east, south-east, south-west and north-west – are the sparks as both are scattered.
6. In the fire of heaven, gods such as Indra, Agni, Varuna and others who are the cosmic counterparts of the organs of sense and action in the body, offer 'faith' as oblation. And out of this arises 'King Soma' or the moon god.

Swami Sivananda explains that a man who does meritorious deeds and leads a virtuous life, rises to a heavenly loka after leaving the physical body. He assumes a subtle body in the heavenly worlds, enjoys the results of his karmas, and is reborn when those results are spent.

This last point takes us deeper into the subject. We can say that all our actions are like oblations in the cosmic sacrifice. We are not impotent; one's actions are capable of influencing world events. Every action produces subtle karma which is *apurva*, the invisible form of the result of action. This subtle vibration, at the proper time, takes form and is termed 'faith' in this translation.

Faith, in this sense of the word, is very powerful, as a person becomes what he or she has faith in – faith moulds one's perceptions, thoughts, life and whole being. If we cooperate with the divine law, our actions become a sacrifice. The totality of one's apurva rises up to heaven at the time of the death of this body as 'faith'. Out of this sacrifice arises a new type of subtle body, a nectarine body fit to enjoy the higher worlds. It is referred to symbolically as the birth of 'King Soma'. S*oma* means the moon and it also means *amrit*, the nectar of immortality.

Second meditation: the fire for this sacrifice is Parjanya

> Verily, O Gautama, Parjanya (god of rain) is fire, the year is its fuel, the clouds (are its) smoke, lightning (is its) flame, thunderbolt (is its) embers, the rumblings (are its) sparks. In that – in this fire – gods make offerings to King Soma. Out of that offering rain is produced. (6:2:10)[11]

We are taught that rainfall is not an isolated event which has nothing to do with our conduct in life. We are all connected with the fall of rain. Unless there is harmony of understanding and action with the divine law, nature will not supply our requirements among which water is perhaps the most important. We can say that life, the *jiva*, comes down in the form of water falling from the heavens.



[11] *ibid*., Swami Sivananda, *The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, p. 553

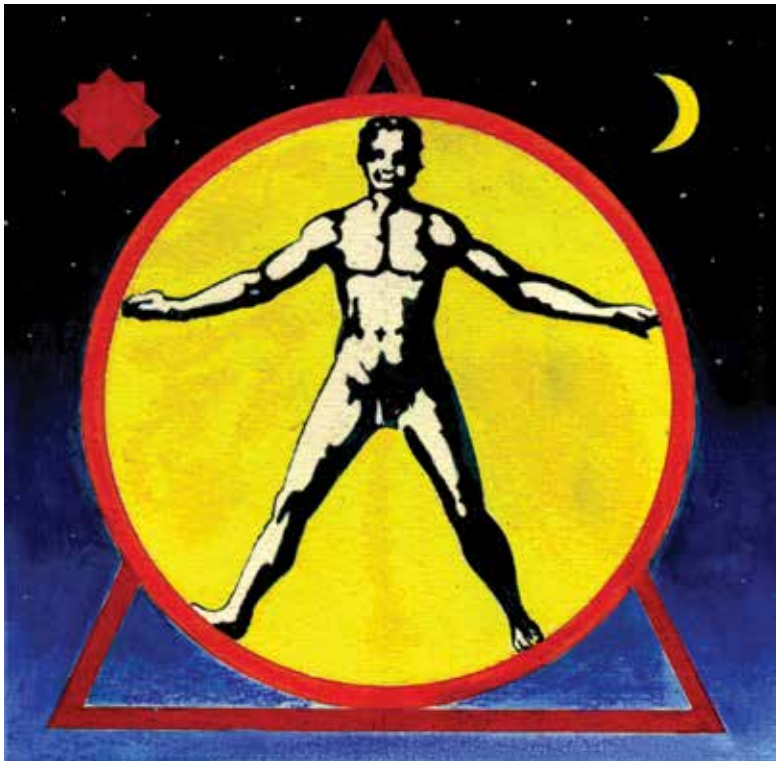
Third meditation: the fire for this sacrifice is the world

> Verily, this world is fire, O Gautama. The earth alone is its fuel, fire (is its) smoke, night (is its) flame, the moon (is its) embers, the stars (are its) sparks. In that – in this fire – the gods offer rain. Out of that offering food is produced. (6:2:11)[12]

Swami Sivananda explains that in the third sacrifice, the product of the previous sacrifice is again offered. Jiva, in the form of water, is offered as the oblation, it falls on the earth and from it arises food. From the liquid form of water, the jiva enters into the solid form of grain like rice, wheat, barley, or any food. The third fire is this world, which is the abode of all beings once they are born, and where they experience the results of past, unspent actions. The stars are to be contemplated on as sparks scattering from the fire, this is based on the similarity of their shiny appearance, and because they are numerous and scattered. This whole macrocosm is the theatre for this meditation: the world, the sun, the moon and the stars. Rain is offered to the earth and life results. The creation of life in the form of food is thus to be meditated on. Life is itself sacrificed to create and preserve the other life-forms on the planet. Seeing this as a divine sacrifice changes one perception of the life and death process profoundly.



[12] *ibid*., p. 554



Fourth meditation: the fire for this sacrifice is man

> O Gautama, man is verily the fire, the open mouth is its fuel, the vital power (is its) smoke, speech (is its) flame, the eye (is its) embers, the ear (is its) sparks. In that – in this fire – the gods offer food. Out of that oblation seed is produced. (6:2:12)[13]

Once again the product of the previous sacrifice (food) is offered into the next fire. And the next 'fire' is man.

HERE YOU ARE

Yes, here we are.

[13] *ibid*., p. 555

Swami Sivananda explains:

1. Man is the fourth sacrificial fire. The oblation of food is offered and from that arises seed or semen.
2. His open mouth is the fuel. The similarity to contemplate on is that man shines through speech and chanting of the scriptures, even as a fire shines due to fuel.
3. The *prana*, the vital force, is its smoke. The similarity is that smoke rises upwards from fuel, and prana rises upwards from the mouth, hence prana is to be contemplated upon in this sacrifice as the smoke rising from the fire.
4. Speech is its flame. As flame reveals objects, speech also reveals its objects. This is the similarity which helps in meditation.
5. The eye represents the embers because both are receptacles of light.
6. The ear is its sparks. Just as sparks fly off to different directions, the ear extends to all directions to receive the sounds.

In this meditation on the fourth fire, the theatre for meditation is the microcosm of man – composed of prana and the sense organs and organs of action, the *jnanendriyas* and *karmendriyas*, which are gods, *indriyas* of man.



Fifth meditation: the fire for this sacrifice is woman

> Woman, verily, is fire, O Gautama. The hip portion is verily her fuel, the hairs (are its) smoke, the womb (is its) flame, the sexual act (is its) embers, the fits of enjoyment (are its) sparks. In that – in this fire – the gods offer seed. Out of that offering man is born. He lives as long as he is destined to live. Then (he) dies. (6:2:13)[14]

Swami Sivananda explains:

> The depositing of the seed by man in woman is to be contemplated as a sacrifice, it then loses its animal aspect and acquires divinity. It plays its part in the cosmic creation. Divinizing this act through rituals followed by vedic mantras is even now prevalent on the first consummation of the marriage.

[14] *ibid*., Swami Sivananda, *The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, p. 556

Still the wheel turns

We are brought to the understanding that the subtle effects of our actions result in rebirth. Faith is a subtle and powerful component of oneself. It shapes and transforms one's existence. Faith, as the subtle, unseen effects of actions is also a universal force shaping the forces of creation in the macrocosm.

This throws light on the five questions asked by the king as a test of spiritual knowledge. Humans are born, live as long as they are destined according to the karma of their past actions and then die and undergo the same process again. If virtuous, they go to the heavenly lokas and stay there till their harvest of good karma is used up. Then they gradually assume a grosser form, and from the seed in the womb of the mother, one is born again.

And of course, it doesn't stop there. Once more the wheel of karma is set to revolve as we perform actions in this world.

> Then (they) carry him to the (funeral) fire. The fire alone becomes his fire, the fuel (his) fuel, the smoke (his) smoke, the flame (his) flame, the embers (his) embers, the sparks (his) sparks. In that – in this fire – the gods offer the man. Out of that offering the man arises shining. (6:2:14)[15]

When the man thus born from the 'five fires', dies at the end of his allotted period of life, he is carried to the funeral ground for cremation receiving the last rites. In this fire, the gods offer the man as the last oblation. Out of this offering, the man arises radiant, because he has been purified by all the rites performed from the time of conception in the womb of the mother up to the funeral ceremony.

This whole process describes the life of a human being on Earth, but one who understands the process and undergoes it as a sacrifice is very rare.

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[15] *ibid*., p. 556

The path of light

> Those who know this as such and those others who worship and meditate on satyam with faith in the forest reach his flame, from the flame to the day, from the day to the bright fortnight, from the bright fortnight to the six months in which the sun travels northwards, from the months to the world of gods, from the world of gods to the sun, from the sun to the lightning; a mind-born purusha coming takes those lightnings to the world of Brahma. These great ones live for many cycles in the world of Brahma; for them there is no return to this world. (6:2:15)[16]

Here also, as elsewhere in the Upanishads, 'those who know' does not mean those who have read this part of the Upanishad and understood its meaning. 'Knowing' in such contexts means living. Those who live a life respecting the inter-relatedness of everything, and practising meditation on that, attain the world of hiranyagarbha, here called brahmaloka.

The deities referred to are the different planes or realms through which the consciousness of the meditator rises, as the degree of purity or illumination increases with the intensity and depth of meditation practised. Swami Sivananda explains:

> Throughout the path of light there is illumination symbolized by bright objects such as flame, day, bright fortnight, lightning, etc. When one reaches the plane of lightning, when the consciousness has risen up to a very high degree of perfection, divine help manifests itself in an intense form to take one to still further heights. This is symbolically expressed by the statement that a 'mind-born being' comes and leads one on to the world of the Creator.

[16] *ibid*., p. 557

Some say that it is Guru who comes to give help, others say it is God himself coming in the form of a person. All these are different ways of expressing the same fact of the mysterious divine manifestation at the last stages of the march towards the Goal.

The bridge

The relationship between a guru and a disciple is based on the transforming power of faith, which can change our conditioning and open our eyes to new understandings and a much wider perspective on life and on death. On April 12th 1982, in Martinique, Swami Satyananda explained:

> Energy is one between guru and disciple. There are no two energies at all. Bodies are two, true. But in the modern physics they don't even accept that there are two bodies. The latest quantum theory says even the difference of body is illusion. In the latest modern physics they have come to the point that this experience which you are having is not true. It is an experience . . .
>
> So disciples should first of all understand the true philosophy of their relationship. It is not a social relationship. It is not a religious relationship. It is out and out a spiritual relationship. And let us first come to the conclusion: 'I and my guru are one'. And when you practise higher spiritual practices this truth must be engrained in your mind. Duality is a path; non-duality is the only truth. Guru and disciple truly live in their bodies. But the energy in them both is the same, and therefore distances do not matter at all. My disciples can always communicate with me; they must just dial.

I don't really understand all of this, but then I believe this knowledge is not for the intellect; it is not a philosophy that is being presented here but a way of living on earth while knowing that we simultaneously exist in different dimensions.

DID YOU SEE THE *MATRIX* FILMS?

Yes, I did, actually.

THEY GOT A LOT OF IT RIGHT.

Yeah – but why did Trinity have to die at the end? Why did he have to become blind?

THINK ABOUT IT

We have to give up being so attached to the body and the senses and attractions of the world. We are here for a purpose. This life is not an end in itself. When we remember this, the embodied spirit, *jivatma*, lives and responds to the world but as a witness, knowing that its real or immortal nature inhabits a dimension beyond time and space. And as our 'faith', so we become – either continuing to revolve and evolve in the samsara chakra, or breaking free.

This is the point

This whole section of the commentary has been presented here because it explains the perspective that the gurus repeatedly teach us so clearly. To repeat the main point again: *it is the absence of the knowledge of the inter-relatedness of everything that is the cause of bondage and suffering.* No event in this vast creation, be it the most insignificant, can be isolated from the rest of the events that take place here. The Sanatana dharma teaches that creation is a single process spanning the macro and micro dimensions: birth and death, together with all that happens in between, are not isolated, disconnected events as we imagine in our ignorance. Once we see birth and death as natural components of ourselves, we are released from the acute fear of death, *abhinivesha*, and consequently from a whole range of sufferings that accompany life. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, faced with the certainty of death occurring on a massive scale, Lord Krishna simply reminds Arjuna of what is really happening (2:13):

> Just as in this body the embodied (soul) passes into childhood, youth and old age, so also does it pass into another body; the firm man does not grieve about this.

This is the fact that is to be known through Panchagni vidya.

The meditation on the 'five fires' described in this section of the Upanishad is how the king explains the path. What emerges is sensitivity to all the elements of creation and a sense of evolution persisting throughout all the phases of nature and states of consciousness. It takes one far beyond the perception of death being an end, rather death is perceived as an integral phase in a large cycle of cosmic activity. Just as sleep is an integral necessity for our awareness in daily life, so death and life are integral necessities for evolution of consciousness.



What happens to the individual soul after death?

Once Swami Satyananda began his Panchagni sadhana in Rikhia, he began explaining that our aim in life directs our focus. We perceive according to our focus, and take that as reality. This applies to our daily life. It applies to our relationship with guru, whomsoever we consider as our spiritual guide and inspiration. It applies to our relationship with God, whomsoever we consider as God. It applies to the way we live and die and what happens to us after death also.

He took his teachings a step further and explained that we have to start searching our inner nature and realize our own relationship with God – with the consciousness transcending life and death – not just have a blind belief in our cultural conditioning without actual experience. So on December 14th 1996, in Rikhia, he said:

> The desires are mental invocations that you make. The body and the senses do not have desires . . . they only have the power of action and perception, not volition or will . . . the willpower does not reside in the karmendriyas or the jnanendriyas, or in the muscles of the body . . .
>
> If I start walking from here, won't I reach my destination? This is what the saints and mahatmas tell us. When we start off we have to decide where we are going, what our destination is, our goal, then we must move in that direction. However, if we go on walking without a destination, we will reach somewhere, but not the particular destination which we decided on beforehand. How should we decide our goal? On what basis should we determine our aim? How should we decide what is the aim of our life?

So it is the inner nature, which we are often unconscious of – the deep desires, the deep attitudes that have formed our samskaras and karma – that is what we have to question ourselves about. It is also what we need to purify and develop positively, through the sankalpas that we make in yogic

practices such as yoga nidra, and through steadfast efforts to live useful and worthy lives.

The karmic harvest of our thoughts, attitudes, work and aims in life remain as subtle impressions and desires for individual fulfillment after death. Now, how should this understanding affect the way we live?

Four necessities



To succeed in this endeavour of self-discovery, again we need the preliminary qualifications, the fourfold necessities for real sadhana, the *sadhana chatushtaya*. The Adi Shankaracharya explained that four qualities are necessary for the understanding of Vedanta, and for one to be able to live the Sanatana dharma.

1. *Viveka* – the ability to distinguish the real from unreal (which puts the ego in its place)
2. *Vairagya* – non-atachment (because one knows the world is a dream, and this knowledge which at first comes in flashes like a dream itself, gradually stabilizes and becomes a continuing understanding – *atmajnana* – which enables an open view of a greater spiritual reality).
3. *Shat sampatti* – six wealths: *shama*, curbing desire, *dama*, external restraint, *uparati*, turning away from sense objects, *titiksha*, endurance without complaint, *shraddha*, faith and *samadhana*, concentration on *sat*, Truth.
4. *Mumukshutva* – the intense desire for liberation.

Yoga is accepted as the way one can develop these attributes in oneself.

In the *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali explains that for samadhi one needs not only vairagya – implying no desire or attachment to the things of the world, but also *paravairagya*, implying that the strong motivating force behind this vairagya is intense attraction to the inner light of supreme consciousness (1:15–16 and 21):

> *Drishtta-anushravika-vishayaa-vitrishnasya vashikaara-sanjnaa vairaagyam.*
>
> When an individual becomes free of craving for the sense objects which he has experienced as well as those of which he has heard, that state of consciousness is vairagya.
>
> *Tat-param-purushakhyaateh-gunavaitrishnyam.*
>
> That is the highest in which there is freedom from the desire for gunas on account of the knowledge of purusha.
>
> *Teevra-samvegaanaam-aasannah.*
>
> Those who have an intense urge attain asamprajnata samadhi very soon.[17]

It means that in life one will not experience the intense eagerness for samadhi, and at the moment of death, one will not be able to recognize one's Self, while sensory and material attachments remain.

We have to get to know ourselves, so that we are able to witness the different thoughts, desires, imbedded attitudes, conditioning, etc., and make the best of them, without thinking that that's who we are. We have got to know the difference between the mind-body car and the driver. The type of car we drive definitely affects where we can go and what we can see to some extent, but if we understand the vehicle, with its strengths and weaknesses, and drive carefully, we can keep going.

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[17] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Four Chapters on Freedom*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 1st ed. 1976, pp. 62–79

On October 15th 1997, in Rikhia, Swami Satyananda was asked:

I have read that when a man dies he sees a very bright light. Is this true?

This must have been a book written by a Christian, this is what is said in the Bible. The light at the end, and in whatever way a man sees in the state of void, will be in accordance with his religion. In fact, there is nothing like this. This is merely an experience. When a man begins to die, gradually all his switches shut down: from the brain to the eyes, to the nose, to the ears, the heart, the lungs, the liver, and all the other connections between the parts of the body. They are all switched off one by one. When all the switches are off, then the brain has this kind of experience.

In meditation, when all the sensory doors are shut and the brain is alone, there is a similar experience. Right now your brain is not alone, it is working through the eyes, ears, nose, etc. When the brain is isolated and alone, then it has such an experience, as does everyone at the time of death. Death is not such a sad event as people fear. Death is as pleasant as sleep. When a tired man sleeps, does he not enjoy it? People are needlessly afraid of dying. They think that everything will be left behind.

Everyone has their own belief about death, but the truth is that if a stalk of wheat does not wither, then how will a new one emerge? If the stalk of wheat remains green, then the grain will not form. The stalk of wheat grows, and then it dries. When it dries the grain becomes seed, and what does the seed contain? DNA, which cannot be seen with the naked eye. We can call it the soul of the wheat. When the wheat-stalk is dead, the seed becomes dormant. The soul sleeps. When it re-enters the earth, it sprouts as a stalk of wheat again.

The same happens with man. Vegetables, grain, coriander, dog, cat, all go the same way. That is why according to the laws of nature, birth is uncertain, but death is certain. Birth is not inevitable, but death is. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says that from the time a soul takes birth, death follows it. Death says, "I am hungry," and follows the life form like a ghost.

Reincarnation

All of you accept the principle of reincarnation, but you do not really believe in it. If you trusted in reincarnation, then you would not fear death. If you really believe that a new house is being built for you, would you have such a problem leaving your old one? The problem only arises if you are told that a new house is being constructed for you, but you don't believe it. Then you think, 'If I am to lose this house, where will I live?'

I am willing to leave today, because this is a 1923 model. Until I sell this old model I cannot get a new one. People still have an old car lying around, but they do not wish to sell it. They are still living in an old apartment, still wearing old shoes; nobody wants new ones.

You are born, become an adult, grow old, die, then you are born again and die again. This is the cycle of the world. Therefore, it is said that history repeats itself. You may say, life repeats itself. This is the law of nature: nature exists on recycling. Leaves sprout and fall, turn into compost which gives birth to new plant life, and then the leaves again fall. The seasons repeat themselves, every year the rains follow summer, winter follows the rains; day follows night, night follows day. There is repetition everywhere. In the structure of nature, there is only repetition: from water, clouds are formed, from clouds water is formed. One is born, dies, then is born again and dies again. Therefore, Sri Shankaracharya says:

Punarapi jananam punarapi maranam punarapi janani jathare shayanam.

Again birth, again death, again lying in the mother's womb

So how do we get out of this cycle? If there was a straight way out, we would be freed of it, but there is none. We can get out only if there is God's grace.

Practices

Swami Satyananda left us major teachings about death and practices that transform life, for example, yoga nidra and tattwa shuddhi. He also inculcated the understanding that karma yoga and bhakti yoga help us to maintain focus as we travel through life and death. He and Swami Niranjanananda, his spiritual successor, focus on unity of spirit, *atmabhava*, and also on developing the capacity to express it.

One of the aims given to Swami Niranjan by Swami Satyananda is to preserve the ancient traditions of the Sanatana dharma, and the higher sadhanas that sannyasins used to perform to accomplish their spiritual missions. From his guru, he received the inspiration to perform the Panchagni sadhana, facing the inner fires of passion, anger, greed, etc., and thus burning through the final chains of karma. And one who has transcended desire can rest in the Source or return at will, fully conscious of the interconnectedness of everything within and without.

The Panchagni sadhana culminates in the Pashupat Astra Yajna, last performed over five thousand years ago at the time of the Mahabharata War. And these are both components of the Pashupat Yoga, which teaches how to overcome the animal nature, the beasts within, that otherwise disfigure one's character.

Pashupat Yoga has many benefits, which stem from its basic purpose of removing suffering. However, very few of us could attempt such sadhanas; we lack the basic training. This includes training oneself in seeing all the events of life



as opportunities whether one likes them or not, i.e. training in overcoming *raga* and *dwesha*, attraction and repulsion. A well-known technique for this is pratyahara, but the fundamental technique is a whole branch of yoga in its own right – karma yoga. Swami Satyananda comments:

> Karma is the essence of life and *moksha*, liberation, is based on karma. Yoga should be able to compensate for the negative effects of karma: the fears about the after-effects of karma, the worries, the physical fatigue, reactions of frustration and disappointment, the pains and pangs of old age, leading to issues such as senility and disability – it should all become inconsequential and redundant. Arjuna wanted to shun karma, but throughout the eighteen chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna counseled, exhorted and prepared him to fight. He enlightened him on the precepts of yoga and *Brahma vidya*, transcendental knowledge . . .
>
> Can one get rid of samskaras by the cessation of action? No, it is not possible. It is essential that whatever life one lives, in whatever form one lives, that way of life must be used as a means to achieve spiritual life and gain spiritual knowledge. Whatever action is done under the influence of one's destiny, desires and circumstances guides one's future life and destiny, which eventually

> creates one's consciousness and samskaras after rebirth. Based on this principle and procedure, one must know how and why to do karma. Karma yoga is the starting point in order to know the various dimensions of life.[18]

New perspectives on one's self

Although death is seen, in yoga, as the gateway to new dimensions, this does not mean that it is wrong to grieve or to sympathize with people grieving. It is entirely natural. Even elephants grieve when one of their number dies. They remember the deaths, and return to the bones of the dead periodically, making what looks like ritual offerings of leaves.

One of the most helpful things we can do when someone is dying, or when we are dying and want to comfort those who are grieving on our behalf, is to affirm our faith in the evolution of the soul. I have often been awestruck by the incredible bravery, sensitivity and generosity of people when they are dying: people in my own family, and people I hardly know. It is as though their confrontation with death makes them heroes and endows wisdom about what is truly important.

Swami Satyananda was once asked: Is it helpful to believe that there is life after death? He answered:

> So far as life and death are concerned, one has to know about them. Hindus know about the *janma*, life, the inner life, after-life, and the life in-between and how the soul moves. It is necessary to know these things as one comes to realize that the body is not the person. There is something else that migrates from one body to another, from one life to another; one needs to understand the *atman*, the spirit or consciousness, and so many other forces.

[18] Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga, Karma Yoga Book 4: Action with a Purpose*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013

> Many great saints have written books which indicate life after death. In fact, this is a sound philosophy, for if a person really believes in his own continuity, death is not inauspicious. This philosophy is an optimistic approach. If one does not believe in life after death, there is a lot of fear and no hope, as one thinks this is the only chance. This is also an important question as this philosophy determines many factors in the personality and many psychological problems can be rectified by it.
>
> Certainly, yoga believes that there is evolution in the realm of matter, and in every realm. In yoga it is not possible to believe that one is just born with this totality of mass. It is illogical to believe that anything has just come about without following a process of evolution. The present life forms a link in a long chain of evolution. Therefore, in yoga reincarnation is not viewed as a religious belief; it is a logical outcome of reason.[19]

The *Sanatana dharma*, the ever-lasting or eternal values, which underlie the ancient vedic culture, gives subtle instruction in how best to live this life. As we have seen, the Vedas, the ancient sacred texts that present these teachings also show how to use this life as a stepping stone to improve one's existence in the other lokas one inhabits between death and rebirth.

The words 'loka' and 'bardo' both refer to different states of consciousness and to different dimensions of existence. The Buddhist teachings spring from this sanatan dharma originally, and the modern Buddhist teachings that the world has benefitted from due to the Tibetan diaspora stay true to the ancient teachings. Another very ancient text, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* also imparts progressive knowledge of psychic and pranic energies, and gives knowledge of

[19] Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga*, *Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, p. 21

different states of consciousness after death or in samadhi, using symbols relevant to the Egyptian civilization. From *The Divine Pymander of Hermes Trismegistus*, we can learn that the ancient Egyptians also had a complex system of initiations safeguarding esoteric knowledge, including knowledge of chakras, kundalini and kriya yoga, leading to physical rejuvenation, pranic conservation and spiritual upliftment. Trismegistus is perhaps the most famous of the Egyptian high priests. He was deified in Greek mythology as Hermes/ Mercury. His teachings had a profound effect on Europe over the centuries where he was thought of as the father of magic, writing and law, alchemy and chemistry, measurements and math, philosophy and healing.



In *Gods, Sages and Kings*[20], David Frawley mentions a connection between the Bhrigus, who were forced to leave India after the 'Battle of the Ten Kings', reported in the *Rig Veda*, and the ancient Egyptian and Mayan civilizations. If this is correct, it could explain why so much of the knowledge about death and evolution embedded in the Upanishads and other Indian scriptures is so similar to the teachings of ancient cultures in South America, Europe and Egypt.

Or maybe the enlightened ones of these cultures simply encounter the same experiences. It would not be surprising to find that nationality really doesn't matter much after death. Although one's individual perceptions and experiences are shaped by what one expects, by one's samskaras, and by one's aims, what is happening essentially remains the same.

[20] Frawley, David, *Gods, Sages and Kings: Vedic Secrets of Ancient Civilisations*, Morson Publishers, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, 1991, p. 143

3

Bardo Thodal: The Tibetan Guidebook for Death

The *Bardo Thodal*, better known as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, is specifically designed to give knowledge of states of consciousness after death. For this purpose, it uses symbols and refers to gods and goddesses that are especially well-known to spiritual practitioners in the Tibetan tradition as symbolizing different states of consciousness.

Introduction to the Tibetan teachings on death

These different dimensions, or states of consciousness experienced by a human being, referred to as the 'bardos', are not restricted to death and after death. They include this life (referred to in the *Bardo Thodal* as the Bardo of the dream-state) and samadhi states:

> O nobly-born listen with full attention without being distracted: There are six states of Bardo, namely: the natural state of Bardo while in the womb; the Bardo of the dream-state; the Bardo of ecstatic equilibrium while in deep meditation; the Bardo of the moment of death; the Bardo (during the experiencing) of Reality; the Bardo of the inverse process of samsaric existence. These are the six.[1]

[1] Evans-Wentz, W.Y. ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*, according to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering, Oxford University Press, London, 3rd ed 1957 (1st 1927), p. 102

The *Bardo Thodal* (*Tibetan Book of the Dead*)

According to the *Bardo Thodal*, the more aware we are, the simpler the journey. If we are one-pointed and aiming for transcendence, we can take death as an opportunity to see the Clear Light – and it is right there as soon as we die. Many people, however, are unconscious as they die, or distracted by fear, pain, by unevolved concerns for this life and so forth. If we are distracted and miss that first chance, another chance is given. If we miss that chance another is given, but we have to follow more guidelines. Even if it becomes clear that we have missed the opportunity for transcendence and are inevitably headed back into the next cycle of rebirth, there is still a chance to move towards a good birth – if we can follow the guidelines even as we are being swept along by the current of our karma.

Whenever we do 'wake up' as we journey through the bardos after death, that is, become aware of our situation and remember the teachings and apply them, things get better. That's true for this bardo of life (which is referred to as the dream-bardo) too. Even if we have missed the chance for transcending the cycle of reincarnation this time, and know we will inevitably end up in a womb again, we can have some sort of input – 'Oh no not that one! Oh no not . . . this one? No? This one? Oh, yes, well . . . Okay'.

The *Bardo Thodal* tells of the bardo experiences after death and how to deal with them. It is like a road map. According to how well prepared you are, different roads may be taken to different places. The *Bardo Thodal* has instructions for those who have received no spiritual training, and who are ignorant and frightened, even terrified, as death approaches. It also has instructions that assume you have already had some



training, know how to drive the car, even if not expertly, and will recognize the major landmarks. It also has instructions for adepts who know, more or less, the route and where they are going.

The assumed training is in meditation from a spiritual guru who has given you initiation, or at least from a well experienced teacher. The masters are those who have free range over the different states of consciousness during life and after death. Whether they are 'alive' or have passed on they are still with you when you call. With such masters, and also established guides in the authentic spiritual traditions, even if they are not there in person as you die, their teachings remain with you. The teachings and your experience of them during sadhana becomes part of your inner self. They become the *samskaras* or deep impressions, that guide your attitudes and choices in life. The priests read to you the instructions from the *Bardo Thodal* during the last moments of your life and, traditionally, for many days after you have died.

In this way 'face to face' teaching can continue to guide you until you transcend or, right through the after-death dimension until the next birth into this dimension – the 'Bardo of Dreaming' which we usually refer to as life.

The three dimensions between births

The after-death dimension is recognized as three distinct phases: the *Chikhai Bardo*, the *Chonyid Bardo* and the *Sidpa Bardo*. To give an idea of the scope of the *Bardo Thodal*, here is a simplified version of its contents.

Book 1: The Bardo of the Moments of Death (*Chikhai Bardo*)

1. Instructions on the 1st stage of the *Chikhai Bardo*: the symptoms of death and the primary Clear Light seen at the moment of death.
2. Instructions on the 2nd stage of the *Chikhai Bardo*: the secondary Clear Light seen immediately after death.

If one is successful in recognizing the Clear Light as one's own Self, the need for instructions ends here, one transcends *samsara*, the illusory, material world, and the *samsara chakra*, the cycle of life and death. Otherwise, the guidance of Book 2 becomes necessary. This consists of instruction on the *Chonyid Bardo* and the *Sidpa Bardo*.

Book 2: i) The Bardo of Experiencing Reality (*Chonyid Bardo*)
This consists of instructions concerning the 'Experiencing of Reality' when the karmic apparitions (perceived as deities in the Tibetan culture) appear if one has not recognized the Clear Light and transcended from the life/death cycle during the *Chikhai Bardo*. The *Chonyid Bardo* can continue up to 14 days. However, these 14 'days' are not the 24-hour days defined by the Earth's rotation before the Sun. Instructions on the *Chonyid Bardo* teach of:

1. The dawning of the Peaceful Deities from Day 1–7
2. The dawning of the Wrathful Deities from Day 8–14
3. A conclusion showing the fundamental importance of these bardo teachings – for the deities can save one from the rebirth process.

Book 2: ii) The After-Death World & The Process of Rebirth (*Sidpa Bardo)*
If one is not able to truly experience the Reality in the *Chonyid Bardo*, then one enters the after-death dimension leading to rebirth, the *Sidpa Bardo*, which is in two parts:

Part 1: The After-Death World

1. The bardo body: its birth and supernormal faculties
2. Characteristics of existence in the Intermediate State
3. The judgment
4. The all-determining influence of thought
5. The dawning of the light of the six lokas.

Part 2: The Process of Rebirth

1. Five methods of closing the door to the womb
2. Choosing the womb-door

3. Alternative choices: to paradise or to the human dimension
4. General conclusion.

Authenticity

According to the introduction written by the editor, W.Y. Evans-Wentz, following suggestions by the translator, Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup, the teachings summarized above have been transmitted by a long and unbroken line of Indian and Tibetan initiates. Even the Buddha merely transmitted the teachings from preceding Buddhas orally, then it was transmitted from guru to guru until comparatively recent times, when it was written down in the present form of the *Bardo Thodal*. However, hyped up we are about our 'modern civilization', once we die we are back to the archetypal blueprints.

The interesting thing is that the meditations and understandings one should apply after death are so applicable to life as well. Including the understanding that life, (the bardo of dreaming) is not the major focus, although we are here presently.

Temporarily.

Temporarily. Of course. In our life, right at this moment, we should understand our 'reality' is formed by karmas and resulting thoughts, relationships and situations, etc., which we can simply witness; or identify with.

If we identify with them, we get bound up in their web and remain distracted even at the moment of death. But, for an adept who remains alert and is by nature unattached, it is possible to recognize and merge with the Clear Light, either at the moment of death or shortly afterwards, and thus win real freedom from the chain of life and death straight away. Therefore, the *Chikhai Bardo* stands alone and has a book of its own.

If one doesn't become free from the samsara chakra and the bondage of rebirth during the *Chikhai Bardo,* then one

enters the *Chonyid Bardo*, where the relative liberation of recognizing and identifying with the deities can be won. If one doesn't become free during the fourteen 'days' of the *Chonyid Bardo*, then it melds into the next bardo, the *Sidpa Bardo*, this whole process taking 49 'days', and then comes rebirth into samsara.

Rerun

Let us look at the reminders given as death approaches, at what happens as one passes through the gates of death, and in the moments after death.

BOOK 1: THE MOMENTS OF DEATH (*CHIKHAI BARDO – 1ST CHANCE*)

One can go to the Clear Light at the moment of death or immediately after death. Such able souls are rare but nevertheless, the instructions should be repeated many times in the ear of any person who is dying.

> At this moment the first (glimpsing) of the Bardo of the Clear Light of Reality, which is the Infallible Mind of the Dharma-Kaya, is experienced by all sentient beings.
>
> The time between the cessation of the expiration and the cessation of the inspiration is the time during which the vital-force remains in the median-nerve.
>
> The common people call this the state wherein the chaitanya, the consciousness-principle or the object-knowing principle has fainted away. The duration of this state is uncertain. (It depends) upon the constitution, good or bad, and (the state of) the nerves and vital-force. In those who have had even a little practical experience of the firm tranquil state of dhyana, and in those who have sound nerves, this state continues for a long time . . . In those who have led an evil life, and in those of unsound nerves, the above state endures only so long as it would take to snap the fingers. Again, in

> some, it endures as long as the time taken for the eating of a meal.[2]

We can see this is a very old scripture, before modern time-keeping methods: a meal takes 20–30 minutes to eat. The point seems to be that when the breathing is stopping, even though the person may appear unconscious, by gently adjusting the posture so they are lying on the right side, and gently pressing the throbbing arteries on the right and left side of the neck, the person can be kept awake so they can die consciously and the energy can leave through the *brahma-randhra*, the aperture at the crown of the head. During this window of opportunity, the instructions should be repeated many times in the ear of the dying one so that they are not distracted at this important moment. The most important thing to remember, according to the *Bardo Thodal* is:

> At this moment know yourself; and abide in that state.[3]

However, if a person has been well prepared, they are supposed to be able to follow their journey into death through the experience of the tattwas dissolving. Training for this can be gained by practising tattwa shuddhi (which we discuss in Chapter 13: Useful Practices) until awareness of the tattwas becomes an effortless adjunct to life. Then, the guide need only refer to them as part of the instruction:

> Now the symptoms of earth sinking into water are come. When all the symptoms (of death) are about to be completed, then enjoin upon (the one dying) this resolution, speaking in a low tone of voice in the ear . . . 'Do not let your mind be distracted . . . O nobly-born, that which is called death being come to you now, resolve thus: "O this now is the hour of death. By taking advantage of this death, I will so act, for the good of

[2] *ibid*., Evans-Wentz, W.Y., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*, pp. 92–93

[3] *ibid*., p. 91

all sentient beings, peopling the illimitable expanse of the heavens, as to obtain the perfect Buddhahood, by resolving on love and compassion . . . I will serve all sentient beings, infinite in number as are the limits of the sky."

Keeping yourself unseparated from this resolution, you should try to remember whatever devotional practices you were accustomed to perform during your lifetime.'

In saying this, the reader shall put his lips close to the ear, and shall repeat it distinctly, clearly impressing it upon the dying person so as to prevent his mind from wandering even for a moment . . . Reverend Sir, now that you are experiencing the Fundamental Clear Light, try to abide in that state which you are now experiencing . . . Recognize it. O nobly-born, your present intellect, in real nature void, not formed into anything as regards characteristics or colour, naturally void, is the very Reality, the All-Good.[4]

This is intended to recall the guru's teachings to the mind. Those who through self-restraint and previous training can maintain a steady meditative state have a chance to win through immediately. The Chikhai Bardo – the state of dying – can continue for seven days, but usually only for four or five days. Only for adepts in yoga or meditation would death be accomplished without a break in the continuity of the stream of consciousness, i.e. without 'fainting away'.

For those who have not confronted the inner foes of humanity: ego, delusions, lust, anger, etc., well, in the time it takes to snap one's fingers, their chance is over. But if one is successful, the 'naked consciousness' is recognized as the Clear Light. Thus recognizing one's own self, one becomes permanently united with the Dharma-Kaya, and experiences liberation.

[4] *ibid*., pp. 93–95

If, when dying, one is familiar with this state, in virtue of previous spiritual (or yogic) training in the human world, and have power to win Buddhahood at this all-determining moment, the Wheel of Rebirth is stopped and Liberation is instantaneously achieved. But such spiritual efficiency is so very rare that the mental condition of the person dying is unequal to the supreme feat of holding on to the state in which the Clear Light shines, and there follows a progressive descent into lower and lower states of the *Bardo* existence, and then rebirth . . .

The mentality of a person dying momentarily enjoys a condition of balance or perfect equilibrium, and of oneness. Owing to unfamiliarity with such a state, which is an ecstatic state of non-ego, of subliminal consciousness, the consciousness principle of the average human being lacks the power to function in it; karmic propensities becloud the consciousness-principle with thoughts of personality, of individualized being, of dualism, and, losing equilibrium, the consciousness-principle falls away from the Clear Light. It is ideation of ego, of self, which prevents the realization of *Nirvana* (which is the blowing out of the flame of selfish longing); and so the Wheel of Life continues to turn.[5]



[5] *ibid*., p. 97 (footnote)

When it is said that 'such spiritual efficiency is very rare' we should believe it. Being united with the *Dharma-Kaya*, the body of dharma, seems to be the Buddhist way of saying that one experiences *dharmamegha samadhi*, the cloud-of-dharma samadhi, which Rishi Patanjali speaks of right at the end of his instructions on raja yoga (4:29–31):

> When there is no interest even in the highest meditation, dharmamegha samadhi develops on account of complete discrimination.
>
> Thereafter arises freedom from kleshas and karmas.
>
> Then by the removal of all veils and impurities, little remains to be known because of the infinity of knowledge.[6]

Not many of us are that proficient.

The *Bardo Thodal* says there is another chance in the Chikhai Bardo though, straight after death, for those who can't hold it together while actually dying. Just as a newborn baby must wake up in this world and experience the nature of its body and of this world, so a person at death must wake up in the next bardo and learn through experience. The next bardo body is invisible and subtle. It is separated from the physical body at the moment of death, retaining 'the consciousness-principle and the psychic nerve system', i.e. there is an exact duplicate of the vijnanamaya and pranamaya koshas, but not of the physical body or lower mind.

THE MOMENTS AFTER DEATH (*CHIKHAI BARDO – 2ND CHANCE*)

Once a person is dead, but no longer unconscious, having woken up from the swoon of death it seems there is a period of intense confusion for those who have strong identification with their body.

THAT'S MOST NEARLY EVERYONE YOU KNOW.

[6] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, trans & commentary, *Four Chapters on Freedom*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 1st ed., 1976

> When the consciousness-principle gets outside (the body), it says to itself, "Am I dead, or am I not dead?" It cannot determine. It sees its relatives and connections as it had been used to seeing them before. It even hears the wailings. The terrifying karmic illusions have not yet dawned. Nor have the frightful apparitions caused by the Lords of Death yet come.
>
> During this interval, the directions are to be applied (by the lama or reader).[7]

If one can respond to that guidance, and has the benefit of previous training, one can direct the soul's course favourably. It is believed that the aperture of the body through which the energy (and often the vital fluids) leave the body is an indication of where a soul is heading. This relates directly to one's good or bad karma but also to the manner in which one died, the last thoughts. Even the behaviour of the people with whom one has been connected or who are with you at death can have an effect. However, the importance of the guru's previous guidance and one's own degree of perfection in practices of concentration, visualization, etc., is referred to again and again.

Swami Satyasangananda refers to psychic power as being both a prerequisite for and a boon of tattwa shuddhi sadhana, where simple visualizations form an integral part of the practice.

> The mental attitude during any prolonged sadhana is of paramount importance. During intensive sadhana, the perception becomes very sensitive and one develops extreme clarity of mind and tremendous psychic power.[8]

It is interesting to note the *Bardo Thodal*'s recognition that the ability to visualize is a definite asset. It makes it clear that

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[7] *op cit*., Evans-Wentz W.Y., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*, p. 98

[8] Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati, *Tattwa Shuddhi*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2000, p. 112

the psychic power built up through intense sadhana is not simply to be used for everyday activities.

> There are those (devotees) of the perfected stage and of the visualizing stage. If it is one who was in the perfected stage, then call him three times by name and repeat over and over again the above instructions of setting face-to-face with the Clear Light. If it is one who was in the visualizing stage, then read out to him the introductory descriptions and the text of the Meditation on his tutelary deity, and then say,
>
> 'O you of noble birth, meditate upon thine own tutelary deity – (Here the deity's name is to be mentioned by the reader). Do not be distracted. Earnestly concentrate your mind on your tutelary deity. Meditate upon him as if he were the reflection of the moon in water, apparent yet inexistent (in itself). Meditate upon him as if he were a being with a physical body'. So saying, (the reader will) impress it.
>
> If the deceased be of the common folk say, 'Meditate upon the Great Compassionate Lord'.
>
> By being thus set face-to face, even those who would not be expected to recognize the Bardo (unaided) are undoubtedly certain to recognize it.
>
> Persons who while living had been set face to face (with the Reality) by a guru, yet who have not made themselves familiar with it, will not be able to recognize the Bardo clearly by themselves. Either a guru or a brother in the Faith will have to impress vividly such persons.
>
> There may even be those who have made themselves familiar with the teachings yet who, because of the violence of the disease causing death, may not be able to withstand illusions. For such, also, this instruction is absolutely necessary.[9]

[9] *op cit*., Evans-Wentz W.Y., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*, pp. 98–99

It is interesting that there is no condemnation of such people in the form of withholding the sacred knowledge so necessary for a peaceful transition. In fact, it is understood that for those who have fallen, greater effort has to be made by the chanters to ensure their every chance of success.

BOOK 2: EXPERIENCING REALITY (*CHONYID BARDO – MORE CHANCES*)

So, generally only people who have very clear karma, and who have been taught by and have learned from a spiritual guru will be able to transcend at the moment of death. Others lose consciousness; it's all too much of a shock. One regains consciousness after death, but sooner or later even those who remain aware to some extent, are usually distracted by the happenings on planet Earth related to their past life (what is happening to their dead body or to their family or house, for example) to concentrate on the need for liberation – on the Reality of the Clear Light. Or one may be distracted by feelings about one's self or various fears or insecurities about what one deserves.

No different from what happens every day really.

Well, yes. So maybe it would be interesting to compare this judgment or self-assessment a person has of their life so far, and their ability to navigate the Chikhai Bardo state successfully. These days you can find many experiences reported by people who have had NDEs, 'Near-Death-Experiences'. If you have not had such an experience yourself, you may wish to consider this topic again later. A summary of such experiences reported in books and film clips follows in Chapter 8, on Near-Death-Experiences, along with accounts various people have provided to me.

This evidence indicates that there is indeed a clear ability in the dead and dying to be aware of the situation of the people 'left behind'. Also, thatthe process of dying involves a self-assessment of whether one's responsibilities to the

living demand a return to the living state – even against one's preferences. Whether one believes those undergoing NDEs are momentarily dead or not, their testimony often indicates knowledge of what the living people they are closely related to are saying and doing at that time. Often this knowledge is completely outside the supposed scope of human perception – for example, relatives may be heard or seen in another town far away from where the 'death' occurs.

The *Bardo Thodal* says such distracted souls are further disorientated by the happenings around them as their reality shifts. Actually, they are about to enter the *Chonyid Bardo* and this should be explained to them as follows:

> O nobly-born, you will experience three Bardos: the Bardo of the moment of death, the Bardo (during the experiencing) of Reality, and the Bardo while seeking rebirth. Of these three, up to yesterday, you had experienced the Bardo of the moment of Death. Although the Clear Light of Reality dawned upon you, you were unable to hold on, and so you have to wander here. Now, henceforth you are going to experience the (other) two, the Chonyid Bardo and the Sidpa Bardo.
>
> You will pay undistracted attention to that with which I am about to set you face to face, and hold on.
>
> O nobly-born, that which is called death has now come. You are departing from this world, but you are not the only one; (death) comes to all. Do not cling, in fondness and weakness, to this life. Even though you cling out of weakness, you do not have the power to remain here. You will gain nothing more than wandering in this Samsara. Be not attached (to this world); be not weak. Remember the precious Trinity.
>
> O nobly-born, whatever fear and terror may come to you in the Chonyid Bardo, forget not these words; and, bearing their meaning at heart, go forwards: in them lies the vital secret of recognition:

'Alas! When the Uncertain Experiencing of Reality is dawning upon me here, with every thought of fear or terror or awe for all (apparitional appearances) set aside;

May I recognize whatever (visions) appear, as the reflections of my own consciousness;

May I know them to be of the nature of apparitions in the Bardo:

At this all-important moment (of opportunity) of achieving a great end;

May I not fear the bands of Peaceful and Wrathful (deities, which are) my own thought forms.'[10]

The above verse is thought to be most important, it is the key to the deceased seeing the reality of the situation as he begins to meet the Peaceful and Wrathful deities in the struggle to attain wisdom.

The Chonyid Bardo is described as lasting up to 14 'days'. All 14 days may not be necessary as each day offers a chance of enlightenment. From day one, the deceased begins to meet the Peaceful and Wrathful deities which are five wisdoms symbolized for Tibetans by five *Dhyani Buddhas*, each personifying a divine attribute related to a specific tattwa or element, a specific strength to be cultivated or weakness to be overcome. For non-Tibetans, other deities or recognizable symbols would appear.



[10] *ibid*., pp. 102–103

The first seven days of the Chonyid Bardo – meeting the Peaceful Deities

The first five days relates to the dawning of the five elements in the Bardos and the meeting with its related symbolic Tibetan deity, one by one. To summarize:

The 1st day – Space and All-Pervading Wisdom

This relates to the space element. For those who are aware, and whose consciousness is imbued with the understanding of the well-known deities of Tibet, there appears:

> The glorious blue light of the Dhyani Buddha Vairochana, the Manifester, 'He Who in Shapes Makes Visible (the universe of matter). The Dharma-Dhatu is symbolized as the Aggregate of Matter. From the Aggregate of Matter arise the creatures of this world, as of all worlds, in which animal stupidity is the dominant characteristic . . . When in man, made as perfect as human life can make him, the stupidity of his animal nature and the illusion of shape, or personality, are transmuted into Right Knowledge, into Divine Wisdom, there shines forth in his consciousness the All-Pervading Wisdom of the Dharma-Dhatu, or the Wisdom born of the Voidness, which is all-pervading.[11]



[11] *ibid*., p. 15

The 2nd day – Water and Mirror-Like Wisdom

This relates to the water element – the life stream, blood, anger, the obscuring passion of consciousness, transmuting into Mirror-like Wisdom personified as Vajra-Sattva (the Sambhoga-Kaya of the Dhyani Buddha Akshobhya).

The 3rd day – Earth and the Wisdom of Equality

This relates to the earth element – solid bodies, egoism, touch, transmuting into the Wisdom of Equality personified as Ratna Sambhava (the gem-born one, the beautifier).

The 4th day – Fire and All-Discriminating Wisdom

This relates to the fire element – animal heat, attachment, lust, the aggregate of feelings transmuting into All-Discriminating Wisdom personified as Amitabha (the Dhyani Buddha of Boundless Light, the Illuminator).

The 5th day – Air and All-Performing Wisdom

This relates to the air element – the breath of life; envy, jealousy, the aggregate of volition transforming into All-Performing Wisdom personified as Amogha-Siddhi (the Almighty Conqueror, giver of Divine Power).

During the meetings with the Peaceful Deities, the deceased are introduced to each of these divine attributes or principles inherent in their own self, one after another, perceiving them according to their capacity. The text strives to remind the deceased of the essentials they have already learned from life, or, from the guru. The encounters are described as:

> . . . a symbolic drama of initiation, to test him and discover whether any part of his divine (or *bodhic*) nature has been developed. Full development in all the bodhic powers of the Five Dhyani Buddhas, who are the personifications of them, leads to Liberation, to Buddhahood. Partial development leads to birth in one of the happier states: *deva loka*, the world of the *devas*

or gods; *asura-loka*, the world of the *asuras* or titans; *nara-loka*, the world of mankind.[12]

One's own nature projects reality

So, during the first five days of the Chonyid Bardo one meets the Peaceful Deities individually and also the five tattwas. The *Bardo Thodal* warns:

> O nobly-born, when your body and mind were separating, you must have experienced a glimpse of the Pure Truth, subtle, sparkling, bright, dazzling, glorious, and radiantly awesome in appearance like a mirage moving across a landscape in springtime in one continuous stream of vibrations. Be not daunted, thereby, nor terrified, nor awed. That is the radiance of your own true nature. Recognize it.
>
> From the middle of that radiance, the natural sound of Reality, reverberating like a thousand thunders simultaneously sounding, will come. That is the natural sound of your own real self. Be not daunted thereby, nor terrified, nor awed.
>
> The body which you have now is called the thought-body of propensities. Since you do not have a material body of flesh and blood, whatever may come – sounds, lights or rays, are all three unable to harm you: you are incapable of dying. It is quite sufficient for you to know that these apparitions are your own thought forms. Recognize this to be the Bardo.
>
> O nobly-born, if you do not now recognize your own forms . . . Should you not know this all-important key to the teachings – not being able to recognize the sounds, lights and rays – you will have to wander in the Samsara.[13]

[12] *ibid*., p.17

[13] *ibid*., pp. 103–104

It seems people have difficulty believing they are dead, even if they can see their dead body, grieving relatives and so forth, because self-awareness continues to exist, and they are not trained to understand how consciousness can function without the senses and body. Also, they now have the 'nectarine body' mentioned in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. A body which is designed to experience the results of our karma in the appropriate loka or bardo.

The 6th day – Divine wisdom or samsara

The *Bardo Thodal* explains we really should have recognized our true nature in one of the preceding days, but if because of our own 'evil inclinations' we have only felt fear and terror in the face of these benevolent deities, now:[14]

> All the Divine Fathers-Mothers of the Five Orders (of Dhyani Buddhas) with their attendants will come to shine on one simultaneously. At the same time, the lights proceeding from the Six Lokas will likewise come to shine on one simultaneously . . . O nobly-born, on this, the Sixth Day, the colours of the primal states of the four elements (water, earth, fire, air) will shine upon you simultaneously.

So here we get another hint that the tattwa shuddhi practice is fundamental. But it becomes clear also that not only the four elements or *mahabhootas*, referred to above need purification. The five poisons that enslave human beings and bind them to existence in the six lokas are lust, hatred, stupidity, pride and jealousy. Again and again, overcoming these addictive drugs is shown to be essential. So on this sixth day:

> Forty-two perfectly endowed deities issuing from within your heart, being the product of your own pure love, will come to shine. Know them.
>
> O nobly-born, these realms are not come from somewhere outside (yourself) . . . They issue from within

[14] *ibid*., pp. 118–119

you, and shine upon you. The deities too, are not from somewhere else; they exist from eternity within the faculties of your own intellect. Know them to be of that nature . . .

At that time, you must remember the teachings of the setting-face-to-face which you have had from your guru. If you have remembered the purport of the settings-face-to-face, you will have recognized all these lights which have shone upon you as being reflections of your own inner light, and, having recognized them as intimate friends, you will have believed in them and have understood (them at) the meeting, as a son understands his mother.

And believing in the unchanging nature of the pure and holy Truth, you will have produced in yourself the tranquil-flowing Samadhi; and, having merged into the body of the perfectly evolved intellect, you will have obtained Buddhahood in the Sambhoga Kaya, whence there is no return.

O nobly-born, along with the radiances of Wisdom, the impure, illusory lights of the six Lokas will also come to shine . . . whereupon be not afraid of nor be attracted towards any, but allow yourself to rest in the non-thought condition . . .

If you are frightened by the pure radiances of Wisdom and attracted by the impure light of the six Lokas, then you will assume a body in any of the six Lokas, and suffer samsaric miseries; and you will never be emancipated from the Ocean of Samsara, wherein you will be whirled round and round and made to taste the sufferings thereof.[15]

The 7th day – Warnings about degradation

From the seventh day the real warnings about the next life come to the forefront, because it is possible that one may not

[15] *ibid*., pp. 121–125

easily achieve a good human birth again. According to the *Bardo Thodal*:

> On the Seventh Day, the Knowledge-Holding Deities, from the holy paradise realms, come to receive one. Simultaneously, the pathway to the brute world, produced by the obscuring passion, stupidity, also come to receive one.[16]

Just as the material elements of the dead body separate and go to their appropriate places (ashes to ashes, dust to dust) so there is a gradual dispersion of the psychic atoms of the bardo's thought-body – each directed by karmic affinity, inevitably goes to that environment most congenial to it. Hence, the text suggests the 'brutish passion' of stupidity has a natural tendency to gravitate to the brute kingdom, the animal kingdom, and become embodied there.

There is debate about whether a human being can be reborn as an animal, but many scriptures imply that there are even worse births than being born as a mere brute. The 49 'days' of the Bardos give opportunity for evolution or degeneration. If one is able to rest in the Clear Light of one's own consciousness at any point, or to some extent grasp the values of the Sanatana dharma and see the truth behind existence, one does not fall into lower conditions of existence. The pure witnessing consciousness neither incarnates nor re-incarnates, it remains the drashta, but lower elements or lower states of consciousness need to be purified by earth-plane experiences and might incarnate in sub-human or animal bodies.

The *Bhagavad Gita* also says that even for humankind, there is always the chance that one can experience again a lower form of birth (16:19–21):

> Those cruel haters, worst among men in the world, I hurl those evil doers into the wombs of demons only.

[16] *ibid*., p. 126

Entering into demonical wombs and deluded, birth after birth, not attaining Me, they thus fall, O Arjuna, into a condition still lower than that.

Triple is the gate of this hell, destructive of the self – lust, anger and greed; therefore one should abandon these three.

The *Bardo Thodal* warns that if one does not get hooked out of the Chonyid Bardo by the grace of the five Dhyani Buddhas, and empowered to see the light of one's own heart, then the next seven days are for meeting the Wrathful Deities – and one is inevitably going to take birth again in some form or other according to one's karmas. Both the editor and the translator seem to feel that the animal births named in the texts as receptacles of sinners are mainly symbolic.[17] They point out that people are sometimes described as 'the lustful swine-man; the deceitful fox-man', etc., and argue that human life offers much better opportunities to work off evil karma than any sub-human species. Still, the *Bardo Thodal* earnestly instructs:

Be not attracted towards the dull blue light of the brute-world; be not weak. If you are attracted, you will fall into the brute-world, wherein stupidity predominates, and suffer the illimitable miseries of slavery and dumbness and stupidness; and it will be a very long time before you can get out. Be not attracted towards it. Put your faith in the bright, dazzling, five-coloured radiance. Direct your mind one-pointedly towards the deities, the Knowledge-Holding-Conquerors.[18]

[17] *ibid*., pp. 57–58

[18] *ibid*., p. 130

The next seven days of the Chonyid Bardo – meeting the Wrathful Deities

In a footnote, the editor explains that the Peaceful and Knowledge-Holding Deities emanate from the heart and throat centres, which would indicate anahata and vishuddhi chakras. The Wrathful Deities come from the psychic centre in the brain. The *Bardo Thodal* says that multitudes obtain liberation by recognition of reality during setting face-to-face with the Peaceful Deities but even so:

> Although (all be) sat face-to-face in such detail, there is a vast preponderance of those who wander downwards unliberated.
>
> Therefore, after the cessation (of the dawning of) the Peaceful and the Knowledge-Holding Deities, who come to welcome one, the fifty-eight flame-enhaloed, wrathful, blood-drinking deities come to dawn, who are only the former Peaceful Deities in changed aspect – according to the place (or psychic centre of the Bardo-body of the deceased whence they proceed); nevertheless, they will not resemble them.
>
> This is the Bardo of the Wrathful Deities; and they being influenced by fear, terror and awe, recognition becomes more difficult. The intellect, gaining not in independence, passes from one fainting state to a round of fainting states. (Yet), if one but recognize a little, it is easier to be liberated (at this stage). If it be asked why? (the answer is): Because of the dawning of the radiances – (which produce) fear, terror and



awe – intellect is undistractedly alert in one-pointedness; that is why.[19]

We may wonder why such peaceful deities are now presenting themselves as blood-drinking horrific figures, but the scripture explains it has the compassionate purpose of shaking the deceased into one-pointed awareness. Also a footnote again explains that this terror on seeing the Wrathful Deities would only occur if the deceased had no adequate preparation or training beforehand, and was therefore unable to recognize them as apparitions or projections from his own self. If there was sufficient depth of preparation he would not be shaken from his goal, whether that was immediate rebirth in favourable circumstances on Earth, or some time in a paradise-loka (or nirvana for an enlightened one). We should remember that 'blood' here symbolizes renunciation of life and its illusions, renunciation of samsara.

Know yourself

The *Bardo Thodal* insists on recognizing the Peaceful or Wrathful Deities, and indeed all experience, in whatever form it takes, as emanating from oneself. If one knows them to be the radiances or vibrations of one's own self, even at this late stage one can still attain the state of at-one-ment: Buddhahood. It is self-recognition that is the key: not intellectually accepting theories or even a premise, but realizing one's own essence. The *Shvetashvataropanishad* says (1:15–16):

> Just as oil is in the whole sesame seed, butter in milk, water in underground springs, fire in wood, so is the Self grasped in one's own soul if one looks for Him with truthfulness and austerity.
>
> The Self which pervades all things as butter is contained in milk, which is the root of self-knowledge and austerity, That is the Brahman and the destroyer

[19] *ibid*., pp. 131–132

of ignorance. That is the Brahman and the destroyer of ignorance.[20]

The similarity of the teachings about the nature of reality preserved in the ancient scriptures of Tibet, India and other countries are masked only because they are presented in an understandable form to the people of different cultures. Tibet, locked in ice, and Egypt locked in sun and desert, have different vivid visual presentations of their symbolic gods. The ancient rishis of India were teaching people from a more benevolent environment, so the flavour of the psyche is reflected in the teachings.

BOOK 2: THE AFTER-DEATH WORLD & THE PROCESS OF REBIRTH (*SIDPA BARDO – LAST CHANCE*)

The Sidpa Bardo opens up for those who have not been able to escape the gravity field of attachments to their physical body and sensory life, by realizing one's own true self.

> O nobly-born, listen well, and bear at heart that birth in the Hell-world, in the Deva-world, and in this Bardo-body is of the kind called supernormal birth.
>
> Indeed, when you were experiencing the radiances of the Peaceful and Wrathful, in the Chonyid Bardo, being unable to recognize, you fainted away, through fear, about three and one-half days (after thy decease); and then when you were recovered from the swoon, your Knower must have risen up in its primordial condition and a radiant body, resembling the former body, must have sprung forth like a trout leaping from a stream . . . This body (born) of desire, is a thought-form hallucination in the Intermediate State, and it is called the desire-body.

[20] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, trans., *Nine Principal Upanishads*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2004, p. 169

> At that time – if you are to be born as a deva – visions of the Deva-world will appear to you; similarly – wherever you are to be born – if as an asura, or a human being, or a brute, or a preta, or a being in Hell, a vision of the place will appear to you . . . At that time, do not follow the visions which appear to you. Be not attracted; be not weak; or through weakness, you will have to wander among the six Lokas and suffer pain . . . But if you are unable to know yourself, then, whosover may be your tutelary deity and your guru, meditate on them, in a state of intense fondness and humble trust, as overshadowing the crown of your head. This is of great importance. Be not distracted. [21]

Guru

This makes it clear that the guru is of the utmost importance to us. To overcome the darkness of avidya, and our birth into the ocean of samsara, we need the guru – the one who dispels darkness. The *Bardo Thodal* explains the characteristics of existence in the intermediate state where one now finds oneself. And we can see close correspondence between the experiences of those who have had NDEs and the description given of the experience after death in this scripture.

It is explained that the frightening karmic illusions of vision and sound relate to the inner enemies, and that anger, lust and stupidity are represented by precipices, falling into one marks one's entrance into the womb and the rebirth. If one can overcome the fear and remain aware and witnessing, remembering the guru's teachings, one will be guided into a more sattwic life.

> Know at that time it is the Sidpa Bardo (in which you are). Invoking by name the Compassionate One, pray earnestly thus: 'O Compassionate Lord, and my Guru, and the precious Trinity, do not allow me (so and so by

[21] *op cit.*, Evans-Wentz W.Y., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*, pp. 155–158

name) to fall into the unhappy worlds'. Act so as not to forget this.

Others who have accumulated merit, and devoted themselves sincerely to religion, will experience various delightful pleasures and happiness and ease in full measure. But that class of neutral beings who have neither earned merit nor created bad karma will experience neither pleasure nor pain, but a sort of colorless stupidity of indifference. O nobly born, whatever comes in that manner – whatever delightful pleasures you may experience – be not attracted by them; do not dote (on them): think 'May the Guru and the Trinity be worshipped (with these merit-given delights)'. Abandon all dotings and hankerings.[22]

The judgement

The idea of judgement is represented by different symbolic figures or activities in different cultures and many images are used in the *Bardo Thodal* also:

Then the Lord of Death will say, 'I will consult the Mirror of Karma'. So saying, he will look in the Mirror, wherein every good and evil act is vividly reflected. Lying will be of no avail . . .

Even at the time that the pebbles are being counted out, do not be frightened, nor terrified; tell no lies; and do not fear the Lord of Death. Your body, being a mental body, is incapable of dying even though beheaded and quartered. In reality, your body is of the nature of voidness; you do not need to be afraid . . .

Apart from one's own hallucinations, in reality there are no such things existing outside oneself as Lord of Death, or god or demon, or the Bull-headed Spirit of Death. Act so as to recognize this.[23]

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[22] *ibid*., p. 163

[23] *ibid*., pp. 166–167

So – I'm just a figment of your imagination?

Mmmm

Your hallucinations are real and I'm not, Huh?

Well, I think it's a teaching technique emphasizing the all-determining influence of thought. First one has to be able to see one's own motivations. We project our hidden fears and conditionings, so we have to learn to acknowledge our own fears, weaknesses, negativities and attachments in order to overcome them. Then, one can retrieve the situation by the transforming power of thought – by thinking of the opposite or summoning the opposite feeling, *pratipaksha bhavana*, in yogic terms – or if you're devotional by temperament, you get real results by calling on higher values or powers to assist:

> Even if you feel attached to the worldly goods you have left behind . . . or feel angry with your successors, that feeling will affect the psychological moment in such a way that, even though you were destined to be born on higher and happier planes, you will be obliged to be born in Hell, or in the world of the pretas (the unhappy ghosts) . . . Think that you are offering them to the Precious Trinity and to your guru, and abide in the feeling of unattachment, devoid of weakness (of desire).[24]

So it is implying – more than implying – insisting – that one's actions after death are as significant as those performed during life. After all, 'life' is just another bardo in the greater scheme of things that the *Bardo Thodal* is speaking of. And, in the formation of the future, the state of a person's mind as they die, and then the deceased's emotional/mental state immediately after death, is held to be active and potent.

[24] *ibid*., p. 170

> You should not create impious thoughts, but exercise pure affection and humble faith towards all impartially. This is highly important. Hence be extremely careful.[25]

Why be so careful now? Because one is about to be reborn – and there are many types of birth possible – and they are heralded by different lights.

The dawning of the light of the six lokas

At this stage, the instructions or guidelines on thought and understanding and attitude would have been chanted continuously for some days in the traditional culture of Tibet. The chanting continues because the benefit is so great if the deceased actually takes these things to heart. But if the deceased is able to hear, why wouldn't one act on the advice given?

Maybe similar advice had been given for years and years but one didn't really believe in life after death, or one was too distracted by the senses, by life itself, to take it all seriously – but now? Surely one would listen at this stage?

YOU'D BE SURPRISED.

Well, yes, the *Bardo Thodal* explains that it remains difficult due to the influence of evil karma. Still the chanter should call on the deceased by name and urge them to meditate on whichever light shines as being the Compassionate One, as perfecting this will obstruct the process of birth, and help towards enlightenment. At this time the instructions are:

> O nobly-born, if you have been unable to apprehend the above, henceforth the body of the past life will become more and more dim, and the body of the future life will become more and more clear . . . Then there will shine upon you the lights of the Six Samsaric Lokas. The light wherein you are to be born, through the power of karma, will shine most prominently.

[25] *ibid*., p. 172

> O nobly-born, listen. If you desire to know what those six lights are: there will shine upon you a dull white light from the Deva-world, a dull green light from the Asura-world, a dull yellow light from the Human-world, a dull blue light from the Brute-world, a dull red light from the Preta-world, and a smoke-colored light from the Hell-world. At that time, by the power of karma, your own body will partake of the color of the light of the place where you are to be born.[26]

The truth is that, for all of us reading this book, we didn't recognize our true selves and ended up getting reborn rather than enlightened, so we are still engaged in the *lila*, the divine play of Nature.

Or at least that holds for 99.999999 percent of us.

THANK YOU.

You, and Guruji, of course, came of your own choice to Earth, and to read this book, out of compassion – being enlightened, you didn't have to come.

ACTUALLY I AM HERE AND EVERYWHERE AS IT'S PART OF THE JOB. I CAN'T SPEAK FOR OTHER PEOPLE'S MOTIVATIONS THOUGH.

Right. Anyway, for the rest of us poor mortals – better luck next time!

The closing of the wombs' doors

The *Bardo Thodal* assures us that even now, poised on the brink, one has options; rebirth is now very likely but efforts to transcend are not misplaced even now. The gurus say that although destiny is already written, our present efforts, our *purushartha*, writes the future destiny. Even if one is not able to recognize the shining lights as the Compassionate One, there are still five methods of closing the womb-door.[27]

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[26] *ibid*., pp. 173–174

[27] *ibid*., pp. 176 ff.

1. We are told this is a time when earnestness and pure love are necessary. One must abandon jealousy and meditate upon the guru Father/Mother.
2. We are warned that at this time one sees visions of males and females in union. When one sees them, one has to remember to withhold oneself from going between them. One should regard the (potential) father and mother as the Guru and the Divine Mother, one should meditate upon them, or upon the divine guru Father/Mother.
3. The third method of closing the door to the womb, and rebirth, is that we have to overcome attraction and repulsion. When the visions come, if one is to be born as a male one feels attraction to the mother and jealousy towards the father, and vice versa.

Now here again the *Bardo Thodal* warns, just like the *Brihad-aranyaka Upanishad* did, that if one doesn't overcome this, one can be born as an insect or mammal or as a being in Hell. Both the editor and translator, however, feel this is just esoteric talk indicating that one will be overcome by various animal propensities in one's next birth. They do not subscribe to the idea of humans back-sliding to such an extent, but there is a feeling of intensity and even urgency to these teachings.

This sense of impending great danger and calamity leads to an impassioned awareness of the great need of a guru for those wondering in the samsara. It is the guru who can make us aware of, and help free us from those great precipices of lust, jealousy, hatred etc., that were referred to earlier. Part 5: Meditations Under the Guidance of Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati gives yo a chance to start this work – today if you wish. You can do a meditation each day as you continue reading this book. The *Bardo Thodal* says this realization comes in the after-death states. But why wait? We can realize this now, admit it while we're alive, meditate and make the resolve as follows:

'Alas! What a being of evil karma am I! That I have wandered in the Samsara before was due to attraction and repulsion. If I still go on feeling endless attraction and repulsion, then I shall wander in endless Samsara and suffer in the Ocean of Misery for a long, long time, by sinking therein. Now I must not act through attraction and repulsion. Alas, for me! Henceforth I will never act through attraction and repulsion.[28]

4. The fourth method of closing the door to the womb seems to be overcoming ignorance of the nature of reality – the same ability that would have allowed one to identify with the Clear Light or with the deities of the previous bardos, had it awakened previously.

   O, the pair, the father and the mother, the black rain, the storm-blasts, the clashing sounds, the terrifying apparitions, and all the phenomena, are, in their true nature, illusions. Howsoever they may appear, no truth is there (in them); all substances are unreal and false. They are like dreams and apparitions; they are non-permanent; they have no fixity. What advantage is there to being attached (to them)! What advantage is there in having fear and terror of them! It is the seeing of the non-existent as the existent. All these are hallucinations of one's own mind. The illusory mind itself does not exist from eternity; wherefore where should these external (phenomena) exist?

   I, by not understanding these (things) in that way until now, have held the non-existent to be the existent, the unreal to be the real, the illusory to be the actual, and have wandered in Samsara so long. And even now, if I do not recognize them to be illusions, then, wandering in the Samsara for long ages, (I shall be) certain to fall into the morass of various miseries . . .

[28] *ibid*., pp. 179–180

> By holding one-pointedly to that train of thought . . . if the knowledge of the unreality be impressed deeply in that way, the womb-door will be closed.[29]

The bardo of this life is crucial

Well, non-existent reader after all – we are right now in a bardo; the bardo we call life, and that the *Bardo Thodal* calls dream. It is an illusion. We better be aware of that, we better become the *drashta*, the impartial, unmoved observer of all these projections of the mind and samskaras that we are experiencing as part of a *lila*, a divine play. Then we can enjoy the play and enjoy walking out of it.

Still, whether we are dead or alive, or dreaming, apparently there is another way to close the door to samsara. It completes the cycle, being the thing we should have done in the first place.

5. One can still close the womb-door by meditating upon the Clear Light. The meditation is performed as follows:

   > Lo! All substances are my own mind (consciousness) and this mind (consciousness) is vacuous, is unborn and unceasing.[30]

One might wonder why this method is given here – surely if one was unable to recognize the Clear Light when one was 'newly dead' it would be even harder now? The reason given is that by now one would be really terrified and desperate, and those states of mind really help one to be one-pointed, so one might be able to really grasp one's true situation and what is at stake.

TRUE.

Mmm. So there's always hope. Even right now, if we close this book and sit down in a sufficiently one-pointed and extremely motivated way, we can find the Clear Light within.

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[29] *ibid*., p. 181

[30] *ibid*., p. 182

YOU THINK SO? WELL, LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING FROM MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE. VERY FEW SEARCH WITHIN FOR THE CLEAR LIGHT WHILE THE MOVIE IS RUNNING – AFTER ALL, THEY'VE COME TO SEE THE MOVIE. IT'S ONLY WHEN THE MOVIE STOPS AND THEY COME FACE TO FACE WITH ME, AND THEY HAVE TO SEE THEMSELVES, THAT THEY WANT TO SEE A CLEAR LIGHT WITHIN.

Mmm.

STILL, TELL ME, WHAT ARE THE BITS OF THIS ANCIENT WISDOM FROM THE MOUNTAINS OF TIBET THAT YOU FIND MOST INSPIRING AND MOST HELPFUL?

How about this?

> For what happens at the moment of death is that the ordinary mind and its delusions die, and in that gap the boundless sky-like nature of mind is uncovered . . . the background to the whole of life and death . . . The teachings make it clear that if all we know of the mind is the aspect of the mind that dissolves when we die, we will be left with no idea of what continues, no knowledge of the new dimension of the deeper reality of the nature of the mind. So it is vital for us to familiarize ourselves with the nature of the mind while we are still alive.[31]

YES, BUT HOW CAN PEOPLE FAMILIARIZE THEMSELVES WITH THE MIND?

We have to meditate regularly, in a simple, disciplined, methodical way. Just like we review the day each evening, we can meditate on improving our inner life. With the focus on love and spiritual knowledge of course, not, you know, on how popular or powerful or rich we've become. Listen – the whole point of life is so simply put here:

> Through weathering changes, we can learn how to develop a gentle but unshakable composure. Our confidence in ourselves grows, and becomes so much

[31] Sogyal Rimpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Rupa & Co, New Delhi, India, 1996, p. 12

> greater that goodness and compassion begin naturally to radiate out from us and bring joy to others. That goodness is what survives death, a fundamental goodness that is within every one of us. The whole of our life is a teaching of how to uncover that strong goodness, and a training towards realizing it.[32]

YES, SO SIMPLE – SO HOW COME PEOPLE WASTE THEIR LIVES AND ARE SO SCARED OF ME? HUH?

Well, because we have such little understanding of who or what we are. We want to stay in the ego-egg, we want to stay in the seed form. We don't want to die to our own selfishness and live on a level of universal love. Without continual meditation to illuminate the inner life, that's like jumping into blinding darkness. Look, this describes the interconnected, non-little-self-centred-perspective we've got to develop.



> Think of a wave in the sea. Seen in one way, it seems to have a separate identity, an end and a beginning, a birth and a death. Seen in another way, the wave itself doesn't really exist but is just the behavior of water 'empty' of any separate identity but 'full' of water. So when you really think about the wave, you come to realize that it is something made temporarily possible by wind and water and is dependent on a set of constantly changing circumstances. You also realize that every wave is related to every other wave.[33]

YES, THAT'S IT, THAT'S THE TRUTH – AND THEN PEOPLE DON'T HAVE TO BE SO FRIGHTENED EVERY TIME I COME INTO THE PICTURE. HAPPINESS OR SUFFERING – ALL THE WAY THROUGH – IT'S UP TO YOU PEOPLE.

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[32] *ibid*., p. 36

[33] *ibid*., p. 37

4

The *Bhagavad Gita*: The Battlefield and After

For an inspirational view of life, death and evolution, and a healthy robust attitude to death, the *Bhagavad Gita* seems the clearest of the scriptures of India. It does not offer the details of necessary rites, like the *Garuda Purana* does. It doesn't offer detailed knowledge of the experiences after death as some of the Upanishads do. It does, however, offer courage in the face of death that is based on a broad perspective of what life is all about. Also it claims to record the words of Lord Krishna, a full-fledged avatara, and therefore one quite aware and conscious during the whole cycle of birth and death, and also one who underwent the transmigratory experience of incarnating on Earth voluntarily, rather than kicking and screaming all the way, as we usually do.

The attitude of 'old souls' who remember the process of transmigration is quite detached from the physical body. They are conscious of many of the usually unconscious experiences that we go through in the womb and during early development as a baby. Paramahamsa Yogananda,[1] for example, was able to describe the processes that enable a human baby to start speaking the mother tongue. The attitude and insights given by an avatara are quite detached

[1] Paramahamsa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Yogada Satsang Society of India, Kolkata, West Bengal, India, 2001

from any single life. They speak of how and why the births are linked, they remind us of the purpose of life and death.

Remembering past lives

One of the strongest statements on death in the *Bhagavad Gita* comes quite early when Krishna tells Arjuna (4:5–11):

> Many births of mine have passed, as well as of yours, O Arjuna; I know them all but you do not, O Parantapa (Scorcher of foes).
>
> Though I am unborn, of imperishable nature, and though I am the Lord of all beings, yet, governing my own nature, I am born by my own maya.
>
> Whenever there is a decline in righteousness, O Arjuna, and a rise of unrighteousness, then I manifest Myself.
>
> For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I am born in every age.
>
> He who knows this in their true light (my divine birth and action) having abandoned the body, is not born again, he comes to me, O Arjuna.
>
> Freed from attachment, fear and anger, absorbed in Me, purified by the fire of knowledge, many have attained to My being.
>
> In whatever way men approach Me, even so do I reward them: my path do men tread in all ways, O Arjuna.[2]

The deity that one is attracted to and identifies with is the one who will appear as the guide at death and in the after-death states. This emphasizes emotional and natural inclination rather than intellect. It suggests that the disposition of the heart, or the *swabhava*, is the key factor not only in life but in death, and in the other bardos.

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[2] Swami Sivananda, *The Bhagavad Gita*, The Divine Life Society, Tehri-Garhwal, Uttar Pradesh, Himalaya, India, 19th ed., 1995

Use this life wisely

The *Bhagavad Gita's* next reference accords with the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* in emphasizing the need for non-attachment and discrimination: the need for knowing one's true self. It points to the necessity of having established in oneself, during life, the qualities which render one free from the bonds of karma. Such qualities all hinge on awareness, discrimination and non-attachment which are the same qualities needed for proper self-management in any circumstances. They lead to a sacrifice of ego where the desires of the little-I are burned in the fire of the Cosmic Consciousness (4:19–24):

> He whose undertakings are all devoid of desire and (selfish) purposes and whose actions have been burnt by the fire of knowledge – him the wise call a sage.
>
> Having abandoned attachment to the fruits of action, ever content, depending on nothing, he does not do anything though engaged in activity.
>
> Without hope and with the mind and the self-controlled, having abandoned all covetousness, doing mere bodily action, he incurs no sin.
>
> Content with what comes to him without effort, free from the pairs of opposites and envy, even-minded in success and failure, though acting he is not bound.
>
> To one who is devoid of attachment, who is liberated, whose mind is established in knowledge, who works for the sake of sacrifice (for the sake of God), the whole action is dissolved.
>
> Brahman is the oblation; Brahman is the ghee; by Brahman is the oblation poured into the fire of Brahman; Brahman verily shall be reached by him who always sees Brahman in action.

The next chapter continues with these themes and also gives a brief, succinct outline of the pranayama and meditation practice that one should engage in to achieve the required stability and control of one's personality. Life is clearly seen

as the battlefield where one must engage in sadhana to overcome the inner enemies responsible for dragging us into battle, and the yoga of meditation is the means for success (5:23–29):

> He who is able, while still here (in this world) to withstand, before the liberation from the body, the impulse born out of desire and anger – he is a Yogi, he is a happy man.
>
> He who is happy within, who rejoices within, and who is illuminated within, that Yogi obtains absolute freedom or Moksha, himself becoming Brahman.
>
> The sages (rishis) obtain absolute freedom or Moksha – they whose sins have been destroyed, whose dualities (perception of dualities or experiences of the pairs of opposites) are torn asunder, who are self-controlled, and intent on the welfare of all beings.
>
> Absolute freedom (or Brahmic bliss) exists on all sides for those self-controlled ascetics who are free from desire and anger, who have controlled their thoughts and who have realized the Self.
>
> Shutting out (all) external contacts and fixing the gaze between the eyebrows, equalizing the outgoing and incoming breaths moving within the nostrils.
>
> With the senses, mind and intellect (ever) controlled, having Moksha as his supreme aim, free from desire, fear and anger – the sage is truly liberated for ever.
>
> He who knows Me as the enjoyer of sacrifices and austerities, the great Lord of all the worlds and the friend of all beings, attains to peace.

Responsibility

So this is the good news, but can we all be sure to carry our inspiration for sadhana, right living and the spirit of self-sacrifice to the grave or the cremation ground? Arjuna asks about people who start out with high ideals and enthusiasm but fall from the path. It's a very relevant question and one

many people ask with fear and despair as the moment of death approaches. Krishna replies (6:41–45):

> O Arjuna, neither in this nor in the next world is there destruction for him; truly one who does good, O my son, never comes to grief.
>
> Having attained to the worlds of the righteous and having dwelt there for everlasting years, he who fell from yoga is reborn in the house of the pure and wealthy.
>
> Or he is even born in the family of wise yogis, truly a birth like this is very difficult to attain in this world.
>
> But the yogi who strives with assiduity, purified of sins and perfected gradually through many births, reaches the highest goal.

In the context of this book we can say the rare people of steady wisdom, the *stithaprajna* of the *Bhagavad Gita*, or Nachiketa in the *Kenopanishad*, desire nothing from this world and recognize the Clear Light straight away. Those people who have achieved competence in yoga or other spiritual disciplines, who have attained pratyahara, dharana and dhyana and have been attempting to follow the spiritual path are equipped to recognize the Peaceful Deities. What of the rest? The *Bardo Thodal* says:

> . . . to the abbots (or discipline-holders), to the doctors, and to the mystics who have failed in their vows, and to all the common people, this *Thodal* is indispensable. But those who have meditated upon the Great Perfection and the Great Symbol will recognize the Clear Light at the moment of death; and, obtaining the Dharma-Kaya, all of them will be such as to not need the teaching of this *Thodal*. By recognizing the Clear Light at the moment of death, they will also recognize the visions of the Peaceful and the Wrathful during the *Chonyid Bardo*, and obtain the *Sambhoga-Kaaya*; or recognizing during the *Sidpa Bardo*, obtain the *Nirmana-Kaaya*; and taking birth on

> the higher planes will, in the next rebirth, meet with the doctrine and then enjoy the continuity of karma.[3]

This instruction tallies well with the *Bhagavad Gita's* attitude to the *yogabrashta* – those who strived for the Supreme through yoga yet fell short of their aims in this life. Both scriptures agree that even if one fails to break free in this life, one's positive efforts are not wasted. Boons such as being born into spiritual families and being able to take up one's sadhana from where one left it, are the natural karma which follows from birth to birth, even if one is not as yet able to perfect one's practice. Swami Sivananda comments:

> The man who fell from Yoga is carried to the goal which he intended to reach in his previous birth, by the force of the Samskaras of the practice of Yoga though he may not be conscious of them and even if he may not be willing to adopt the course of Yogic discipline on account of the force of some evil Karma. If he had not done any great evil action which could overwhelm his Yogic tendencies he will certainly continue his Yogic practices in this birth very vigorously through the force of the Yogic samskaras created in his previous birth. If the force of the evil action is stronger, the Yogic tendencies will be overpowered or suppressed for some time. As

[3] *op cit*., W.Y. Evans-Wentz ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*, pp. 135–136 (footnote) "If there be recognition of Reality when it first dawns, i.e., if the Dreamer in samsaric existence be awakened into the divine state of the Sambhoga-Kaaya during the Chonyid Bardo, the normal cycle of rebirth is broken; and the Awakened One returns voluntarily and fully conscious to the human world as a Divine Incarnation to work for the uplifting of mankind. If recognition be delayed till the Sidpa Bardo, and the Nirmana-Kaaya be attained, that is but a partial awakening, not an unclouded realization of Reality, the Sidpa Bardo being a much lower plane than the Chonyid Bardo; but even then there will be won the great boon of spiritually enlightened birth on one of the higher planes – deva-loka, asura-loka or the human-loka – and upon being born anew in the human world, the devotee will take up, in virtue of acquired propensities gained in the previous earth-life, the study of the mystic mantrayaana doctrines and yogic practices from the point where it was broken off by death – this being the continuity of karma."

> soon as the fruits of the evil action are exhausted, the force of the Yogic Samskaras will begin to manifest itself. He will start his Yogic practices vigorously and attain the final beatitude of life.[4]

Arjuna is about to engage in battle with his relatives, and he loves them despite their wrong actions. They all grew up together. He had known them as children when they were inspired by the same heroes and events, but then his cousins mysteriously turned away on other agendas, becoming his enemies. It was them he was about to kill in a 'righteous' war – not a lot of saints who were going to attain moksha or some heavenly abode. Maybe, as children, they had sneaked a look in the *Garuda Purana* and the images of people being roasted alive with the skin stripped from their bodies lurks in his subconscious. He doesn't want these people that he still loves to go through hells and torments. It is his agony on their behalf that has honed his desire to know the truth of life and death to incandescence.

Arjuna again and again voices his doubts. Krishna assures him that one gets one's just reward, or we can say, the state which actually suits one. Swami Sivananda explains that *avidya, kama* and *karma*, ignorance, desire and one's actions, tie one to this world of samsara. When, through ignorance, one acts to attain one's own selfish desires one becomes enmeshed in the perception of duality. Love and hate, *raga* and *dwesha*, attraction to pleasure and the attempt to avoid suffering, make one struggle in the net and get caught by the gills.

Inevitability

Lord Krishna refers to the course of evolution being irresistible: that finally all will learn enough for moksha, and until then people wander here and there learning from various sources (7:19–21 and 7:26–30):

[4] *op cit*., Swami Sivananda, *The Bhagavad Gita*, p. 153

At the end of many births the wise man comes to Me, realizing that all this is Vasudeva (the innermost Self); such a great soul (Mahatma) is very hard to find.

Those whose wisdom has been rent away by this or that desire, go to other gods, following this or that rite, led by their own nature.

Whatever form any devotee desires to worship with faith – that (same) faith of his I make firm and unflinching.

I know, O Arjuna, the beings of the past, the present and the future, but no one knows Me.

By the delusion of the pairs of opposites, arising from desire and aversion, O Bharata, all things are subject to delusion at birth, O Parantapa.

But those men of virtuous deeds whose sins have come to an end, and who are freed from the delusion of the pairs of opposites, worship Me, steadfast in their vows.

Those who strive for liberation from old age and death, taking refuge in Me, realize in full that Brahman, the whole knowledge of the Self and all action.

Those who know me with the Adhibhuta (pertaining to the elements), Adhidaiva (pertaining to the gods) and the Adhiyajna (pertaining to the sacrifice) know Me even at the time of death, steadfast in mind.

Death and samadhi

From a yogic point of view, the references made in the *Bardo Thodal* to a 'swooning' between different states of consciousness are also very interesting. Swami Satyananda explains that the difference between samprajnata samadhi and asamprajnati samadhi is that in asamprajnata samadhi there is no awareness in the sense of willpower. One cannot stay in that state of consciousness through any act of will, it is simply a matter of samskara or *swabhava*, one's basic constituency, which determines whether one stays in that state or not.

In both asamprajnata samadhi and death, it seems it is the force of the samskaras which is the real force – they are the ball bearings in the machine of karma. And this explains why gurus insist that people have the right samskaras before being eligible for certain practices. It is not simply a matter of intelligence, effort or even sincerity; it is about basic tendencies, *swabhava*, our natural state, our default programming.

The last thought and one's basic nature

All this shows that there is no short-cut. To be able to successfully maintain awareness at the transition moments of death, a life dedicated to deeply imbibing and expressing the awareness and compassion that comes from atmabhava, is necessary. The importance of the thought at the time of death was highlighted in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and is emphasized in the *Bhagavad Gita* too (8:5–7):

> And whoever, leaving the body, goes forth remembering Me alone, at the time of death he attains My being, there is no doubt about this.
>
> Whosoever at the end leaves the body thinking of any being, to that being only does he go, O son of Kunti, because of his constant thought of that being.
>
> Therefore, at all times remember Me only and fight. With mind and intellect fixed in Me, you will doubtless come to Me alone.

This belief in the power of the last thought is widespread. In Shakespeare's time it must have been part of the European culture for his hero, the prince of Denmark, Hamlet, refuses to kill his evil relative during his prayers as that would ensure his passage to heaven. Hamlet was about to slay the man who killed his father and married his mother in order to become king; but finds him when he is praying. Hamlet says to himself:

> A villain kills my father, and for that, I, his sole son, do this same villain send to heaven? . . . And am I then

revenged to take him in the purging of his soul, when he is fit and seasoned for the passage?

No.

Up, sword, and know a more horrid hent when he is drunk asleep, or in his rage, or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed, gaming, swearing, or about some act that has no relish of salvation in it – then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven, and that his soul be damned and black as hell, whereto it goes.[5]

This refers to the 'circumstantial' last thoughts – the circumstances a person is in when they meet death suddenly leaving an imprint on the death. For most people who die more 'naturally' – from illness or extreme age, the last thought is more likely to reflect their basic nature. The significance of the last thought is explained clearly by Swami Sivananda:

> Faith is born of the individual nature, i.e. the Samskaras or latent impressions of virtuous and vicious actions which were performed in the past births and which manifested themselves at the time of death. In the subconscious mind or the Chitta there is a reservoir of past impressions which are revived through the operation of memory.[6]

Meditation practice for the moments of death

A related meditation practice, specifically for the time of death, is given in the *Bhagavad Gita*, and here the mantra *Aum* is spoken of as the mantra which will take one across the bardos safely (8: 8–16):

> With the mind not moving towards any other thing, made steadfast by the method of habitual meditation,

[5] Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*, ed by T J B Spencer, Penguin Books, England, 1980, III: 3, p. 145

[6] *op cit*., Swami Sivananda, *The Bhagavad Gita*, p. 435

and constantly meditating, one goes to the resplendent Supreme Purusha, O Partha.

Whosoever meditates on the Omniscient, the Ancient, the Ruler, minuter than an atom, the supporter of all, of inconceivable form, effulgent like the sun and beyond the darkness of ignorance.

At the time of death, with unshaken mind, endowed with devotion, by the power of yoga, fixing the whole life-breath in the middle of the two eyebrows, he reaches that resplendent Supreme Purusha.

That which is called imperishable by those who know the Vedas, that which the self-controlled and passion-free enter, that, desiring which celibacy is practised – that goal will I briefly describe to you.

Having closed all the gates, confined the mind in the heart, and fixed the life-breath in the head, engaged in the practice of concentration

Uttering the one-syllabled *Aum* – the Brahman – and remembering Me, he who departs, leaving the body, attains to the Supreme goal.

I am easily attainable by that ever-steadfast yogi who constantly and daily remembers Me, not thinking of anything else, O Partha.

Having attained Me these great souls do not again take birth (here) which is the place of pain and is non-eternal, they have reached the highest perfection.

All the worlds, including the world of Brahma are subject to return again. O Arjuna. But he who reaches Me, O son of Kunti, has no rebirth.

An interesting point to note: the avatara, Lord Krishna is here speaking about himself as the Nirguna Brahman – asserting that absorption in him gives complete freedom from rebirth not just the relative immortality offered by the great gods such as the creator, Brahma.

Open new dimensions

Chapter 8 of the *Gita* continues to speak about death and rebirth, and mentions the state of most people as they approach birth. This gives an interesting perspective. We are used to an attitude of dread towards death, and people speak of being driven along helplessly towards their death. However, Sri Krishna speaks of people being swept along towards birth – and in terms very similar to those used by the Tibetans when speaking of the Sidpa Bardo – as being quite helpless before the current of karma. He also makes the point that some, those devoted to the Supreme, are free from that – and need not return (8:19–22):

> This same multitude of beings, being born again and again, is dissolved helplessly, O Arjuna, (into the unmanifest) at the coming of night and comes forth at the coming of the day.
>
> But truly, there exists, higher than this unmanifest, another unmanifest Eternal, which is not destroyed when all things are destroyed.
>
> That called the unmanifest and the imperishable; that they say is the highest goal. Those who reach it do not return (to samsara). That is My highest abode/state.
>
> That highest Purusha, O Arjuna, is attainable by unswerving devotion to Him alone within whom all beings dwell and by whom all this is pervaded.

The two paths

Then comes the famous references to the path of light and the path of smoke which are also discussed in the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* of Sri Adi Shankaracharya and in the Upanishads. The *Bhagavad Gita* says (8:23–28):

> Now I will tell you, O Chief of the Bharatas, the times, departing at which, the yogis will return or not return.
>
> Fire, light, day time, the bright fortnight, the six months of the northern path of the sun (the northern

solstice) – departing then, men who know Brahman go to Brahman.

Attaining to the lunar light by smoke, night time, the dark fortnight also, the six months of the southern path of the sun (the southern solstice), the yogi returns.

The bright and the dark paths of the world are truly thought to be eternal; by the one a man goes not to return and by the other he returns.

Knowing these paths, O Arjuna, no yogi is deluded; therefore at all times be steadfast in yoga.

Whatever fruit of merit is declared to accrue from the Vedas, sacrifices, austerities and gifts – beyond all this goes the yogi, having known this; and he attains to the supreme original abode.

The idea that if one dies during the six months while the sun is moving northwards, one will not be reborn, and that one will be reborn if one dies during the other six months, is a literal understanding of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

One major premise of Vedanta is that one can attain moksha by jnana: ultimate freedom from the cycle of birth and death is won by those with real Knowledge. In one debate in the Adi Shankaracharya's commentary on the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, however, the opponent says this cannot be absolutely true because even an enlightened person – one with true knowledge – will have to come back to samsara if death occurs during the wrong time of year, fortnight, or even day, according to the above verses of the *Bhagavad Gita*. In answer, the Adi Shankaracharya mentions that the belief that the path of the sun at the time of death is the guiding factor of where one ends up is just a conventional belief. His commentary on the *Brahma Sutras* raises an interesting point here about what we should understand to be symbolic teachings, and what we should take as being literally true.

The path of the gods, known as the *Uttara Marga*, the higher path, and as the Path of Light is from mid-January to

mid-July. The southern solstice, also known as the *Dakshina Marga* and as the Path of Smoke or Darkness, and the path of the ancestors, is open during the other half of the year. It's fairly obvious we're missing something here if we take this just at face value. To begin with, Swami Sivananda explains:

> Each step may mean a plane or a state of consciousness or the degree of purity or illumination. The more the purity the more the divine light. There are bright objects throughout the course of the path. There is illumination of knowledge when one passes along this path. Hence it is called the path of light . . . (whereas) the *Pitriyana* or the path of darkness or the path of the ancestors leads to rebirth. Those who do sacrifices to the gods and other charitable works with expectation of reward go to the Chandraloka through this path and come back to this world when the fruits of the karmas are exhausted.
>
> 'Smoke', 'night time', 'the dark fortnight' and 'the six months of the southern solstice' are all deities who preside over them. They may denote the degree of ignorance, attachment and passion. There are smoke and dark-coloured objects throughout the course. There is no illumination when one passes along this path. It is reached by ignorance. Hence it is called the path of darkness or smoke.[7]

The *Bhagavad Gita* continues in Chapter 9 to explain the real nature of this world but calls this secret knowledge because, even if you tell somebody, they will not be able to believe it or understand it until the necessary faculties of vairagya, viveka, intuition, *prajna*, and direct experience, *aparoksha*, give them the ability. Also, until employing self-restraint and righteous living is one's fundamental nature, one will not be able to employ this secret knowledge to escape from samsara. But then, until the ego is totally dissolved one doesn't want to – so that's alright.

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[7] *ibid*., Swami Sivananda, *The Bhagavad Gita*, pp. 196–197 Ch 8 v. 24–25

One part of the secret is that this world we are living in is no more real than the world after death, in that it is just another loka, bardo, dimension or state: just another projection of our own evolving consciousness.

Lokas

Along with the well-known references to the paths of light and darkness already mentioned, the *Bhagavad Gita* refers in passing to the paths to other *lokas* or dimensions. The vedic yajnas relate to these other dimensions, invoking divine powers to affect conditions in this world and other dimensions spoken of in the Upanishads. For example, in (9:19–21):

> (As the sun) I give heat; I withhold and send forth the rain, I am immortality and also death, existence and non-existence, O Arjuna.
>
> The knowers of the three Vedas, the drinkers of Soma, purified of all sins, worshipping Me by sacrifices, pray for the way to heaven; they reach the holy world of the Lord of the gods and enjoy in heaven the divine pleasures of the gods.
>
> They, having enjoyed the vast heaven, enter the world of mortals when their merit is exhausted; thus, abiding by the injunctions of the three Vedas, and desiring desires, they attain to the state of going and returning.

The long journey

For most of us the state of moksha and freedom from the transmigration process is very far off. As human beings we have the chance of journeying from life to life with some awareness, but this implies preparing for the journey during life itself. So what do we need to pack and what will we naturally take with us? Sri Krishna explains (15:7–11):

> An eternal portion of Myself having become a living soul in the world of life, draws to (itself) the (five) senses with the mind for the sixth, abiding in Nature.

When the Lord (as the individual soul) obtains a body and when He leaves it, He takes these and goes (with them) as the wind takes the scents from their seats (flowers, etc).

Presiding over the ear, the eye, touch, taste, smell, as well as mind, it enjoys the objects of the senses

The deluded do not see Him Who departs, stays and enjoys; but they who possess the eye of knowledge behold Him.

The Yogins striving (for perfection) behold Him dwelling in the Self; but, the unrefined and unintelligent, even though striving, see Him not.

We found this same insight or guideline echoed in the teachings about the Chonyid Bardo of the *Bardol Thodal*. There, the deceased are met by peaceful and wrathful deities who can conduct one to the safety of their (relatively) immortal realms. The people who have fallen this far are confronted by the projections of their own natures: on the first 'day' by their intense stupidity, on the second by violent anger, on the third by pride, arrogance and ego, on the fourth by evil karma identified with covetousness and miserliness and on the fifth the bad karma is jealousy.[8] Lust, hatred, stupidity, pride or egoism, and jealousy are identified as the internal enemies of a human being in esoteric traditions: because of them we want to enjoy the fruits of our actions, thus they bind us to the misery of mortal life again and again, and to a hellish existence between lives also.

The *Bhagavad Gita* says it is for this reason that one has to become the witness, the *sakshi*, not influenced by the scenes and actions we live through. Actually, the question is not what we can take with us, but how cleanly we can renounce – possessions, attachments, ego and the sense of importance, the 'doership' (18:11 and 12):

[8] *op cit*., W.Y. Evans-Wentz ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*, pp. 106–118

Verily, it is not possible for an embodied being to abandon actions entirely; but he who relinquishes the rewards of actions is verily a man of renunciation.

The threefold fruit of action (evil, good and mixed) accrues after death to the non-abandoners, but never to the abandoners.

Karma after death

The Tibetan teachings reveal that one who is totally one-pointed on reality is free from karma and will recognize the Clear Light as they die or immediately after during the *Chikhai Bardo*. Those with good or mixed good karma will remember the lessons of their guru and win a respite during the 49 'days' of the *Chonyid Bardo*. For those with doubtful mixed or bad karma, frightening things are experienced during the *Sidpa Bardo*, the intermediate state one experiences after death when it is sure rebirth is going to happen but the womb has not yet been 'chosen'.

The *Bhagavad Gita* sticks resolutely to the bright side: a person who has dedicated the fruits of action to God or guru, or who works selflessly for the good of others at all times, for example, is not bound by the sticky effects of his deeds and can achieve moksha or nirvana (18:50–57):

Learn from me in brief, O Arjuna, how he who has attained perfection reaches Brahman (the Eternal), that supreme state of knowledge.

Endowed with a pure intellect, controlling the self by firmness, relinquishing sound and other objects and abandoning attraction and hatred,

Dwelling in solitude, eating little, with speech, body and mind subdued, always engaged in meditation and concentration, resorting to dispassion,

Having abandoned egoism, strength, arrogance, desire, anger and covetousness, and free from the notion of 'mine' and peaceful – he is fit for becoming Brahman.

Becoming Brahman, serene in the Self, he neither grieves nor desires. Being the same to all beings, he obtains supreme devotion to Me.

By devotion He knows Me in truth, what and who I am; then having known Me in truth, he forthwith enters into the Supreme.

Doing all actions always having taken refuge in Me, by My grace he obtains the eternal indestructible state of being.

Mentally renouncing all actions in Me, having Me as the highest goal, resorting to the yoga of discrimination always fix your mind on Me.

The *Bhagavad Gita* gives the same advice for the living as the *Bardo Thodal* does for the dead. Recognize your enemies whether 'internal' or 'external' – and fight them. Remain steady throughout all your experiences, understanding that in the last resort they are interconnected illusions. Fix the mind on reality whichever bardo or loka you are in, and you will eventually be drawn to That.



5

Life and Death in the Upanishads

The Upanishads are part of the Vedas containing spiritual discussions between gurus and their disciples recorded over millenia. Some are thought to be four or five thousand years old, others may be as recent as the 7th century CE. They deal with the nature of human beings and the universe, and treat this whole manifest universe as an inter-related whole. The Upanishads contain the central esoteric teachings of Vedanta, therefore it should come as no surprise that they address the question of death and evolution in depth. Nevertheless, this aspect of the teaching is not generally realized.

The teaching: Brahma *satya*, *jagat mithya*: that Brahman is the one constant Reality, and this life and indeed the world are just an illusion, is often presented as the major teaching. Here we look at other transitory states that we experience. In this chapter translations are given of parts of several Upanishads so that the multifaceted scrutiny of life and death and the Reality beyond these passing phases can be seen. Maybe we just don't like to look at death too closely? *Abhinivesha*, the fear of the unknown, and more particularly the fear of death, stops us from learning about death's pivotal role in our evolution.

In the Upanishads, the disciples and their gurus are looking closely at matters that we normally don't realize are open to question. They question the basic structure of

reality, of their own existence, of the interconnectedness of things. Like children, they are amazed at everything. Each Upanishad has an independent story. Sometimes they back each other up closely, sometimes their insights stand alone, sometimes we see them echoed in other traditions.

We have already seen parts of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* in Chapter 2. The *Kathopanishad* and the *Chandogya Upanishad* are also amongst the most ancient and respected Upanishads. They will be seen in Chapter 11 on Panchagni sadhana for they deal with the ways to transcend death through intense tapasya. The Upanishads have an interesting perspective on death. Rather than voicing the typical desire to cling onto one's personality and be born again and again, the aim of Upanshadic teachings is to break free altogether from bondage to the *samsara chakra*, the cycle of life and death. The vedic teaching aims to free one from being restricted to an unrealistic, limited individuality that feels isolated from the universe and from the process of evolution.

AITAREYA UPANISHAD

To give a glimpse of the beauty and breadth of the vedic understanding of the role of life and death in our evolution, we begin with a short section from the ancient *Aitareya Upanishad*, which speaks on the topic in a humble and down to earth manner (Section 2, Part 1:1–4):

> In man, the soul enters in the form of seed. In this seed is the essence assembled from all the limbs. Man retains this essence of his self within his body. When he sheds the seed in woman he generates it, and this is his first birth.
>
> The seed changes and becomes like her own limb and therefore it does not hurt her. She protects this self – given to her by him.

She, as its protector, has to be protected. The mother bears the child in her womb and the father takes care of the child before and after its birth as his own self, so that this world of progeny can go on without stopping. This birth of a soul is its second birth.

The son, who is the very self of his father, is posted in his place to continue his holy deeds. Then the other self (the father), having fully completed his duties and become old, departs from the world and is born again. This is his third birth.[1]

The answer to that profound often unconscious and sometimes despairing question, 'What are we doing here?' is answered so naturally – we're here to do our duty.

PRASHNOPANISHAD

The *Prashnopanishad* deals with the same topic and is especially accessible as it tells of six disciples of the guru Pippalada. After they have lived and worked in his ashram for some time, and have acquired enough perceptiveness to ask useful questions and to understand the answers, they are allowed to ask him questions. The first three questions are concerned with lower knowledge, *apara vidya*, but the third question ends with information on death, which is regarded as *para vidya*, higher or transcendental knowledge. The fourth question relates to different states of consciousness. The fifth explains the power of the mantra *Aum* and is also relevant to this study of death. The sixth answer distinguishes between the mortal and the immortal.

In answer to a question on death, the guru refers to the knowledge of nadis and pranic forces, which the disciple has already acquired, in order to explain why people have different, apparently fortunate or unfortunate births.

[1] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Nine Principal Upanishads*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2004, pp. 155–157

> The Self, Atman, abides within the heart; from here emerge 100 main nadis, each branches into 100 nadis and these branch into 72,000 minor nadis. In these nadis, vyana moves.
>
> Udana resides in the nadi passing through the centre of the spine. If udana is in the higher part due to virtuous deeds, a virtuous world will be attained after death; if in a lower part due to sinful works, a sinful world will be reached; and if there is a combination of both elements, the human world will be returned to.
>
> The sun is the external prana. When he rises, he gives grace (vision) to the prana of the eye. The deity of the earth draws apana to his downward duty. The ether is samana and air (wind) is vyana.
>
> Fire is known as udana, and he who extinguishes the fire or udana in the body attains or goes for rebirth with all the senses dissolved. (Question 3:6–9)[2]

The references here to the energy channels and centres that make up pranamaya and vijnanamaya koshas are present in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* also. The knowledge of how to control the pranas is highly prized and, if the person dying is not able to summon the necessary concentration and strength, then the people there to help in the process are advised to shift the body so that its position, *asana*, is conducive to the desired pranic flow. The correct pranic flow is important, because, in this early Upanishad also, we find reference to the belief that what a person thinks in the last moments of life has enormous significance – though here it is explained through its relationship with the energy, *prana*, rather than being explained psychologically as in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

> When a man dies, the thought held in the mind enters into prana. Prana and udana accompany the soul and take it to the desired world. (Question 3:10)[3]

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[2] *ibid*., pp. 20–21

[3] *ibid*., p. 22

The fourth question is on sleep and dreams – different states of consciousness we experience each day. Then Satyakama asks the fifth question of the *Prashnopanishad*, about the power of meditation on *Aum* in regard to death.

The power of *Aum*

The power of *Aum* chanting is particularly relevant to the study of death, and useful to people with little or no experience of yoga or related disciplines – chanting *Aum* is not a difficult practice though of course it may be done with different degrees of perfection.

> Then Satyakama asked: What world will a man attain who meditates on *Aum* throughout his life?
>
> Pippalada replied: O Satyakama, *Aum* is both the higher and the lower Brahman. He who meditates on *Aum* will surely attain one of them.
>
> He who meditates on *Aum* with but little understanding gains some enlightenment, and the Rik verses will bear him back quickly to be reborn on this earth. If he then observes austerity, celibacy and faith, he will certainly achieve spiritual greatness.
>
> And he who meditates on *Aum* with greater understanding gains greater illumination and after death is transported to the sky by the Yajus verses. He enjoys the magnificence of the lunar world before returning to this earth.
>
> But he who meditates on the supreme Purusha with the help of *Aum* is united with the life-giving sun. Just as a snake sheds its skin, so also will his sins fall from him, and the Sama hymns will transport him to the world of Brahma, and he will know Purusha abiding in all hearts. About that there are the following two verses:
>
> He who understands *Aum* in part, whose three sounds are the waking, dreaming and deep sleep states, remains

in the thrall of the rebirth cycle. He who realized *Aum* in its wholeness rises above these. (Question 5:1–6)[4]

Sukesha then asks his guru about the nature of Purusha. The whole of this sixth question relates to distinguishing between our mortal and immortal part. The word *Purusha* refers to the one who dwells in the city or the body, regarded as the dormant receptacle of consciousness.

Purusha pondered: What is that which, when it vanishes, I vanish also, and when it remains, I remain?

Then Purusha created prana; from prana he created desire; from desire – ether (space), air, fire, water, earth, the senses, mind and food; and from food, strength and penance, the scriptures, rites, the worlds and the names in the worlds.

As the rivers upon reaching the ocean flow into and become one with it, abandoning their name and form, similarly, the sixteen parts of the wise, who realize Purusha, merge in Him and lose their separateness. He then becomes free from the parts, *kalaas*, and immortal. There is the following verse about it.

May you know that Purusha, the end of all knowledge, in whom the parts radiate like spokes from a wheel-hub, and thereby achieve release from death. (Question 6: 3–6)



[4] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Nine Principal Upanishads*, pp. 28–30

KENOPANISHAD

The *Kenopanishad* opens with the questioning attitude where one suddenly turns round and begins wondering about the common miracles of life that have been taken completely for granted (Part 1:1 and 2):

> By whose will is the mind directed towards its goal? By whose order does prana proceed to perform its duty? By whose command does a person utter speech? Who directs the eyes and ears to their respective objects?
>
> It is the ear of the ear, the eye of the eye, the speech of the speech, the mind of the mind, and the life of the life. When the wise abandon 'I-ness' and rise above the life of the senses, they achieve immortality.[5]

The idea that this waking life is just a state of consciousness, as also is the dreaming state, the state of deep sleep, the samadhi state and the after-death state underlies the discussion. The Upanishads do not debate on whether there is 'life after death' or whether we are 'reborn'; they accept these states as part of a continuous experience that we need to learn how to manage. This is now backed up by research into near-death experiences and also by investigations into hundreds of children who claim to remember past lives, as we shall see when Professor Stevenson's research is examined in Chapter 9. It may also be backed up by your own experience. Many people have memories of other places, other people, other times that they are hesitant to acknowledge. The *Kenopanishad* continues (Part 2:4–5):

> Brahman is known really well when he is known in every state of consciousness, since by that knowledge one receives immortality. Through the Self one gains strength and through knowledge immortality.
>
> He who knows Brahman whilst on earth has achieved the sole object of life; they do not suffer great misfortune.

[5] *ibid*., Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Nine Principal Upanishads*, p. 38

> The wise, perceiving the oneness of all beings in Atman, rise above sensory phenomena and are immortal.[6]

We have been offered various passports: through the last thought, through prana management, through *Aum*, through recognizing oneself: the *Kenopanishad* offers a pure and simple passport to the highest levels of the immortal planes (Part 4:8–9):

> Austerity, self-restraint and performance of duty are the means to purify the heart; the Vedas and scriptures are the foundations of this knowledge, and truth is its essence.
>
> He who knows this, and being free from all sin remains steadfastly in the boundless and highest Brahman, is forever established in Him. He will be released from the cycle of rebirth and will not return to this world.[7]

Many of us are brought up to think that it would be good to be born again, so at first when we hear these compassionate assurances from the great scriptures of the world that we will be freed from this cycle, the implications don't really sink in. The real wisdom and compassion takes a while to slowly penetrate one's egoistic shell – as lives pass by. Nevertheless, though the advent of death is primarily seen as the entrance to Supreme Knowledge in Vedanta and in yoga, it is also the portal to other realms of existence.

Breaking the shell of the ego – the ahamkara – involves more than dissolving body consciousness; one must also become established in a state of expanded consciousness which transcends the limitations of our personality and present life role. It is more than just time, space and object that bind us here physically and psychically. Swami Satyananda says:

> Every human being is born with certain karma to fulfil, that is to say, one has come under deputation. Once

[6] *ibid*., p. 42

[7] *ibid*., p. 49

the period of deputation is completed the body ceases to function. Therefore, death is an exit, not an end . . . This life is nothing but the play of karma. One has sown what one is reaping, one is sowing what one shall reap. Life is continuous and eternal; death is only a full stop before the next sentence. The physical body does not represent the whole truth of creation. Besides the body there is buddhi, chitta, ahamkara and *atman*, the spirit, which represents the totality of truth and existence . . .

One has to go beyond attachment, ego and desire to enjoy immunity from sufferings. Death plays an indispensable role by helping one to transcend worldly attachments.

The individual soul could never grow without death. The evolutionary process is a very long one and requires various experiences of poverty and riches, purity and pollution, ignorance and education . . . in a single body it is not possible to assimilate all these. Therefore, by virtue of necessity one dies and is born again under different circumstances for a different set of experiences. In the post-mortem states the consciousness widens. The deeds of the past life have a reaction, and one learns many new lessons. Monkeys often devour food rapidly and then masticate at their leisure. Similarly, one masticates one's experiences in a higher and wider light which shines after death.[8]

The understanding that death marks the end of one training period has to permeate all the different stages of consciousness – just adhering to the knowledge at an intellectual level does not help us much when we actually come to die, and the whole mortal vehicle and personality begins to disintegrate. We should start swadhyaya now.

[8] Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga*, *Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, pp. 8–10

The word *swadhyaya* means self-study, the sort of looking into one's self that we call introversion, and also it means study of the scriptures or the teachings of the guru. We need to hear the bigger truth about ourselves from really mature human beings. Most of us are just children as far as having any kind of clue to what life and death is all about. If we have not had the good fortune to meet a living guru then we can read what they say and think about it. And we can read the scriptures of whatever society we have been born into as guidelines on how to live and die well.

MUNDAKOPANISHAD

The *Mundakopanishad* starts with the understanding of the whole universe being drawn from Brahman (Section 1, Part 1:7–8):

> As threads come from the spider and are withdrawn, as herbs from the earth and hair from the human body, likewise the entire universe springs from immortal Brahman.
>
> God willed that He should express Himself in joy in creation; He brought forth sustenance, from sustenance mind, from mind the five elements, from the five elements the worlds, and from the worlds karma and its fruits.[9]

Such an understanding gives a wide perspective on life and encourages a high standard of conduct for a human being who desires to advance in the evolutionary process. One must become the witness of one's little self, the lower mind, as the 'operating system' necessary for survival and learning on Earth. It is not something to be identified with; it is not the real self. If we have the desire to be reborn we are; if we really have had enough of this samsara we can be released. Freedom from desire, intense viveka and vairagya are the

[9] *op cit*., Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Nine Principal Upanishads*, p. 63

necessary assets for breaking free from the whole cycle. Is this understanding too good to be true? (Section 2, Part 1, 1–3 and 10):

> That is the truth. As a flaming fire sends forth a thousand sparks, similarly, O gentle youth, from immortal Brahman spring various jivas (souls) who return to Him once more.
>
> Ever radiant He is and formless, existing both within and without, unborn, beyond prana and mind, pure and supreme – the Imperishable One.
>
> From Him issue prana, mind, the senses, space, air, fire, water and earth, the supporter of the world.
>
> O Loved One, the entire universe is Purusha alone. All sacrificial works, austerity, Brahman and the greatest immortals issue from Him. He who knows Purusha, residing in the heart cave, must break the knot of ignorance whilst still in this life.[10]

And how to break that knot of ignorance and imbibe the wisdom of the identity of jivatman and Brahman? The *Aum* mantra is again given as the passport. (Section 2, Part 2:3–5):

> Take the great weapon of the Upanishads, the bow. Fix in the arrow sharpened by meditation. With the mind draw it and aim at Brahman, the immortal. O Beloved Youth, hit this target.
>
> *Aum* is the bow, the soul (Atman) is the arrow and the target is Brahman. He succeeds who possesses a one-pointed mind; the arrow becomes fixed in its mark; he is merged in Brahman.
>
> Know Him, the Unique One, the sustainer of space, earth, mind and the forces of life. Abandon all other beliefs. The bridge crossing the ocean of life and reaching immortality lies here.[11]

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[10] *ibid*., p. 73

[11] *ibid*., pp. 74–75



This refers to the bridge known to Hindus as the Vaitrani, to the Parsis as the Chinavat, and to Muslims as the Surat bridge. The image of a bridge leading to other dimensions is easy to grasp, completely understandable and very powerful. When Lord Rama instructs his army to build a bridge over the ocean (of samsara) to Sri Lanka so that he can rescue his beloved from Ravana, the demon king, (so the individual soul can reunite with the cosmic soul), his commander in chief says – You are the Bridge.

> *Sindhu bachana suni Raama sachiva bole prathu asakaheu*
> *Aba bilambu kehi kaama karahu utarai kataku*
> *Sunahu Bhaanukula ketu Jaamavantu kara jori kaha*
> *"Naatha naama tava setu nara chati bhavasaagara tarahi."* [12]

For the disciple, the guru is the bridge that can safely carry one across this ocean of existence – the ocean of samsara.

[12] Tulsidas, *Ramacharitamanasa*, Ch. 6: Lankakand

Untying the psychic knots

There are three major *granthis*, or psychic knots that tie us to particular planes of experience. Brahma granthi is based in mooladhara chakra, tying us to the material world and the *raga* and *dwesha*, attraction and repulsion, of the senses. Vishnu granthi is in the heart. Rudra granthi is at the level of ajna chakra, tying us to *ahamkara*, the limited ego. The *Mundakopanishad* says (Section 2, Part 2:8–11):

> The knot of the heart is released of he who is a realizer of the Self, the higher and lower Brahman; all doubts disappeared, all karmas vanished.
>
> Within the innermost sheath He resides, indivisible and without blemish, the Pure One and light of all that shines. So know the knowers of Brahman.
>
> There the light of the sun does not penetrate, not of the moon, of the stars, of lightning, and even less of fires kindled on earth. When He shines the whole universe is radiant with his reflected light.
>
> All, certainly is immortal Brahman. Above, below, before, behind and on every side: the entire universe is Brahman alone. It is the greatest.[13]

The reference to the knot of the heart refers to the breaking of Vishnu granthi, the psychic knot at anahata chakra that ties us to raga and dwesha in the realm of emotions and relationships. Breaking through these, one progresses to identification with the atma, the immortal self, seated in the heart. Atma is pure, everlasting, beyond dualities, yet only when the knot of the heart is released can one progress to that centre of existence.

Rudra granthi, relates to the ego, and destroying the Rudra granthi amounts to leaving this earthly existence, if not immediately, then very soon. The circle of life and death runs out like a potter's wheel with no one to spin it.

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[13] *op cit*., Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Nine Principal Upanishads*, pp. 76–77

Guru

The *sat guru* is one who has become free of that circle of karma and avidya and has become established in *sat*, the truth of reality; though, like an avatara, he or she has chosen to be born to establish righteousness and to help the good. (Section 3, Part 2:1 and 2, 8 and 9):

> The wise, free from worldly desires, should worship such a man, a knower of Brahman, the supporter of the whole universe and the all-radiant, for then they will transcend the cycle of rebirth.
>
> Those who are full of desires and dwell on them continually are born here and there so that these desires might be satisfied. Those realized ones, however, abandon all desires even in this life.
>
> As the rivers flow into and become one with the ocean, abandoning name and form, so also the wise, freed from name and form, merge with the highest Reality, the supreme Divinity.
>
> The knower of Brahman in Him is united; the knot of ignorance in the heart is released; he rises above sin and suffering, and is immortal. Into his family none ignorant of Brahman is born.[14]



[14] *ibid*., Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Nine Principal Upanishads*, pp. 82–85

SHVETASHVATAROPANISHAD

The *Shvetashvataropanishad* begins with a group of earnest seekers discussing the mysteries of life amongst themselves and resolving to find the answers through meditation (Chapter 1:1):

> Some aspirants of the Brahman, whilst discussing earnestly among themselves, raised doubts regarding the mystery of this creation. What is the reason for this creation? Why are living beings born? Why do they survive? Where is their abode? Under whose command do they live? Who controls their suffering and happiness? Are there any rules to abide by? Who knows the Brahman?[15]

They conclude the only way to end the journey of the travelling soul is to realize this Supreme Being or Supreme Consciousness (Chapter 1:6–8):

> In this wheel of the universe all things live and rest. The travelling soul moves around with revolving force, considering his (to be a) separate identity, but when he knows himself by harmony with the Supreme and is blessed by Him, he becomes immortal.
>
> This universe is clearly revealed by the Vedas as the Supreme Brahman, firmly upheld by the imperishable trio. Knowing this eternal existence, knowers of the Vedas absolutely surrender themselves to Brahman and become free from this cycle of birth and death.
>
> God upholds this universe which is a union of the perishable and the imperishable, the clear and the unclear. As long as the self does not know God, he is bound and takes great pleasure in worldly affairs, but when he is known by the self, then he is free from all bondage.[16]

[15] *ibid*., p. 163

[16] *ibid*., pp. 165–166

In this way we find that it is a union of knowledge, experience, and total identification with the Supreme, i.e. *jnana* and *bhakti*, that is the fuel for the flight beyond the pull of this world's gravitational field. Otherwise, due to one's desire for pleasure in worldly affairs, one keeps coming back again and again in the cycle of birth and death – though not to the same point in one's evolutionary cycle.

Meditation instructions

The first necessity is to be able to restrain the senses, then to follow the mind within: to become adept in *pratyahara*, to be able to look within. This gives great enthusiasm for the spiritual quest to improve one's own attitudes and behaviour in the day-to-day life, and to commune with the soul, the *atman*. The *Shvetashvataropanishad* contains meditation instructions (Chapter 2:1–3):

> Firstly, the mind and the senses are to be checked and controlled in order to realize the eternal truth, and when the light is discerned from the fire, the progressing soul is to be brought out of the earth.
>
> We must control our mind to visualize that self-luminous soul and shall try to attain the Supreme Bliss with full vigour.
>
> Keeping the extrovert tendency of the senses in order with the help of the mind and intellect, the soul within keeps them in the correct manner so as to see the self-luminous infinite light.[17]

Identify oneself as the *drashta*, the witness of internal and external states. It is important to note that this experience of the inner light of consciousness is common to the experiences in deep meditation, or samadhi, and the Clear Light experience after death. It is the lighthouse guiding one's progress during meditative and after-death experiences (Chapter 2:7):

[17] *ibid*., p. 170

After reaching that absolute state, the origin is demolished and no more anxiety is needed about the results of previous deeds.

Once the senses are curbed and the intellect is stilled, one is able to see through the mind more clearly, just as when floating particles and ripples settle, one can see clearly through water. If one's motivation is tuned to the Self, Brahman, then the practices continue taking one further inside and the light of consciousness becomes clearer and clearer. One is freed of karma from before and from that of present actions because the motivation is pure.

In that state, actions are done from the sincere deep desire to benefit everyone. Everyone is seen as a spark of light dancing in the fire of the sacrifice of life. The sticky attachment to one's own gain is not present in the lives of saints or sadhus intent only on self-realization. Continuing their austerities, they are not affected by disease, old age or death because instead of identification with the mortal body, they see the clear light of the soul (Chapter 2: 8–12):

By keeping the body in a steady and straight pose, while holding the chest, throat and head in line, and withdrawing the senses and mind within the heart, one who knows this will overcome all the terrible currents with the help of the boat of Brahman.

Keeping the senses under command with great strength and adjusting their performance in the body, one should exhale through both nostrils until the vital force becomes mild and subtle. Then one who knows this should hold the mind without hesitation, like reins fastened to restless horses.

One should practise one's exercises with full concentration in a cave or a similar pure clean place helpful for the purpose. It should be performed on level ground, having lovely and pleasing scenery and one should avoid windy, dusty, noisy, smoky and damp places.

While doing yoga practice, visions like snow, smoke, sun, wind, fire, lightning, crystal and moon are visualized, then be sure that the revelation of Brahman is at hand.

When the fivefold elements of yoga come to the notice of a yogi, while concentrating the mind on earth, water, light, air and ether, then his gross body becomes the body made from the fire of yoga, and he is not affected by disease, old age or death.[18]

Once again we see a reference to the importance of tattwa shuddhi as a means for transcendence, and see similarities with the teachings of the *Bardo Thodal*. Just as it is claimed to the teachings in the *Bardo Thodal* are based on teachings of those advanced souls who remember their after-death experiences, in the third chapter Sage Shvetashvatara himself steps forward speaking from his own experience (Chapter 3:8, 10, 13, 15, 18):

I (Sage Shvetashvatara) have realized this Supreme Brahman, who is radiant like the sun above all darkness. One can cross over death only after realizing Him, as there is no other way to avoid the circle of birth and death.

That Supreme Being is far more extensive than this world, without form and free from misery. Those who know this become immortal; others have to suffer the consequences.

Taking the limited shape of a thumb, on account of intellect, emotion, imagination and will, the Supreme Being rests in the heart of all living beings as their soul. Those who know this attain immortality.

This Supreme Being is nothing but is all that is, all that was and all that will be. Even though he leaves His true nature and assumes the shape of the objective universe, still He continues to be the Lord of immortality.

[18] *ibid*., pp. 172–174

That is He who lives in the body, in the city of nine gates. He is the soul (swan) who goes in the outside world for merrymaking. He is the sovereign of the world, animate and inanimate.[19]

The force of attraction

The *Shvetashvataropanishad* refers to the same mechanisms as the *Sidpa Bardo*, the Bardo of Becoming: according to our desire, and actions, we enter the womb that will nourish the next step of our evolution. The samskaras and karma of one life thus determine the next birth in the cycle of life and death for however long we identify with the fruits of our desires and actions (Chapter 5:7, 11–12):

Only he who is attracted towards things from which pleasure is obtained works to harvest the fruits of his deeds and enjoys the same. Even though he is master of the senses, yet he becomes limited by the three gunas, having several forms, and goes round the three paths as the consequence of his deeds.

Just as the gross body is nourished by ample food and water, so also the personal soul undertakes various forms in several places according to its deeds by means of desire, contact, sight and delusion.

This embodied Self selects gross, subtle and various forms, influenced by the qualities of the body, the mind and the senses, but the cause of this combination seems to be yet another.[20]

There is always the continuing debate about freewill and destiny when the intellect and ego seeks to understand forces far bigger than rationality. The Upanishads describe Brahman as aloof. The deeds of one birth lead to the vehicle and circumstances of the next, however, various possibilities have been provided: whether you perceive a fire as heat or

[19] *ibid*., pp. 180–183

[20] *ibid*., pp. 196–198

light is up to you. Whether you live and work to enjoy the fruits of your actions is also up to you. Surrendering the fruits of our actions transforms our actions into karma yoga, where we can act for the benefit of otherswithout producing further karma: we are not bound by the results.

NADABINDU UPANISHAD

The *Nadabindu Upanishad* has as its theme the secrets of meditation on *Aum* and how one wins salvation by renouncing the sense perceptions we gain through the indriyas and manas, and thus overcoming attachment to the world of sense objects.[21] It also states that *nirvisesha Brahman*, Brahman itself – without any special attributes, is attainable through nada yoga and describes practical techniques for qualified people, under the guidance of guru. The *Nadabindu Upanishad* assumes a level of proficiency before one acquires this secret knowledge: it is secret because it is not understandable until a certain state of evolution is attained.

The teachings of the *Shvetashvataropanishad* regarding the possibility of present enlightenment and future rebirth are addressed to those who have already got some proficiency in sense control and in witnessing and managing the mind. Such people, intent on Brahman, can go deeper into sadhana and be released from samsara. Here, in the *Nadabindu Upanishad*, we again have reference to one who has *atma jnana*, knowledge of the inner self of all, and so is living out this life simply as a witness – not involved and not attracting new karma. It is only when one reaches this stage of supreme detachment from worldly life, and is attracted only towards the clear light of the inner consciousness, that the mechanism behind karma in this life and future lives runs out of fuel (21–23):

[21] Paul Deussen, *Yoga Upanishads: Sixty Upanishads of the Vedas Vol 2* (Translated from German by V.M. Bedeliar), Motilal Banarsidas, Patna, Bihar, India, pp. 683–686

May your whole life be ever devoted always to the experience of the Bliss Supreme, O wise man, enjoying the fruits of your entire prarabdha (that segment of previous karma bearing fruit now) without complaining (about its effects).

This is because one's own body and other material things are unreal (i.e. illusory) like the contents of a dream to a person who has awakened out of it.

Since he (the tattwa jnani) has become freed of rebirths, that (part of his) karma accumulated through previous births (i.e. his prarabdha), in no way disturbs or affects him.

Aum

The *nadanusandhana sadhana*, the practice exploring the mantra *Aum*, can take one to the *Turiya-Turiya avastha*, or the superconscious state that transcends the need for rebirth, but this comes as the product of a long evolutionary process. If, honestly speaking, we know we are attached to life's pleasures and pains, and know that we want rebirth then that is what we will experience because it is exactly that attachment and attraction that fuels the karmic process.

The nada yoga sadhana takes one beyond the 'operating system' of the mind to the inner awareness, consciousness, or witness. The person merged in the *Aum* vibrations enters a dimension of consciousness beyond waking, dream, sleep, intuitive and wisdom states, where the sensory matrix of the manifest universe is revealed as transitory and illusory. Reality is described as 'radiant light' (46):



That sound which emerges from the Pranava, (*Aum*) i.e. which is the same as Brahman, is of the nature of radiant light.

That same Clear Light is described by the *Bardo Thodal*. The great scriptures agree the ultimate state cannot be described or comprehended by the mind, but the *Nadabindu Upanishad* stands on the shore and says (48–50):

> Beyond this exists the silent, soundless (ni-shabda) Parabrahman which is the Paramatma (i.e. the Supreme Self). Till there is sound, the mind also thrives, but when the sound stops, there arises the state of experience of unmani manas (i.e. 'no-mind' or 'thoughtless' or 'beyond the mind' state).
>
> Into the Akshara (imperishable) Brahman, this sound becomes merged and this silent state of soundlessness is the highest state.
>
> The bondages of karma in the yogi's mind are annihilated through sustained focused concentration on the nada. Then, the mind together with the prana vayu get themselves immersed in the blemishless Supreme One.



MANDUKYA UPANISHAD

So finally we come to the *Mandukya Upanishad*, a small Upanishad totally devoted to explaining the significance of the *pranava*, the first mantra: *Aum*. It is interesting that the Bible also says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God", because *Aum* is understood as the seed of the universe (like the Big Bang) and of human consciousness.

The *Aum* mantra is composed of three sounds, which represent the three states of consciousness we know (to some extent): waking, dream and deep sleep. These three states define our consciousness in this life for most of us, most of the time – although, by definition, our awareness of them is not usually complete, for they are called the conscious, subconscious and unconscious, *jagrat*, *swapna* and *sushupti* or *nidra*.

The total import of *Aum*, not broken into parts, refers to a superconscious state that we sometimes glimpse, which yogic techniques are designed to expand, and which survives death of the body and the persona constructed through the senses, memories, etc. As we will see in the works of Myers, Professor Stevenson and others, in Chapters 7 to 9, there is a lot of evidence continually emerging, concerning this whole other, fourth, state of consciousness. That state of consciousness transcends death, and also life.[22]

This topic is so important, and the *Mandukya Upanishad* is so concise, that we will see now the whole text – all 12 verses.

> The word *Aum* is the universe. Everything that exists in the past, present and future is *Aum*. And that which exists beyond the threefold division of time is *Aum*.
>
> And everything that is, is Brahman. The Self (Atman) is Brahman. The following are his four aspects.
>
> The first aspect is the waking state, the awareness of external things, the terrain of Vaishnavara. Seven limbs

[22] *op cit*., Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Nine Principal Upanishads*, pp 51–57

and nineteen mouths are possessed by him, and his enjoyment lies in the perceptible objects of the world.

The dreaming state is the second aspect, over which Tejas rules. Seven limbs and nineteen mouths belong to him, and the objects he enjoys are imperceptible.

The third aspect is deep dreamless sleep, lying beyond desire. Prajna is the Lord of this territory. He abides in deep sleep in which all things have vanished, and he enjoys bliss. Prajna lies at the gateway to the dreaming and waking states.

Prajna is the Lord supreme, the knower supreme, the authority supreme, the source supreme, the creator and the destroyer of all beings.

Turiya, Lord of the fourth aspect, according to the wise, remains unaware of the external, intermediate and internal worlds. He lies beyond both conscious and unconsciousness. He is indescribable, bearing no relation to anything where the senses or thoughts can reach, or penetrate. Turiya enjoys pure awareness and experiences peace, bliss and non-duality. He is none other than Atman. Realize him.

Aum is the sacred word of the Atman. The sounds of *Aum* are A, U, M and symbolize different aspects of Atman.

'A', the first sound, is the sound of the waking state, ruled by Vaishnavara. He who knows this truth has all desires fulfilled and is the first among men.

'U', is the second sound. It represents the state of dreaming, of which Tejas is the ruler. The knower of this truth becomes exceedingly wise and is held in reverence by all. None to whom Brahman is unknown will be born into his family.

'M', is the third sound. It symbolizes deep sleep, the enjoyer of which is Prajna. 'M' is both the measure and the end, therefore one who knows this truth measures everything by his knowledge, and becomes realized in Atman, the cause behind the universe.

> The fourth aspect is '*Aum*' itself, the sacred, indivisible word. *Aum* is the Atman, the transcendent, the beyond understanding, the cessation of all phenomena, the blissful, the non-dual. The knower of this highest truth is merged in Atman and attains the final goal, which is Brahman.[23]

Aum is the passport

The *Mandukya Upanishad* explains the mantra *Aum* as the passport to full knowledge and transcendence in life and states of consciousness beyond life. The *Prashnopanishad*, *Nadabindu Upanishad*, *Mundakopanishad*, the *Bhagavad Gita* do also. The practice of chanting the mantra *Aum* is explained as being so important because it establishes awareness of states of consciousness that we can explore and refine. In Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, the way to overcome obstacles is *Ishwara pranidhana*, surrender to That which is never destroyed, or God – and *Aum* is said to be not only the name of God but That itself (1:27):

> *Tasya vaachakah pranavah.*
> Aum is the word denoting God.[24]



This sutra states that *Aum* is not a man-made name; it is the vibration of the formless supreme consciousness in order to make it perceptible to humankind.

So we see that the Upanishads agree on the importance of the mantra *Aum* as embodying the whole range of states of consciousness open to us. And chanting *Aum* is such a simple sadhana – not difficult at all and if it has become familiar to us beforehand, it can accompany us, guiding us in the right direction as those last breaths cease.

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[23] *ibid*., pp. 51–57

[24] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Four Chapters on Freedom*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 1st ed. 1976

6

Other Scriptures

GARUDA PURANA

In the *Garuda Purana,* a complex scripture, with wide-ranging information on health, conduct and how to enhance life generally, one also finds information dealing with omens before death, and the experience after death. The experiences of the *pisacha* and *pitri*, spirits at different stages of development after death, and how rites and worship can be performed to help them, are described at length. Tradition names Rishi Vyasacharya as the author, and *rishis* or seers are those who have seen or experienced the subtle realities, and brought the knowledge back to this dimension, the *bhu loka* of our earthly existence.

In some respects, the text reflects a very practical psychological perspective on the journey of the soul after death. It has similar information to that found in the *Bardo Thodal*, and is read out to help the spirit of the deceased for some days after death. There are special priests trained to perform the associated rituals, and the eldest son has a significant role. In fact, one meaning of the word *putra*, or son, is the one who can save the spirit from the hells.

At first, one who has died generally wants to remain in the sphere of their past life associations, due to the habits and attachments built up during their life. At this stage the spirit is called a *pisacha*. During the 13-day program after death, the *karta* is the son, it is he who offers water,

sesame, balls of rice, *pinda*, along with ghee, yoghurt and honey every day. Cooling foods are offered because the pisacha has to go over a slender, scorching hot, bridge. On the thirteenth day, the soul needs to move on, and to journey to other dimensions. To aid this, the women of the household step into the forefront of the picture. The soul must be made to move, to leave this bhu loka – so the women prepare food poorly, with no salt and no taste. With their hair unbound, they throw the food unceremoniously at the altar. Well, what would one do if food was offered like that? One would leave!

Thus the soul is helped to develop *vairagya*, non-attachment to earthly things, and to move on. At this stage special offerings are made so that the necessary type of 'body' can be built up by the spirit, now called a *pitri*, as it travels onwards.

Women die but can they transcend?

The *Bardo Thodal* specifically caters for unlearned lay people and for those fallen from the path as well as the virtuous, however it is written for men, not women. But do not despair; the *Bhagavad Gita* is quite unusual in specifically stating that even women can attain immortality, the highest state. It's not exactly encouraging for that less educated sex, who obviously haven't written many scriptures, but still, better than nothing (9:29–33):

> I am the same to all beings; there is non hated or dear, but those who worship Me with devotion are in Me and I am also in them.
>
> Even if the most sinful worships Me with devotion to no one else, he too should indeed be regarded as righteous for he has rightly resolved.
>
> Soon he becomes righteous and attains eternal peace, O Arjuna, for sure, proclaim that My devotee never perishes.

For taking refuge in Me, they also who, O Arjuna, may be of a sinful birth – women, Vaishyas as well as Shudras – attain the Supreme Goal.

How much more (easily) then the holy Brahmins and devoted royal saints (attain the goal); having come to this impermanent and unhappy world.

WHY DO YOU ALWAYS WANT SOMETHING SAID PARTICULARLY FOR WOMEN?

What do you mean?

YOU'RE ALWAYS WORRYING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS TO THE WOMEN. 'HE' IS A GENERAL PRONOUN – ONE CAN ASSUME 'SHE'AS WELL.

That's not the way people in society always see it!

YOU KNOW I TREAT EVERYONE THE SAME.

Yes, but . . .

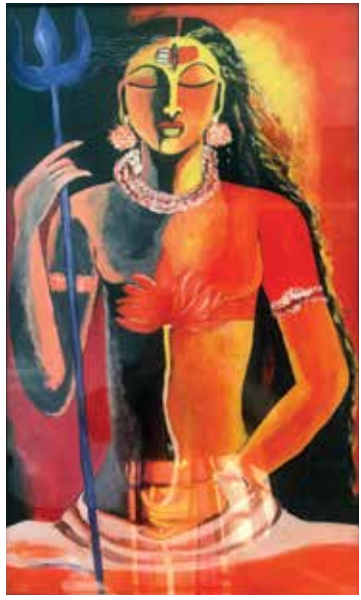
YOU WOMEN SHOULD WRITE MORE SCRIPTURES IF IT'S SO IMPORTANT TO YOU.

Yes, but we don't have the education . . .

GET REAL. IT'S ALL EDUCATION – LIFE'S JUST ONE DIMENSION OF IT, YOU HAVE TO LOOK AT THE BIGGER PICTURE. DON'T GET BOGGED DOWN IN BODY IDENTIFICATION ALL THE TIME, EVEN IF OTHERS DO.

Okay, but there is this belief that each 'door' of the body opens to a particular dimension, and accordingly, which door the spirit escapes from (the anus, mouth, nose, etc.) is significant – and can often be detected because of some discharge. After death, it is the son who is instructed to open the door at the crown of the head, the *brahmarandhra*, the door to the loka of Brahman, so that the spirit, escaping through this gate, can go directly to the highest dimension. Only the son performs the last rites that can save his father from the hell called 'Put' as described in the *Garuda Purana* – and some people find this another reason for prizing sons

more than daughters. In fact, one definition of the Sanskrit word *putra*, son, is *put* + *tra: Put* 'the hell which is reserved for childless people' and *tra* 'to liberate'. Mmm. *Putri*, means daughter . . . is a daughter etymologically disqualified from liberating her (otherwise) childless father (or mother) from Put? By the feminine ending?



Sometimes it does seem that scriptural texts from patriarchal religions embody a disregard for the souls of women: women – souls? However, in Indian households, although the *karta*, the performer of the rituals, is male, he is unable to do them alone. The wife must touch his shoulder with some kusha grass throughout the ritual in order for the necessary energies to flow. The man and the woman are not seen independently, but rather as *ardhanarishwara* – that form of consciousness which is half male and half female, before transcendence.

Also, according to the *Garuda Purana*, rites for the departed soul are performed for both men and women, and it is taught that the spirit is beyond gender. Gender is only for the body; the journey is for the *jiva*, the soul.

Swami Sivananda encouraged people to use a wary discrimination in believing all the *Garuda Purana* says because souls are at different stages of development. From his high perspective:

> Birth and death are two false scenes in the unreal drama of maya. That is her nature and habitat. The *Garuda Purana* and the *Atma Purana* describe the pangs of death as tantamount to the pain caused by the stings of 72,000

> scorpions. However, according to the unanimous reports of enlightened spirits who have clearly described their experiences, there is not even a bit of pain during death. They have stated that they were relieved of the great burden of the physical body and enjoyed perfect composure at the time of separation from the physical body. At the time of death, the little distortion and contraction that one feels is just the effort of the pranic double to extricate itself from the physical body. The experience is said to be painless, but why does it matter even if it is painful when death promises light behind the curtain![1]

The descriptions of hells and the tortures there do not seem very edifying, but then it is written with an eye on the needs of the living, and sometimes threats of punishment are actually needed to make a person change their ways. Similarly, the descriptions of heavenly planes can be seen as enticements to improve one's conduct.

KULARNAVA TANTRA

In the *Kularnava Tantra* instructions for this life are given in the context of it being just one phase of our existence and evolution. Still, the text opens with an exhortation not to waste this life (Ullaasa 1:13–17):

> Of the 84,00000 bodily forms, the human body is the most important, for it is this form in which one gets knowledge of the Essence. This knowledge of Essence cannot be attained in any form other than human. Even in hundreds of thousands of births, O Parvati! When due to the accumulation of virtuous deeds a human being, with effort obtains the knowledge of Essence he becomes Liberated.

[1] Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga*, *Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, p. 29

> Endowed with human form as a ladder for emancipation if one does not liberate his Atman, then who can be a greater sinner than him.
>
> Obtaining a superior birth and bestowed with a beautiful set of motor and sensory organs one who does not understand the best of his interests is like the one who is a self-slayer.[2]

The insistence that it is the virtuous life of a human being that allows one to break free of the circle of life and death and its attendant sufferings and limitations is fundamental to the tantras.

The knowledge is encoded and symbolism is used so that one requires the right background, or samskaras, to understand the deeper meanings of tantra. Texts are therefore often misinterpreted by those who read and understand according to their own conditionings. However, once we have met the teachings in other traditions, we can recognize the instructions which are given in vivid language (Ullaasa 1:22–23 and 25):

> So long as the body exists one should live according to the laws of Dharma. Dharma leads to knowledge; knowledge leads to Dhyana and Yoga, which though secret lead to liberation.
>
> If the person himself would not find the means for Release of his Self, who else is there to see the favourable means for this Release?
>
> He is a fool who starts digging a well when his house is already ablaze. Therefore, so long as this body exists one should earnestly devote himself towards the exploration of the Ultimate Truth.[3]

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[2] Ram Kumar Rai (text and translation), *Kularnava Tantra*, *Series Tantra Granthamala No. 5*, Prachya Prakashan, Pub. Kush Rai, Varanasi, India, 2010, p. 3

[3] *ibid*., p. 4

Old age prowls like a tiger

We are urged to use this life as a means for transcendence, and not to waste it. Otherwise death, or rather life, will fling us back into the churning wheel of karma once more. The *Kularnava Tantra* is not only written for people of the vanaprastha or sannyasa ashramas, but for the young and for householders still very much engaged in life, hence the frequent warnings not to get caught in the illusion that this life is a permanent state.

> Old age prowls like a tiger; age diminishes like water in a broken pot; diseases strike like an enemy. Therefore, take you the auspicious path well before the limbs lose their vitality and the adversities crowd upon you. (Ullaasa 1:26 and 27)
>
> Even a life of a hundred years is too little, for the half of it is spent in sleep and the other half is made infructuous by infancy, disease, misery, old age and what not. (Ullaasa 1:31)
>
> The Jiva considers favourable that which is not favourable; considers permanent that which is transitory; considers useful that which is of no use; and sees not his own death. (Ullaasa 1:34)
>
> This world being plunged into the fathomless time-ocean, the Jiva here does not recognize the lurking crocodiles of death, disease and old age.
>
> He fails to see that with every moment which passes his body decays; realizes not that like an unbaked earthen pot in water, the body is gradually being destroyed. (Ullaasa 1:36 and 37)
>
> Man keeps prattling of 'my children', 'my wife', 'my wealth', 'my relations'! Death swallows him when he is still thinking of what is done and what is half done. Therefore, do today what is required to be done tomorrow; do in the forenoon what is meant to be done

> in the afternoon, because death waits not to see what is done or not done. Wise man, do you not see prowling towards you the Death, armed with a host of terrible diseases? Cut across by the spear of desire, moistened in the lubricant of sense-enjoyment, cooked in the fire of likes and dislikes, man is the banquet of Death. (Ullaasa 1:40–44)[4]

YUM YUM! ER, JUST JOKING – ACTUALLY, I'M JUST DOING MY JOB.

The *Kularnava Tantra* says that the chief qualities needed for this life, the after-life, and any life include discrimination, non-attachment, awareness and one-pointedness, just as noted in other scriptures.

Break free of the whole circle

This tantra does not give knowledge of the after-death states specifically. It is not interested in how to get to heavenly lokas or even how to avoid the lower births as animals, demons or sufferers in various hells. It is one-pointed in its advocacy that we should break free of the whole cycle.

> Non-attachment is the only way for Liberation; all evils are born of attachment. Therefore, rejection of attachment and devotion to true knowledge alone makes one happy. Even the enlightened ones are moved by attachment, then what to speak of lesser beings. (1:55)
>
> All the Jivas, constantly engaged by the needs of their own bodies and that of their wives, deluded by ignorance, undergo repeatedly the cycle of births and deaths. (1:71)[5]

It is not a text speaking to the general population, as the *Bardo Thodal* does, but to those who have taken initiation

[4] *ibid*., Ram Kumar Rai (text & translation), *Kularnava Tantra*, *Series Tantra Granthamala No. 5*, pp. 4–7

[5] *ibid*., pp. 8 and 10

from a guru as the fulfillment of efforts made in countless lives. The aim of transcending even the desire for divine pleasures and relative immortality is not one that appeals to people who are devoid of discipline. It requires an awareness accrued in many previous lives.

> Just as from the experiences of a dream arises knowledge without instructions, so out of the studies and disciplines of previous lives dawns the Knowledge of Kuladharma.
>
> Maturation and development of mind which takes place during a thousand previous lives, that alone yields the knowledge even without instruction. (2:27–29)[6]

All these scriptures agree that the connecting forces between life and death and rebirth are desire and *karma*, actions which are sticky because they are performed with desire, and so their results stick to you. Karma gives the necessary circumstances which form and direct one's life, but how one utilizes the present life, is really up to the individual. As a seeker, one has to face oneself, and actually make efforts to improve oneself so one can keep on walking. Otherwise the ego will project all the bad outside, and one is never able to learn.

In various scriptures there are sadhanas given to develop different dimensions of our mind and being, and instructions on how to live so that we can engage in this long walk to freedom. They are of no use to us if we cannot understand that it is our own self that we have to improve – not someone else – and so this process of evolution takes many lives of *purushartha*, of striving to establish worthwhile qualities in ourselves and achieving integrity. It is here that the *guru*, the dispeller of darkness, is invaluable, offering the disciplines that keep us on the path of light.

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[6] *ibid*., p. 25

VASISHTHA SAMHITA

We can develop a wider perspective from reading the extensive *Yoga Vasishtha*. In *Yogakandam,* its chapter on yoga, Rishi Vasishtha, the guru of Sri Rama, answers questions on death asked by his son, Sakti.

> Sakti asked: "O lord! You have the knowledge of all sciences and are ever inclined to do good for all beings. So please tell me how one ignorant like me can acquire knowledge through which I may liberate myself from this world which is full of miseries and fears of birth, death and old age." (1:6 and 7)
>
> Vasishtha said: "O Sakti! Wisest among all intellectuals, rise up and be ready, may you be blessed with wellbeing, I shall tell you easiest and eternal means of ceasing transmigration." (1:9)

And he invoked Brahma, the compassionate Creator:

> Brahma said: "There is a two-fold path of actions, ordained by the Vedas to be known and adopted by all persons. Both the ways consist of two actions; namely Pravartaka (motivating) and Nivartaka (liberating).
>
> The performance of actions by the persons of any varna and of any ashrama with any desire, is called Pravartaka because it motivates a person for transmigration.
>
> Whereas the same path of action, when based on knowledge and bereft of all desires, is called Nivartaka as it frees from birth. (1:18–21)
>
> As long as a cognizant or an ignorant person bears a body as a means of action, he must deal with all the duties assigned according to the varna and ashrama for liberation."
>
> Vasishtha said: "Thus explaining and preaching inevitable duties and Karma Kanda (ethics) authentically,

Brahma himself became engrossed in Yoga. As even the knowers and also those desirous of salvation undertake to perform every action, hence, O best Brahmin! You should also perform all the deeds with knowledge." (1:25–27)

To break free, perform duties with wisdom

This is very interesting – anyone who becomes embodied, no matter how enlightened or dulled, takes on duties according to their qualities. Yet also anyone – no matter their qualities – can perform their duties either with desire, which will create karma and bind one to rebirth, or without desire, which will free one from rebirth. It is clearly a theme in all the scriptures: one's attachments and desires shape the matrix we are born into and live in. By following the guru's discipline, designed for the whittling away of our ego and wrong self-identifications, we begin to express ourselves through *karma yoga*, working for the good of all without desire for personal benefit. This means we become free from desire and karma: we become free. To put it concisely: A person who has desires is reborn. A person without desires is not reborn. We have to understand that this life and its approaching death is one link in a long chain.

Sage Vasishtha continues to clarify that the *atman*, the spirit, is quite separate from the body it inhabits during life and that it is the atman that we should focus on as we evolve through different experiences in different bodies.

Sakti said: "If a soul (atma) is transcending gunas, is immaculate, ever blissful, devoid of old age, immortal, then O father, what is being born or destroyed and where does it stay after death?

O glorious father! How can we know the time of its final destruction? Please tell me all now accordingly." (5:2 and 3)

Vasishtha said: "That very atma, which is ever-pure and ever-blissful, when enjoined with a body is called

jiva, of which there is transmigration. That very one jivatma which pervades in different beings, appears as one and many, like the moon's reflection in water. The same atma is named jiva when enwrapped by delusion. As it is acquainted with the body (kshetra) it is recognised as a (kshetrajna) knower of the body. This atma designated as kshetrajna enjoys both favourable and unfavourable fruits. The objects of enjoyment are internal like happiness, etc., and external like a pot, etc., and in the body, which is the place of enjoyment, the senses are the means of enjoyment. (5:4–7)

Similarly, there are four states: jagrat, waking; swapna, dreaming; sushupti, sound sleep and turiya . . . There is no fifth state. In swapna (dream) also enjoyment is experienced by the enjoyer though there is no external object. Sushupti (sound sleep) is a state wherein the atma (soul) stays in its own real form devoid of any activity. In the stage of Turiya the soul frees itself from the worldly existence.

After destruction of the body this soul is limited by the subtle and causal body and resides in air or fire. The soul with the linga sharira exists everywhere and bears the name of jiva and owing to its (own) good and evil deeds it resumes another gross body.

In this way only the jiva moves (in different bodies) until it realizes the complete cessation of its action. After the cessation of action, the soul attains purification and the purified soul realizes its one-self." (5:9–13)

We are told again and again that it is pointless identifying with the mortal body – but that, nevertheless, the opportunity of being alive in a human body is a rare and fortunate experience. Although the aim of all the yogas is to free us from suffering, this is not only the suffering of the daily grind, or our physical and emotional pain as we get sick, grow old and die – or die young in battle – it is to free us from the pain of living, to free us from the need for rebirth.

Being bound to the wheel of birth and death is the suffering. Human birth is to be respected as a means of freeing oneself from the gravity of the residual karmas which tie us to existence in this or other lokas, and prevent final liberation, *moksha*.

> Salvation is attained only by dhyana yoga, not otherwise, and from the time indicators the time of destruction of the kshetra (body) is guessed. By understanding, through the internal and external signs, the time (of death), one should act accordingly. One should perform all the duties and worthwhile acts whilst one is endowed with the body. For who will be capable of doing anything at all after destruction of the body (kshetra)? And embodiment (kshetrayoga) is quite difficult to attain." (5:14–17)

How to know when death approaches

There are various yogic techniques which can help one know when death is approaching, and these are discussed in Chapter 12: Preparation for Death. These are useful as we can prepare for the important journey we are bound to take. The *Bardo Thodal* explains that the knowledge of the tattwas, and observation of their spontaneous dissolution gives a sure guideline of approaching death. For this to become more useful one should practise tattwa shuddhi regularly for some years so one acquires a finer understanding of tattwas more naturally.

In tantra, there is a distinct technique known as chhayopasana which can foretell the time of death, but it is very hard to actually practise. Sakti, however wants even more, he wants to be able to change the time of death.

DEATH WAITS FOR NO MAN. NO WOMAN EITHER – LET'S BE CLEAR ON THIS.

But still . . .

Aum is the ferry

There is an archetypal mandala of imagery about life and death which is referred to in many of the scriptures. The ocean of *samsara* is the phenomenal universe, the *guru* is the bridge between dimensions, and also there is *Aum*, which is the ferry, the *taraka*, which can help one cross the ocean.

> Sakti said: "O respected sir, by what means can a knower of Kala (the time of death) overcome the death? That's what I want to hear. Kindly tell me accordingly."
>
> Vasishtha said: "After deciding (the time of) one's own death by external and internal signs, he should remain fearless, content, without conflicts and with controlled senses. He should perform daily and occasional duties as enjoined by scriptures and reach the internal sphere through the practice of Yoga and (thinking about) paramatma. Controlling the pranas, one devoid of desire should perform japa of Taraka (Om) or should chant the Taraka Brahma without expectation of fruit and (remain) unswerving on the path.
>
> That death would be overcome by him and he will attain long life and become a knower of Brahma. Thus long ago Brahma expounded pranava to me in short.
>
> O son, having good understanding, that I shall expound to you. Listen:
>
> O amiable son, in the beginning there was 'sat' alone and that was the cause of birth etc. From this cause the seed was born, composed of four letter syllables. That is '*Aum*' which is Brahman and the only means to attain knowledge of Brahma, by which knowledge the learned perceive the omniscient, the supreme immortal." (6:1–9)

The next group of verses in the *Vasishtha Samhita* are particularly sweet, emphasizing the need of *atmabhava*, recognizing the self in all beings, to triumph in life, in death, and in the other lokas. Love and respect for everyone is actually what marks out the everyday saints that we are sometimes lucky enough to meet in life. The problem is, as generosity of

spirit grows, one is often faced with peculiar dilemmas in life: how can one pass the beggar on the road? How ignore the mute appeal in the eyes of terrified cattle in trucks on their way to slaughter? How to leave the butterfly trapped in the lift?

The raft of sthitaprajna

Is it a wonder that people with atmabhava sometimes have strong mental and emotional problems living in the current environment of our world? Once the perception of the soul or the spirit becomes dominant, when meeting anybody, or any being, the body they are inhabiting is seen as a temporary characteristic – like a suit of clothes that will be discarded when no longer appropriate. When one perceives injustice or suffering, it is only when one is strong in faith that one can remain detached enough to help wisely. This is probably why *viveka*, the ability to discriminate between what is real and what is unreal, and *vairagya*, the ability to be unattached to worldly perceptions and always focused on the Truth, are referred to as the two wings of the bird. They are necessary for anyone wanting to practise strong spiritual sadhanas, or to live a spiritual life.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, we are given the inspiration of the *sthitaprajna*, the one with steady wisdom and devotion who maintains balance and benevolence in all circumstances. The *Vasistha Samhita* agrees that maintaining an equal vision towards all beings leads to a type of selflessness which removes fear in general, and also helps dissolve the fear of death (6:44–49):

> "By perceiving oneself in all beings and all beings in one's own self, one becomes self-sacrificer." Thus said Brahma.
>
> "He who with a pure mind always perceives the supreme soul in the form of supreme bliss, situated in his own self, he only is the real perceiver.

Or else who perceives the soul immanent in all beings and of the form of supreme bliss as situated in his own soul, he only is the real perceiver.

Abandoning the one situated in one's own self when one worships another situated outside is like leaving the jewel in one's own hand while one tries to secure another.

Hence, by propitiating one's own soul, the one without a second, having the form of supreme bliss by the mantra I am that 'Om', one overcomes death.

If one is not able to propitiate in one's own self, then one may always propitiate in an external (object) in a self-created linga or in a consecrated one."

If one is not genuinely able to see this unity of spirit and experience it as a reality for oneself, then it is no use just knowing it intellectually and parroting it as one's own view – better to turn to the *karmakanda*, the path where actions are highlighted, and with the help of external worship begin to develop the necessary neuronal circuits in the brain. Such sincere efforts win the favor of the guru and deities who are in a position to help.

Other mantras and methods

The fear of death is one of the major causes of suffering in dying – both for the person dying and for family and others attached to that one. Lord Shiva is the one who gives moksha, liberation from the whole cycle of transmigration – either while alive or after death. For someone with his vision, each life is just like a fruit growing on the vine of immortality. Each life, grows, flowers, ripens and falls, with the seeds of the next life within it. The vine remains (6:51–52):

He who is afraid of death, though impure, in all stages or in any stage, anywhere, let him always chant *Mrta-sanjivani*. For the person who is bound by the meshes of world, yet desirous of salvation, there is no other remedy for the death except the tryambaka.

The *Vasishtha Samhita* is not repressively sectarian: The '*Trayambaka mantra*' refers to the Three-eyed-one (Lord Shiva) but Rishi Vasishtha also mentions meditation on Narayana as a valid means of overcoming death. However, the state of samadhi devoid of any meditational aim is most extolled for overcoming death (6:58–61):

> Or else one may get rid of the approached death by practising samadhi.
>
> Samadhi is proclaimed as voidness devoid of all desires. Samadhi is the state of equality of the individual soul and the supreme soul.
>
> That is samadhi known to be voidness which is bereft of Dhyana (Meditation). One must always practise devoid of all desires.
>
> One who transcends, through Samadhi, both the states of existence and non existence, he too, indeed, becomes the conqueror of death.

That's good to know, but not many of us human beings can achieve samadhi at the moment. So if we cannot transcend, how can we improve ourselves, along with our karmic stock which will direct us as we keep going in the *samsara chakra*, the circle of life and death?

Satsang and seva

We have mentioned several times that the thought, the attitude one has at the time of death, and the people there as one dies, can be very influential. It is the same with life – and everything is connected. Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe) comments:

> What the *jiva* actually does is the result of his *karma*. Further, the term *jiva*, though commonly applicable to the human embodiment of the *atma*, is not limited to it. Both *papa* (vice) and *punya* (virtue) may therefore be manifested in beings of a lower rank than that of humanity in so far as what they (whether consciously

> or unconsciously) do is a hindrance to their true development. Thus, in the *Yoga Vasishtha* it is said that even a creeping plant acquired merit by association with the holy muni on whose dwelling it grew. Objectively considered, sin is concisely defined as *duhkhajanakam paapam*. It is that which has been, is, and will be the cause of pain, mental or physical, in past, present, and future births.[7]

Which opens the field somewhat – making us realize it is not only the life and death of us human beings which is important. Everything has its dharma. After all, trees and rabbits and elephants all live as best they can and then die, just like us. Also, if sin is defined as that which causes *dukkha*, pain and suffering, then it explains why inner happiness or contentment is the goal of all the yama and niyama of Patanjali. And why Swami Niranjanananda emphasizes that we have to actually practise *manah prasad*, happiness, as the first yama for a yogic lifestyle.

MAHANIRVANA TANTRA

The inner enemies act to prevent the experience of happiness in our daily lives, and the peacefulness, bliss and luminosity that comes as we develop awareness of the *anandamaya kosha*, the most subtle blissful or divine aspect of ourselves. We are in human form, not animal and not divine, so it is natural to have instinctive qualities, but they should be seen for what they are, and managed accordingly. They are deep rooted, linked with the survival instincts in the operating system of the human mind. They are here to keep us in the circle.

Kundalini yoga and tantra explain that while we are embodied, the four basic urges or instincts relate to fear

[7] Arthur Avalon, *Tantra of the Great Liberation (Mahanirvana Tantra): A Translation from the Sanskrit with Introduction and Commentary*, Dover Publications Inc, New York, 1972, Introduction p. cxxxvii

and self-preservation, sex and procreation, food and self-satisfaction, and sleep. They tend to rule our lives as they are so 'natural', we do not realize that we have to master them to become truly human. They relate closely with the endocrine glands in the physical body, *annamaya kosha*, and to the chakras in the energy body, *pranamaya kosha*. They affect the way we think, through the *manomaya kosha*, and are registered in the unconscious recesses of our psychic body, the *vijnanamaya kosha*. Practices are given to combat the instincts and the related 'six enemies' that we face in life at this stage of the evolutionary cycle.

The six enemies

These enemies also relate to the six precipices that we face in the after-death states: fear/anger, desire and greed, attachment, ego and delusion. The spiritual traditions are united in the belief that we have to recognize these inner enemies within ourselves and work to overcome and transform them. In the Buddhist tradition, the *Bardo Thodal* taught us that it is the eradication of their power which is the way to close the doors to rebirth. In the tantras, the *Mahanirvana Tantra* agrees that *kama, krodha, lobha, moha, mada, matsarya* – lust, anger, covetousness, ignorance or delusion, pride and envy – are the cause of suffering in this and future births.[8] In the Sanatana dharma, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* teaches that overcoming these yawning precipices in our nature is one of the attainments accruing from the panchagni sadhana, which can be undertaken by paramahamsa sannyasins.

As we shall see in Chapter 12: Preparation for Death, the tattwa shuddhi or bhoota shuddhi practice includes the resolve to defeat these inner enemies, and it is a sadhana that people who are not siddhas, but who are regular practitioners, can benefit from.

[8] *ibid*., Introduction pp. cxxxvii–cxxxviii

UDDHAVA GITA

This Gita is not so well-known as the *Bhagavad Gita*, but again the teacher is Lord Krishna. The *Bhagavad Gita* encourages us to fight on since we are here on the battlefield of life: to fulfill our duties and perfect our faith, and finally to find union with the object of devotion after death. The *Uddhava Gita* is Sri Krishna's last message, and the tone is more transcendental. He is no longer involved in the battlefield of life but is preparing to return to the Source. He dispenses with the whole drama of manifestation in a lordly manner and relegates our birth into this dimension as a dream.

> The soul is described as bound or free from the point of view of My Gunas, but it is not so in reality. And since the Gunas are the creation of Maya, there is, in my opinion, neither bondage nor liberation. Grief and infatuation, happiness and misery, as well as taking on a body, are all due to Maya. Just as a dream is a fiction of the mind, so transmigration also is not a reality. (6:1 and 2)
>
> O generous one, the complete acceptance by a man of a particular sense-object as himself is called his birth as in the case of dream and imagination. (17:39 and 40)[9]

AVADHUTA GITA

The *Avadhuta Gita* consists of eight chapters and gives transcendental teaching at length. Dattatreya was born of Rishis Atri and Anasuya, became a famous warrior-king and then renounced his worldly duties and connections. His teachings are revered by Advaita Vedantins and praised by Swami Vivekananda and Swami Sivananda. In chapter one Dattatreya asks his disciple to understand that he is none other than That.

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[9] Swami Madhavananda (trans.), *Uddhava Gita: The Last Message of Sri Krishna*, Advaita Ashram, Kolkata, West Bengal, India, 2005, pp. 83 and 261



Know the Self always to be everywhere one and unintercepted. I am the meditator and the highest object of meditation. Why do you divide the Indivisible?

You are not born nor do you die. At no time do you have a body. The scripture declares in many different ways the well-known dictum: "All is Brahman."

You are He who is exterior and interior. You are the auspicious One existing everywhere at all times. Why are you running hither and thither deluded, like an unclean spirit?

Union and separation exist in regard neither to you nor to me. There is no you, no me, nor is there this universe. All is verily the Self alone. (1:12–15)[10]

The instruction again is to overcome the attraction to the manifest world of the senses to overcome duality, reclaim one's true nature and therefore, naturally, cease suffering.

You verily are Truth, devoid of change, motionless, One, of the nature of freedom. You have neither attachment nor aversion. Why do you suffer, seeking the objects of desires?

All the scriptures say that the Truth is without attributes, pure, immutable, bodiless and existing equally everywhere. Know me to be That. There is not the least doubt about it. (1:19–20)[11]

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[10] Swami Ashokananda (trans. & annotations), *Avadhuta Gita of Dattatreya*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, Tamil Nadu, 3rd ed. 1988, pp. 6–8

[11] *ibid*., p. 10

Know yourself, and there's no need for rebirth

If we desire rebirth, we are assured of it. If we have no desire, then there is no karma, and there is no compulsion to be reborn. The Sanskrit of the next verse (1:21) reads:

> *Saakaaram anrtam viddhi niraakaaram nirantaram*
> *Etat tattvopadeshena na punar-bhava-sambhavah.*

Swami Ashokananda translates it as:

> Know that which has form to be false, that which is formless to be eternal. Through the instruction of this truth there is no longer rebirth into this world.

Swami Abhayananda has an equally striking, though slightly different translation. It's definitely something to keep returning to in our minds. Even if we cannot fully realize it, this mantra is like a compass.

> All forms, understand, are only temporary manifestations; only the formless Essence eternally exists. Once this truth is realized, there's no more necessity to be reborn.[12]

The *Avadhuta Gita* is designed for those who do not want rebirth. And do not want heaven or any other loka. And do not want anything to do with the illusory existence we call life.

> There are no Vedas, no worlds, no gods, no sacrifices. There is certainly no caste, no stage in life, no family, no birth. There is neither the path of smoke nor the path of light. There is only the highest Truth, the homogeneous Brahman. (1:34)

> What I do, what I eat, what I sacrifice, what I give – all this is not mine in the least. I am pure, unborn, undecaying. (1:40)

[12] Swami Abhayananda (trans. & introduction), *Dattatreya's Song of the Avadhuta*, Sri Satguru Publications (Indian Books Centre) Delhi, India, 1st ed. 2000, p. 24–25

> The Self certainly does not become pure through the practice of six-limbed yoga. It is certainly not purified by the destruction of the mind. It is certainly not made pure by the instructions of the guru. It is Itself the Truth, Itself the illumined One. (1:48)
>
> You have no mother, no father, no wife, no son, no relative, no friend. You have no likes or dislikes. Why is this anguish in your mind? (1:63)[13]

It is so awe-inspiringly unswerving. In Dattatreya's vision, he sees the ultimate aim of yoga as freedom from the compulsion of rebirth. And remember, he had about 24 gurus, including a bee, an ant . . .

> It doesn't matter where a yogi may die; it doesn't matter how (in what state) he dies. He becomes absorbed in the Absolute, as the space within a jar becomes absorbed (in the outer space when the jar is destroyed).
>
> Whether he dies near a holy river or in an outcaste's hut, whether he is conscious or unconscious at his death, he merges into Freedom, into Unity alone.
>
> All duties, wealth, enjoyments, liberation – all people and objects in this world as well – everything, in the eyes of a yogi, is like the (illusory) water in a desert mirage. (1:69–71)[14]

For him nothing is sacred – because everything is – and it is the natural dharma of the yogi to experience this.

> When through constant practice one's concentration becomes objectless, then, being divested of merits and demerits, one attains the state of complete dissolution in the Absolute through the dissolution of the object of concentration, but not before then. For the destruction of the terrible, poisonous universe, which produces the unconsciousness of delusion, there is but one infallible

[13] *op cit*., Swami Ashokananda, *Avadhuta Gita of Dattatreya*, pp. 18 ff

[14] *op cit*., Swami Abhayananda, *Dattatreya's Song of the Avadhuta*, pp. 48–51

remedy – the nectar of naturalness, *sahaja amrtam*, the state of pure existence; Divine Identity). (2:16–17)[15]

The guru

The guru's grace and guidance is necessary to learn about this, but to attain, one has to stand on one's own two feet and this is very clear in Swami Ashokananda's translation.

> A Guru gives the gift of wisdom to both the wise and the foolish man; but only he crosses over this ocean (of life) who attains the knowledge of Truth for himself. (2:23)

In practical terms, the role of guru is to understand the karma of his *shishya*, disciple, and assess the level of the disciple's evolution, limitations, worldly attachments, and to what extent he/she can transcend. Such a powerful being can give various disciplines in life that help their followers to live better and more harmonious lives. However, the guru is *really* essential for one committed to the spiritual disciplines to the extent that they want the guru's grace only for *moksha*, liberation.

We can say that there are two types of *chetana,* consciousness. *Bahiranga* is the outer limb, where one experiences the world, dream, visions, and can progress through mantra, kriyas etc. *Antaranga*, the inner limb, is developed in meditation: where there is consciousness but no sense information or thoughts. After that, *karana chetana*, previously unconscious chetana related to the source or the cause, develops, and *then* you need a 'sat guru'. Because one can only do sadhana in the conscious area; it is the guru who opens the door to the unconscious.

> It is difficult to have faith in the guru who is embodied as a mortal human . . . Even the faith of the best disciples' falters and they leave their guru, finding him to be unsuitable. They denounce their guru because they find he does not conform to their own ideals of what a guru

[15] *op cit*., Swami Ashokananda, *Avadhuta Gita of Dattatreya*, pp. 47ff

should be like. What a paradox! Should the guru comply with your wishes or should you come up to his expectations? . . . All this boils down to one single point – faith, which you have to search for within the recesses of your own mind and discover for yourself.

Shraddha, faith, is the *brahmastra*, the ultimate weapon of spirituality. It is the ultimate power of spiritual life. If one's faith remains intact in spite of the assaults and challenges, then one has real unwavering faith. A disciple of such deep faith can even have the darshan of God.[16]

Each individual has their own unique needs and attainments, requiring instructions and, eventually, meditation practices, according to their particular state of mind. Spiritual practices and training enable us to see our role in life, our ultimate purpose and immediate duties clearly, then we can make the fullest possible use of life and its opportunities for liberation. More, we can develop those subtle parts of our consciousness which survive death – so that we not only have penetrating awareness in this waking life, and in dream, but also become established in those states that are now generally beyond us – the 'unconscious' and 'superconscious' states. *Atma jyoti*, the light of the soul, joins the clear light of the *antaryamin*, the inner ruler, within us.



[16] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Guru*, Rikhiapeeth, Jharkhand, India, 2014, pp. 98–100

Part 2
Scientific Perspective

7

Consciousness and Personality Enduring Death

Why was the knowledge and indeed the belief in reincarnation and the whole transmigratory cycle of birth and death lost in the west? Part of the answer is historical. There are references in the Bible that show people at that time accepted the idea of prophets taking rebirth to continue their spiritual mission. When John the Baptist asks Jesus "Are you Elijah?"[1], or when his disciples think Jesus Christ may be Elijah, Jeremiah or a reincarnation of some earlier prophet.[2] Also there is the story of Saul who, in great distress, went to a woman who could speak with spirits, and she summoned Samuel from the dead to advise him.[3] However, the Christian church does not emphasize such views in the canon of accepted beliefs. Then the materialistic 'scientific' mentality took over.

Why is it now being reconsidered by the western civilization? Part of the answer must be that now we can communicate so freely with cultures around the world, and have available translations of so many previously hidden scriptures. The diaspora of highly trained Tibetan Buddhist monks has also contributed hugely to the increasing awareness that consciousness endures after death. There

[1] *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*, (John 1:21)

[2] *ibid*., (Mathew 16:14)

[3] *ibid*., (1 Samuel 28:2–15)

are now large centres of Buddhist learning in the south of France and in other European countries. According to census it is the fastest growing 'religion' in Australia, and Buddhist techniques have been taught successfully in prisons in the USA.

Accredited researchers have gathered information on various aspects of death, and if we look at their findings, we see it corroborates the teachings of the ancient sources of knowledge that we have looked at previously. As individuals around the world are given more access to such research, many have stepped forward saying that this 'new' and amazing information has been experienced by them as well – they have had life-changing near death experiences, memories of past lives, etc. There is a growing realization that the ancient understandings about death, the after-death dimensions of existence, and rebirth, explain some observed behaviours and experiences better than any other explanations. If previously inexplicable phenomena and experiences are investigated in terms of death being a transitional process in the evolution of consciousness, it seems scientific conclusions can be drawn in several related areas. The research carried out by three people will be studied in this section of the book. In chronological order they are F.W.H. Myers, Dr Raymond A. Moody and Professor Ian Stevenson.

Three investigations into death

F.W.H. Myers was a contemporary of Freud. In Europe, Freud established the importance of the 'unconscious' area of the human psyche. Myers introduced an even more expansive view of the human psyche and demonstrated that humans enter a different, expanded state of consciousness after death. He acknowledged the power of the unconscious mind but also investigated the 'superconscious' – which remains an unconscious faculty in most of us. In the foreword to Myer's book *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death,* Aldous Huxley remarks:

> His account of the unconscious is superior to Freud's in at least one respect; it is more comprehensive and truer to the data of experience. It is also, it seems to me, superior to Jung's account in being more richly documented with concrete facts and less encumbered with those psycho-anthropologico-pseudo-genetic speculations which becloud the writings of the sage of Zurich.[4]

Myers is the unknown genius who coined many of the terms that are routinely used today to describe subtle and relatively unknown aspects of personality.

> I ventured in 1882 to suggest the wider term *telepathy* (the communication of impressions of any kind from one mind to another, independently of the recognized channels of sense) and *clairvoyance* (any direct sensation or perception of objects or conditions independently of the recognized channels of sense). I shall use these terms in the present work. But I am far from assuming that these terms comprise the whole field of supernormal faculty.[5]

He produces reasoned arguments and an immense wealth of case histories showing that the human consciousness is able to know and communicate things which are far beyond the scope of the mind and senses as we know them. He highlights times when the consciousness is operating independently from the body-mind most people think themselves to be. Once he has established that the consciousness can and does operate independently from the body-mind through studies of dream, trance and hypnosis, he proceeds to discuss case histories showing that the personality exists and can communicate after death.

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[4] Myers, F.W.H., *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, Studies in Consciousness, Russell Targ Editions, Hampton Roads Publishing Co. Inc., Charlottesville, USA, 2001, originally printed 1961 by University Books Inc., p. xv

[5] *ibid*., p. 67



Such proofs, explanations and arguments are not necessary in the eastern traditions because this knowledge is embedded in the cultural beliefs which still exist, and guide people's lives, to this day. The findings that he presents may strike many westerners as strange new ideas, however many of his findings were accepted knowledge in the west. Myers does not exhibit any knowledge of yogic techniques, and his work predates the translation of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, but his conclusions harmonize with the established eastern scriptures and, for example, the descriptions of the *siddhis*, or powers of consciousness experienced by yogis in samadhi states.

Dr Raymond A. Moody Junior, by contrast, who led the early research into Near-Death-Experiences (NDEs) in the 1970s has studied the *Bardo Thodal*. He notes that the people he and his team have interviewed tell of experiences very similar to parts of the account of the Chikhai Bardo in that scripture. For example, that one enters into a different and more expansive consciousness during the moments of death where one is no longer bound by the body and the senses.

Like F.W.H. Myers, his conclusions are drawn from case histories that have been carefully examined for authenticity. However, he has nothing to say on the personality enduring through the death states. In most of Moody's case histories of NDEs, people felt their awareness leave the body and saw the body from a perspective or location outside it. They also experienced many other things not in the vicinity of their bodies or within the accepted range of sensory perception. This corroborates Myer's findings that death heralds superconsciousness. His work makes it clear that the consciousness experienced by people officially declared 'dead', and later revived, can perceive things far beyond the

scope of the normal living body-mind unit. A very convincing account of such extra sensory and supra-mental faculties is also recorded by Anita Moorjani in her book *Dying To Be Me*. Such testimonies back up Myers' finding that consciousness is not essentially limited by, or dependent on, the body-brain network.

Professor Ian Stevenson, who headed the Department of Psychology in the University of Virginia, USA[6], conducted a contiguous area of investigation. He has written many well-researched papers on the subject of reincarnation. His work is also based on case histories – this time of people who claim to remember previous lives. Particularly interesting is his book *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect*, which contains studies, recorded interviews and photographs of children between the ages of three and eight years who make such claims. They are from many parts of the world and diverse cultures, yet they all claim to remember previous lives. We will refer to this subject in greater detail in the next chapter, along with reports from individuals who have come forward spontaneously with their own past life experiences during the period that this book was being written.

F.W.H. Myers: Survival of the personality after death

Myers lived from 1843–1901 and in 1882 was one of the founders of the Society for Psychical Research in England, which collected data and investigated psychic experiences as scientifically as possible. The greatest part of *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* is a collection of case histories from around the world that were screened regarding the reliability of the percipient. Many are presented by reliable, unrelated people who underwent similar experiences and, as a result of his researches, Myers was forced to conclude that death needs to be investigated. His book begins:

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[6] Stevenson, Ian, M.D., *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect*, Praeger, Westport, Cleveland, USA, 1997

> In the long history of man's endeavours to understand his own environment and to govern his own fate, there is one gap or omission so singular that its simple statement has the air of a paradox. Yet it is strictly true to say that man has never yet applied the methods of modern science to the problem which most profoundly concerns him – whether or not his personality involves any element which can survive bodily death.[7]

Some may refer to religious beliefs playing a role in the lack of questioning, as people in general simply believe according to the views and values of their own particular society, but the paradoxical realization of man's inability to look squarely at his own impending death is an ancient wonder. The *Mahabharata* records events prior to 5,000 BCE, and in that the *Yaksha Prashna*, the question asked of Yudhishtira by the Yaksha is: "What is the greatest wonder, the most amazing thing?" And Yudhishtira answers: "The greatest wonder is that day after day, human beings enter the abode of death yet those that remain believe that they will live forever." Somehow, we don't want to look at death as a reality worth serious investigation . . .

Subliminal experiences

In order to convince the reader of the cohesiveness of his view of the human personality, Myers documents various different aspects of the human personality which, although experienced by many, are often relegated to the arena of 'not being as real' as other experiences. Why not? Maybe because they are rarer, maybe because they are not experienced by everyone, or maybe because they disturb the view of reality which society deems appropriate.

On one end of the scale he discusses states deemed as abnormal psychological conditions such as split personalities, which he explains as the uncontrollable uprushing of

[7] *op cit*., Myers, F.W.H. *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, p. 1

generally subliminal aspects of the personality into everyday life. His investigation includes hypnotic and trance states, and extends to genius, and psychic faculties such as telepathy and clairvoyance, which yoga refers to as *siddhis*, perfections or abilities which one naturally attains as a by-product of intense prolonged sadhana. But he also investigates sleep and dream – which everyone experiences.

His main thesis is that human beings can evolve from our present limited state, where we are aware of only a small area of our consciousness, and that it is beneficial to delve into generally unacknowledged areas of ourselves.

> It is of the *evolution* of human personality that this work proposes to treat; of faculties newly dawning, and of a destiny greater than we know.[8]

It is interesting to note that he did not set out to prove anything about death. His conclusions in that field arose as a by-product when he realized that his research showed that we enter into a different state of expanded consciousness after death. He then noted that this explains previously observed behaviours and experiences better than any other explanations available.

Sleep and samadhi

Myers starts by investigating sleep, an aspect of our existence that we all experience, think of as 'normal' but somehow unimportant, and therefore take for granted. He views it as the time when we rest in the repository of subliminal experiences which mostly remain unconscious, though some aspects bubble up through the subconscious and into our conscious awareness fleetingly, through the medium of dream. He forcefully presents sleep as an undeniable and unexplained psychological reality, and it begins to become clear that what happens to us for a third of our lifetime, when we are generally 'unconscious' in sleep is really something that deserves investigation.

8 *ibid*., p. 8

The importance of sleep and dream has also been emphasized by the seers of yoga, such as Adi Shankaracharya. Dreams have been thought interesting, and have been investigated and interpreted in many cultures over the ages. Keen investigative interest in the state of sleep itself has not been so common. Myers begins his analysis of sleep by pointing out that sleep is an alternating phase of personality, and we should therefore consider what are its special characteristics and faculties.

> Regarding it as an integral factor in our earthly existence, and on equal footing with the waking state, we must consider how the faculties of sleep, as of waking, can be improved and concentrated in the course of the physical and psychical evolution of man.[9]

The yogic siddhas maintain that samadhi, in which one experiences unity with the cosmic consciousness, is essentially similar to sleep; the major difference is that in samadhi one retains awareness while entering what is an unconscious state for most of us. Swami Sivananda spoke forthrightly on the similarities and differences between sleep and samadhi in the first half of the last century.

> Samadhi is a sleepless sleep in which the senses and the veil of ignorance are destroyed by the fire of knowledge. The aspirant enjoys the perfect joy of freedom and infinite supra-cosmic, vast experiences and the supreme silence of the imperishable. If one can consciously induce a state like deep sleep, it is no longer deep sleep but samadhi.
>
> Generally, in what is called 'dreamless sleep', either one does not remember what one dreamt or one fell into absolute unconsciousness, which is a taste of death. There is the possibility of a sleep in which one enters into absolute silence, immortality and peace in all parts of one's being; and consciousness merges into

[9] *ibid*., p. 57

> *satchidananda*, the Supreme Reality, truth-consciousness-bliss. It can hardly be called sleep, for there is perfect awareness. It is called samadhi, and one can remain in that condition for a few minutes or hours or days. Even a few minutes will give more rest and refreshment than hours of ordinary sleep.[10]

From a practical point of view for less accomplished people who cannot consciously alter their state of consciousness, there are practices that help one slip into altered states. The practice of *yoga nidra*, psychic sleep, or of *japa*, which involves concentration on a visual symbol of the divine along with mindful repetition of a *mantra*, a sound vibration which induces identification with the divine, are yogic techniques to facilitate this replenishment.

Myers seems unacquainted with yogic practices, as he does not mention the parallels to his conclusions that can be found in yoga or Vedanta, but he has clearly understood that awareness is not dependent on external perception.

> We cannot treat sleep – as it has generally been treated in its purely *negative* aspect. We cannot be content merely to dwell, with the common text-books, on the mere *absence* of waking faculties – on the diminution of external perception, the absence of controlling intelligence. We must treat sleep *positively* so far as we can, as a definite phase of our personality, coordinate with the waking phase.
>
> Assuredly in sleep some agency is at work which far surpasses waking efficacy.[11]

Many of his conclusions on different states of consciousness parallel yogic understanding and so his work gains authority

[10] Swami Sivananda Saraswati, 'What is Samadhi', *Avahan: Invoking the Divine*, bi-monthly magazine, Year 2014, Issue 6, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, p. 19

[11] *op cit.*, F.W.H. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, p. 58

today as we can see it is validated by centuries, even millennia, of keen observation by the rishis. Myers, through his independent investigations, notes:

> We see the man of genius achieving spontaneously, and unawares, much the same result as that which is achieved for the hypnotic subject by deliberate artifice. He is in fact coordinating the waking and the sleeping phases of his existence. He is carrying into sleep the knowledge and the purpose of the waking hours; and he is carrying back into waking hours again the benefit of those profound assimilations which are the privilege of sleep.[12]

We should notice that Patanjali's discussion of samyama agrees with such findings and takes them much further. *Samyama* is when the yogi maintains a steady oscillation of consciousness between dharana, dhyana and samadhi. It enables one to bring the experiences gained in samadhi back into the gambit of one's 'normal' waking life. The siddha is thus able to access all the 'subliminal' aspects of personality at will. Samyama is not easy to do – so there is not much need to speak about it – but it manifests as the siddhis or the semi-automatic changes in the 'reality' surrounding a siddha.

Travelling through consciousness and siddhis

Myers' research leads him to ask:

> What becomes of the soul during sleep? I think that our evidence has shown that sometimes during apparently ordinary sleep the spirit may travel away from the body, and may bring back a memory, more or less confused, of what it has seen in this clairvoyant excursion. This may indeed happen for brief flashes during waking moments also. But ordinary sleep seems to enhance the process; and deeper states of sleep – spontaneous or induced – seem still further to facilitate it. In the coma preceding

[12] *ibid*., p. 53

> death, or during that 'suspended animation' which is sometimes taken for death, this travelling faculty has seemed to reach its highest point.[13]

The 'travelling faculty' referred to by Myers seems to be his way of expressing the complimentary expansion of consciousness and psychic facilities that yogic texts refer to as *siddhis*. Any accomplished yogi experiences siddhis and also, it seems, any saint who experiences expansion of consciousness. The scriptures and yogic texts warn against them as distractions to be overcome. The Bible records that, after his fasting and tapasya Christ was tempted with dominion and the power to achieve any conceivable desire.

The experience of *ananda*, bliss or ecstasy, is another correlate of this evolution of consciousness.

> This matter of psychical excursion from the organism ultimately involves . . . the claim to ecstasy: to a wandering vision which is not confined to this earth or this material world alone, but introduces the seer into the spiritual world and among communities higher than any which this planet knows.[14]

Sleep is thus a potentially deep state, equivalent in potency to samadhi, exploring dimensions beyond the material plane. Dreams, on the other hand, are like bridges between different dimensions of reality.

Dream

Dreams often indicate that we are aware of more things, and remember more things than we are consciously aware of. During dreams our subliminal perceptions may come to the fore along with long-forgotten impressions and experiences. Myers documents the prophetic, clairvoyant and apparently telepathic nature of dreams. Many of us must admit that we

[13] *ibid*., p. 293

[14] *ibid*., p. 294

have shared similar experiences, and heard of many more from people we know and trust to be telling the truth – but we simply forget about them. Many dreams we may discard on analysis, as churned up reflections on insignificant daily events, but some we innately feel, or find out, are significant.

Myers pays attention to dreams and categorizes 'supernormal' dreams in his presentation. He begins with those that simply suggest extension of the dreamer's own innate perception of the world around him, and progresses to dreams he considers mark the entrance into a spiritual world, from where embodied and unembodied spirits communicate. He does not automatically opt for a supernormal explanation, for example he quotes from *Proceedings* where Mr Brighten writes:

> I owned a 35-ton schooner, and in August, 1876, in very calm weather, I dropped anchor in the Thames. The current being exceedingly swift at that part we let out plenty of chain cable before going to bed. Towards morning I found myself awake in my cabin with the words ringing in my ears, "Wake, awake, you'll be run down." I waited for a few moments, then dropped off to sleep, but was again wakened with the same words ringing in my ears. (*Proceedings* S.P.R., vol. viii. p. 400.)[15]

This auditory warning happened again and again, and finally Mr Brighten got up just in time to save his schooner from being run down by a large vessel. Myers comments that this dream can be explained as subliminal observations and knowledge surfacing in the dream as a warning – it need not be thought of as supernatural. He collected many such dreams where 'extra' knowledge had been given to the dreamer and submitted them all to similar scrutiny; still he was left with a large collection of dreams where the insights given are not readily explicable.

[15] *ibid*., p. 69

Dreams, death and immortality

For example, Myers has a group of case histories where an impending death is announced in a dream. One from Hobart, Australia, 18th July 1984 is recounted in *Phantasms of the Living* vol. i. p. 370, where Mrs Storie dreamed of her twin brother William after a day during which she had felt exceptionally nervous. She woke up at 2 am after dreaming that she saw a railway station and a train.

> I thought 'What's going on up there? Travelling? I wonder if any of us are travelling and I am dreaming of it.' *Someone* unseen by me answered, 'No; something quite different – something wrong.' 'I don't like to look at these things,' I said. Then I saw behind and above my head William's upper half reclining, eyes and mouth half shut; his chest moved forward convulsively, and he raised his right arm. Then he bent forward saying, 'I suppose I should move out of this.' Then I saw him lying, eyes shut, on the ground flat. The chimney of an engine at his head. I called in excitement, 'That will strike him!' The 'someone' answered, 'Yes – well, here's what it was'[16]

Mrs Storie told her husband about the dream but he calmed her and dismissed the dream by pointing out her strange description of the train chimney's peculiar shape – he claimed that no such chimney existed. The news reached her a week later that her twin had died about 9.30 pm on the 18th when he was accidentally killed by a train. When her husband later went to Victoria, where her brother had been living, he returned telling her that engines with chimneys just like the one she had described were being used there.

From all the well-attested cases that he investigates, Myers concludes that the deeply restorative powers of sleep and dream do not relate merely to the body and mind but to the spirit which exists independently though residing in the body/ mind during life.

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[16] *ibid*., pp. 76 ff

> I have assumed that man is an organism informed or possessed by a soul. This view obviously involves the hypothesis that we are living a life in two worlds at once; a planetary life in this material world, to which the organism is intended to react; and also a cosmic life in that spiritual world which is the native environment of the soul. From that unseen world the energy of the organism needs to be perpetually replenished.
>
> Admitting, for the sake of argument, these vast assumptions, it will be easy to draw the further inference that it may be needful that the soul's attention should be frequently withdrawn from the business of earthly life, so as to pursue with greater intensity the maintenance of the fundamental, pervading connection between the organism and the spiritual world.[17]

The three *Matrix* films give a good understanding of the way 'realities' are relative yet interconnected. In yogic terms, one needs to be able to practise *indriya nigraha*, sense control, and *danti*, control of mental behaviour, in order to be able to break free of the sensory matrix which otherwise is often presented as the whole of reality, and which therefore skews our attitude to death.

Automism: clairvoyance, genius, etc.

Myers defines 'automism' as the widest term for the range of such spiritual and more ordinary subliminal emergences into ordinary life. The term includes acknowledged but unexplained experiences such as clairvoyance, telepathy, visions, premonitions, etc. He investigates, at length, many varieties of automism, through case studies and by presenting research, because he is arguing that the human being is not essentially connected with the body. That one can, and in fact does, often have experiences without the body-mind, and without the agency of the senses.

[17] *ibid*., p. 84

> If purely subjective hallucinations of the senses affected insane or disordered brains alone – as was pretty generally the assumption, even in scientific circles, when this enquiry began – our task would have been much easier than it is. But the results of these enquiries show that a great number of sensory automatisms occur among sane and healthy persons and for many of these we can offer no explanation whatever . . . Now, crystal-vision, like hypnotic trance, allows an occasional seer to develop this faculty of inner vision up to a point where it will sometimes convey to him information not available by ordinary means.[18]

He mentions that scrying using springs, mirrors of polished metals, blood, ink, gemstones etc., as well as crystals, has been practised for at least 3,000 years in Greece, Rome, China, Japan, India, Assyria, Persia, Egypt, Russia, and among North American Indians, Australian aborigines, Zulus, Maoris, Incas and the Shamans of Siberia. In Europe, during the Middle Ages, this power, which had earlier been regarded as a divine or benevolent ability, was said to mark out the heretics of the time. The witch hunts began – but survivors kept practising in England and Europe to the present day.[19]

The yogic practice of *trataka*, steady gazing at a chosen object, is well known to produce extra-sensory experiences. There is also a whole science of selecting and preparing certain symbols or *yantras* which are known to be vehicles for such experiences. Myers regards hypnotism as most beneficial as it can be used to bring previously unknown aspects of the personality to conscious attention, and is one way to reveal a much greater capacity for recall and perception in everyone than is generally acknowledged. It seems that freer access to these previously hidden deeper faculties leads to a kind of clairvoyance.

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[18] *ibid*., p. 129

[19] *ibid*., p. 132

No yogic practices of pratyahara, dharana or dhyana are mentioned by Myers, although these systematic steps to meditation far surpass the scope of hypnosis,[20] and also leave the independence and responsibility of the practitioner intact. However, Myers points out that hypnosis is built on suggestion – and ultimately it is self-suggestion which is the most important. Yogis would agree and use *sankalpas*, resolves, and deep relaxation states combined with self-awareness and positive intent to release the 'genius' aspects of the self. Myers' interpretation of genius is most interesting as it is in line with yogic theories of what happens during samadhi. He states:

> We must here regard the subliminal self as an entity partially distinct from the supraliminal, and its occupation of these brain centres habitually devoted to supraliminal work is a kind of possession. The highest genius would thus be the completest self-possession – the occupation and dominance of the whole organism by those profoundest elements of the self which act from the fullest knowledge and in the wisest way.[21]

Seeing and communicating with the dead or dying

These days many cases can be quoted which seem to prove the fact of telepathy, and we can consult our own experience to show it is no big deal: but mostly these are investigating telepathy between living people. As his work progressed, Myers felt bound to say that:

> The evidence for communication from the departed is now in my personal estimate quite as strong as that for telepathic communication between the living. [22]

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[20] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Yoga Nidra*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 1st ed. 1976

[21] *op cit*., F.W.H. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, p. 293

[22] *ibid*., p. 142

And so we come again nearer to the theme of this book: that death is an evolutionary experience. The caterpillar may never dream of being a butterfly, but unlike our many-footed friend, humans from many cultures really believe that through death we naturally move into a whole new dimension, though devoid of this material form. Myers' research assures him that consciousness does survive death but he asks: Does our personality survive the transition? The yogic answer would be that, if it does, then rebirth is inevitable.

Myers argues that if you 'see' someone, a friend or even someone you have not met previously, at the very time that he is unexpectedly dying, far away and unknown to you, it must mean something. He has recorded several hundred cases where people have experienced this, and has concluded that there must be a causal connection between the death and the perceived apparition, otherwise one would have to doubt the testimony of hundreds of reliable witnesses.

Myers also has a group of cases where there was the exchange of a promise between two friends to appear to one another after death, and concludes that there is real ground to believe that such a pact makes it more likely for communication to occur. He remarks that this provides an opportunity for an experiment which we can all make.

Communication with animals during and after death

Many people have tried to define the difference between human and 'other' animals in terms of emotion, intellect, self-awareness, etc., but maybe what makes human beings different from animals is that the human spirit can be aware of itself after death? And that the disembodied spirit has the ability to communicate to a greater degree with other humans? Even this distinction between animals and humans seems doubtful however. I know of two experiences involving communication with animals during and after death, and would be interested in hearing more.

1. Swami Shaktimudra recounted the story of Misty, a horse that she rode on the family farm. The horse grew old and was retired but the little daughter of Shaktimudra's brother was great friends with Misty and they spent a lot of time together. Then one night, the little girl was very distressed and told her parents that she had dreamed Misty was not able to stand up – and kept insisting that they go and see her. That same night, Shaktimudra dreamed of Misty, although she had not thought of her for a long time. She dreamed that Misty was in a lot of pain. She went to try and help her – Misty recognized her and she was able to soothe her old friend. There was a wave of peace and Misty fell asleep. The next day, unable to quieten their little daughter who kept on repeatedly telling them of her dream, her parents rang the farm – and found out that Misty had died during the night.
2. The second account is of my own experience – about a cat in Hervey Bay. I used to own some land up there. It was just bush, one day I was walking through it and came across a thin female tabby cat, stretched out and fairly rigid on the ground, foaming at the mouth and with eyes half glazed. I assumed she had been poisoned or maybe bitten by a snake. She died soon after I found her, there was nothing I could do to help but I sat there for the little time she had left and tried to soothe her with gentle words and remaining present with her. She died and I chanted *Mahamrityunjaya* mantra for her for some time. I didn't want to bury her so just covered the body with leaves and then walked off to the beach.

   She followed me. It wasn't her body as such but I could definitely perceive her following me, not like a dog, but in the special way in which cats do occasionally accompany a person they like on a walk. She was not suffering anymore and I was glad she was all right but did not really want her following me a long way either. When I got to the beach I walked into the ocean and continued walking up the

beach in shallow water. She didn't follow me there and had left when I came back to dry land.

Communication with people after death

I found that, during the course of writing this book, people came forward to say that they had experiences of death, and that the book would be very helpful. One of these was Kai, a young man from Germany who visited Ganga Darshan ashram in India in 2018. He had studied psychology and had been very wary of the idea of life after death, or of communicating with the dead, however his own experience changed his beliefs.

1. Kai's experience: My grandmother died last year. I had the feeling that I should visit her in the hospital that same day, and prepared a drawing as a gift for her. Unfortunately, I didn't make it on time, and she had already passed away. I went into a deep meditation and told her everything I had wanted to say and said goodbye to her. During the next days I didn't sleep well. Usually I always do. I had the feeling that someone was in my room, and my grandma appeared in my dreams and in my meditations related to chakras.

   I felt her presence for one week, always at 3 am I started communicating with her and we exchanged thoughts and feelings without words. After seven days, I dreamed to hug her goodbye and saw a huge white light. It was a huge experience. I felt myself pulled up through the chakras, my body arched in a spontaneous kriya (movement). I wanted to go. I could have gone also, but I said, "No!" My grandma left, and I stayed. I knew that she had found the way.
2. My own first experience of communicating with someone who had died was as a teenager while I was working as a nursing aide. The hospital I was working in was basically for elderly people who needed a place to live until they died, so death was not new for me. One day, when I started my shift, reading the notes I learned that one lady

who had seemed quite well had died unexpectedly since I was last there. We had been friendly, and I was sad that she had left without me being there.

Although her body had already been taken away, I went into the ward where she used to live to pay my respects, and there she was! A silvery presence, she rose from the chair next to her bed to greet me, but her presence was not so much visual as felt. It was she, and she had been waiting for me so we could say goodbye. She was calm, peaceful and welcoming, just as she had been in life, and the flow of friendship between us was the same. We greeted each other happily, and then she left. I was so happy that she had waited to meet me like that.

Many of us may have our own experiences of this type of communication with deceased human beings, either in waking, dream or meditative states. Myers came across similar accounts as his work progressed, and argues that humans have the capacity to perceive and indeed communicate with disembodied spirits.

> There need be no real break here in my previous line of argument. The subliminal self, which we have already traced through various phases of growing sensitivity, growing independence of organic bonds, will now be studied as sensitive to yet remoter influences – as maintaining an independent existence even when the organism is destroyed.

His researches into the 'phantasms' that the living sometimes perceive proved to him that something survives death. On the subject of apparitions, where people see the dead, or experience other manifestations of the dead, he proposes three conditions that can establish the experience is more than a hallucination or a sensory mistake (like mistaking a rope for a snake).[23]

[23] *ibid*., F.W.H. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death,* p. 170

1. When more than one person is independently affected by the phenomenon;
2. When the phantasm conveys information which the percipient could not have known, but which is afterwards proven to be true;
3. When the appearance, characteristic speech or actions of the phantasm are accurately described by the percipient although he has no way of knowing about these characteristics.

He notes that a disproportionate number of cases of communication with the dead (apart from 'hauntings') occur shortly after the death of the 'person' perceived. This would be in line with the information from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, that the spirit moves on after some time and generally does not stay attached to relatives, the place of death etc. The communication may occur during sleep, as a dream, during a trance induced by crystal gazing or other methods of scrying, or during waking visions, and he gives many case histories of such occurrences. What interests Myers are not hauntings, which seem to be tied to a particular place and incident but are not primarily attempts to communicate with the living. He is interested in meaningful communications with the recognizable personalities of the deceased, especially where knowledge is given or special duties allocated. For example, he quotes (from *Proceedings* S.P.R. vol. x, pp. 380–382) this account by Miss L. Dodson.

> On June 5th, 1887, a Sunday evening, between eleven and twelve at night, being awake, my name was called three times. I answered twice, thinking it was my uncle, 'Come in, Uncle George, I am awake,' but the third time I recognized the voice as that of my mother who had been dead sixteen years. I said 'Mama!' She then came round a screen by my bedside with two children in her arms, and placed them in my arms and put the bedclothes over them and said, 'Lucy, promise me to

take care of them, for their mother is just dead.' I said, 'Yes mamma.' She repeated, '*Promise* me to take care of them.' I replied, 'Yes, I promise you,' and I added, 'Oh mamma, stay and speak to me, I am so wretched.' She replied, 'Not yet, my child,' then she seemed to go round the screen again, and I remained, feeling the children to be still in my arms, and fell asleep. When I awoke there was nothing. Tuesday morning, June 7th, I received the news of my sister-in-law's death. She had given birth to a second child three weeks before, which I did not know till after her death. I had not known she was ill.[24]

As Myers continued his research he came across more and more material and, as it accumulated, he studied death and consciousness from a wider and deeper perspective. His studies convinced him that discarnate spirits do sometimes attempt to communicate and that 'possession' by such spirits may explain such psychological phenomena as alternating personality, split personality and multiple personality disorders. He does not, however, mention any evidence of the intention of these spirits being 'evil' – rather the reverse. He also offers the explanation of temporary possession as a description of what happens to 'sensitives' during successful séances, etc.

The yogic perspective

Myers, it seems, did not have access to the yogic understanding of a person being composed of five koshas, which serve as a chariot for the immortal spirit when it manifests in the mortal world. However, his research was carried out with total commitment and a great deal of self-discipline – and we see that he is describing the same experiences and coming to the same conclusions as the *rishis*, the yogic seers. His researches convince him that the spirit is only attached to its body (its annamaya/manomaya/pranamaya kosha-chariot)

[24] *ibid*., F.W.H. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, p. 185

for the duration of this lifetime – and not necessarily tightly attached either.

> To put the matter briefly, if a spirit from outside can enter the organism, the spirit from inside can go out, can change its center of perception and action, in a way less complete and irrevocable than the change of death. Ecstasy would thus be simply the complementary or correlative aspect of spirit-control.[25]

Such realizations are liberating; and need not be frightening. Although in the Middle Ages people were persecuted for having such realizations and the skills and powers attendant on the opening of vijnanamaya and anandamaya koshas, one would hope that witch hunts and crucifixion of saints are aberrations of the past. Working with vijnanamaya and anandamaya koshas means exploring the unconscious and blissful superconscious aspects of one's self, and human beings need to evolve their consciousness.

There is nothing wrong with striving to evolve beyond a limited physical and sensory world view while we are still alive – to live happily and practise positive acceptance of all the life around us. Rather, the ability to experience and even transmit bliss, ongoing happiness and ecstasy regardless of external situations is one of the most widely acknowledged attributes of saintly, sattwic or spiritual people.

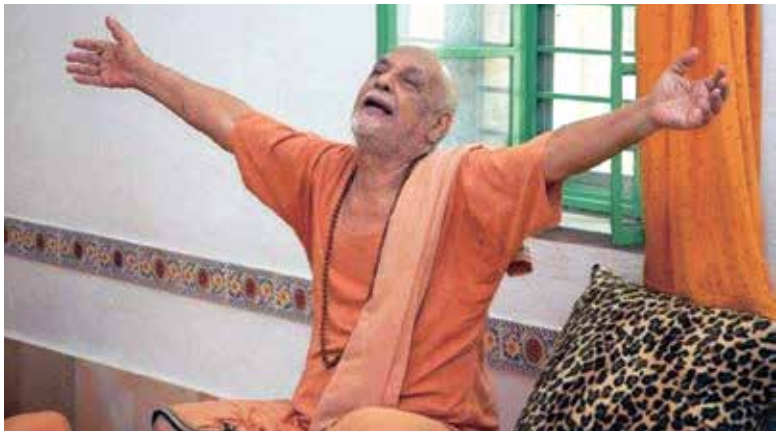
> It is hardly a paradox to say that the evidence for ecstasy is stronger than the evidence for any other religious belief. Of all the subjective experiences of religion, ecstasy is that which has been most urgently, perhaps to the psychologist most convincingly, asserted; and it is not confined to any one religion . . . From the medicine man of the lowest savages up to St John, St Peter, St. Paul, with Buddha and Mahomet on the way, we find records which, though morally and intellectually much differing, are in psychological essence the same.

[25] *ibid*., p. 294

> At all stages alike we find that the spirit is conceived as quitting the body; or, if not quitting it, at least as greatly expanding its range of perception in some state resembling trance. Observe, moreover, that on this view all genuine recorded forms of ecstasy are akin, and all of them represent a real fact.[26]

The trance of the saint, the samadhi of a yogi, the state of nirvana for the Buddhist result in a state of being far more refined and potent – and rare – than the state of consciousness usually found in human beings. Many people may have experienced expanded consciousness and bliss fleetingly, however, the main difference is that the truly evolved beings maintain the state of bliss which we sometimes experience fleetingly, by chance or through sadhana, as their default setting, as their core samskara, as their innermost self.

This subtle aspect of consciousness survives death. In evolved beings, rather than karmic debts related to personality pulling one quickly into *bhu loka*, earth, and rebirth, a blissful and expanded state of consciousness can be experienced in other dimensions.



[26] *ibid*., F.W.H. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, p. 295

8

Near Death Experiences and Research

In his research on near-death experiences (NDEs), Dr Raymond A. Moody Junior has interviewed over 2000 people, many of whom were declared clinically dead but have lived to tell of their experiences. He published his findings in his book, *Life after Life*. The preface was written by Melvin Morse M.D. (neuroscientist) who points out that in the past people were familiar "with the spiritual aspects of dying", though in the 20th century it became necessary to prove that the visions of another life experienced by so many as they went through the process of dying "were real and not simply hallucinations of the dying mind". Now he feels there is a change of awareness and, "virtually every conscious researcher and medical scientist in the field agrees that these experiences are a real and natural part of the dying process."[1]

Dr Elisabeth Kubler-Ross was one of the foremost pioneers of this new awareness. She listened to the experiences of people who were dying and developed great insight into their fears and how they can be helped. In her Foreword to his book, *Life after Life*, she supports Moody's research into the experiences of patients who have been declared dead, but who then returned to life totally against expectations. She mentions that in her research too:

[1] Moody, Raymond A. *Life After Life, The Investigation of a phenomenon – the Survival of Bodily Death*, copyright 1975 Rider's 25th Anniversary edition, 2001, Preface by Dr Melvin Morse, pp. xiii–xiv

> Patients have experienced a floating out of their physical bodies, associated with a great sense of peace and wholeness. Most were aware of another person who helped them in their transition to another plane of existence. Most were greeted by loved ones, or by a religious figure who was significant in their life and who coincided, naturally, with their own religious beliefs.[2]

Dr Moody's research

Dr Moody presented a lot of information about the out-of-body experiences people sometimes undergo when they are approaching death, and his book established the study of NDEs. The short documentary film on Near Death Experiences – *Life After Life*, made by Cascom Films, in association with his research, consists of six interviews with people who had NDEs. Their descriptions of a bright light accord with the description of the Clear Light that one must recognize as part of oneself in the moment of death, according to the *Bardo Thodol*. It seems they had not read that scripture – they were simply relating their own experiences.

The *Garuda Purana* confirms that at first many people do not recognize their own dead bodies, or the fact that they are dead. The average person identifies himself mainly with the physical body. It is therefore very confusing and difficult to accept the idea of one's consciousness functioning without the body. The rituals enjoined in the *Garuda Purana* help one to accept one's new state, otherwise one may not recognize the death experience for a considerable time.

Meetings between the living and the dead

The *Bardo Thodol* mentions that when one first dies, even if one tries repeatedly to make contact with the living, they can't perceive you. In the scriptures, establishing communication between the living and the dead is not

[2] *ibid*., Foreword by Dr Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, p. xxii

recommended; rather they highlight meetings between the individual spirit and divine forces. Also, the scriptures speak of the pain the spirit experiences when hearing the weeping and wailing of relatives, and thus encourage one to let go and not cling on to attachments with the old life.

> You see your relatives and connections and speak to them, but receive no reply. Then seeing them and your family weeping, you think, 'I am dead! What shall I do?' and feel great misery like a fish cast out (of water) on red hot embers. Such misery you will be feeling at present. But feeling miserable will avail you nothing now. If you have a divine guru, pray to him.[3]

Turning point



Often, when people have an NDE their understanding about their own self changes, and they begin a turning inward toward the more transcendental part of their nature. In the *Bardo Thodol* this is counted as a significant turning point.

The big realization was how everything is interconnected. There was a self-assessment – not a judgment by someone else – connected with this new awareness.

Self-assessment and interconnectedness

The understanding of the interconnectedness of all things is one of the very important underlying tenets of vedic astrology.

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[3] Evans-Wentz W.Y. ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*, according to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English rendering, Oxford University Press, London, 3rd ed 1957 (1st 1927), pp. 161 ff

> An unholistic attitude is an unholy attitude, a disintegrated view of the world . . . everything has to interact with everything, be it animate or inanimate.[4]

This insight is one of the major boons of ancient tapasyas, such as the Panchagni sadhana. Both Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjanananda spoke of this living realization while performing the Panchagni – but more especially it has permeated their lives. Swami Satyananda learned intuitively of disasters that had struck desolated families living in his district, and sent disciples to help them establish new homes and livelihoods. He also established the annual Sat Chandi Yajna in Rikhia, at which daan is distributed to the needy. Swami Niranjanananda had already established organizations to help the children and youths in his district of Munger. Since performing Panchagni he has also established the tradition of giving daan to different sections of the community on the Sankranti day of each month. One month it will be 108 fisher-folk who receive, the next, rickshaw drivers, the next, metal workers or school cooks, and so forth.



[4] Gaur, Col A.K. *Introduction to Astrology*, Gaumat Press Bulandshahr, New Delhi, India, 2001, p. 39

However, the realization is multi-levelled. These generous activities can be seen as solid attempts to recognize the integrated nature of society, and uplift those in need, but actually it isn't a physical thing but a projection of inner realization.

> With the mind harmonized by yoga one sees the Self abiding in all beings and all beings in the Self; he sees the same everywhere.
>
> One who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me never becomes separated from Me, nor do I become separated from that one. (*Bhagavad Gita* 6:44–47)

The understanding of interconnectedness extends to all beings, not just us humans. It includes animals, trees, rivers, the sun, moon, and other divine forces. Working towards the healthy ecology of Earth is not only an essential need of the time, but is a result of inner realization, therefore Swami Niranjanananda is now reviving vedic tenets on how to live in harmony with nature.

The understanding that our lives project our inner thoughts, problems and aims is yet another level of this interconnectedness. Maybe this is one reason why Swami Niranjan gives the sequence of meditations in this book – they can be used to improve the quality of this life and the next.

Swami Sivananda explains the interconnectedness of all the *lokas*, or *bardos*, or states of consciousness. It is not just in this life that we are subject to the law of karma through our actions and attitudes.

> During one's stay in the astral plane, the scenes of the past life are reviewed one after another, but with a difference; one is identified with all the actors in every situation. For example, one feels as one did while torturing a person, and one also feels the pain that the person who was being tortured felt. This process exhausts one's karma to a degree and provides useful lessons. Karmic purgation

occurs when both the oppressor and the oppressed have been able to excuse each other. Retaliation only causes arguments and bondage.[5]

Associated questions

Nowadays very probably more people are having NDEs because of modern resuscitation procedures. So, when is death, or how is death identified? From a philosophical point of view, we may say it is either the end of everything for the individual, or the portal to another dimension of consciousness, but practically speaking:

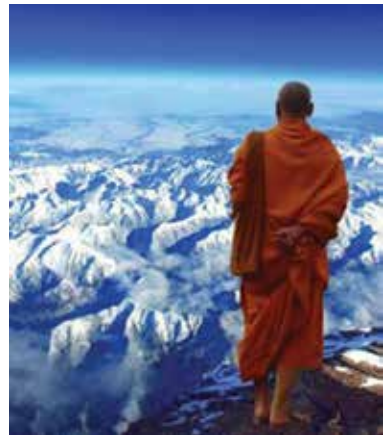
1. The clinical definition is: when the heart stops beating, breathing stops and the blood pressure drops for an extended time.
2. A modern definition is: when there is an absence of brain wave activity (as shown by EEG).
3. The common definition is: an irreversible loss of vital functions (in other words if the person comes back to life then he was never dead).

So, could NDEs just be hallucinations or part of a normal (but interrupted) shutting down process? Whether we call them hallucinations or 'normal' unexplained experiences, the positive life changes that NDEs are often associated with make the NDE very worthy of investigation. And Moody repeatedly stresses that such patients are profoundly changed and imbued with a totally new value system. They want to form loving relationships with fellow human beings. They have no more fear of death whatsoever, whether they were religious or atheist previously.

Sogyal Rimpoche was born in Tibet, and was recognized as the incarnation of Terton Sogyal, who had been a teacher of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. He entered the monastery of his master at the age of six months and his training included

[5] Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga, Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, p. 59

specific techniques for guiding the dead and dying. He refers to the extended awareness and sensitivity in people undergoing NDEs, and makes it clear that people who actually go all the way across the bridge often experience these out of body experiences for days at a time before death.



> Most people die in a state of unconsciousness. One fact we have learned from the near-death experiences is that comatose and dying patients may be much more aware of things around them than we realize. Many of the near-death experiencers reported out-of-the-body experiences, from which they were able to give surprisingly accurate detailed accounts of their surroundings and even, in some cases, of other rooms in the same hospital. This clearly shows the importance of talking positively and frequently to a dying person or to a person in a coma. Conscious, alert, and actively loving care for the dying person must go on until the last moments of his or her life.[6]

Home-made research

Moody presents many more case histories, he mentions in *Life After Life* that he had collected over 150 well-researched and authenticated reports – but because of some restrictions does not give names etc. The people on his internet video clip speak freely, and a sense is conveyed of how important the experience was to them. Moody also claims that in any group with which he spoke, he found about one in thirty

[6] Sogyal Rimpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Rupa & Co., New Delhi, India, 1996, p. 190

would have had an NDE themselves, but when they tried to tell people what happened they faced scepticism or worse and so stopped talking about it.

After reading that, I decided to mention to people that I was writing a book on death, and through that I met Abbha, who told me she used to be a fashion designer but, after her near-death experience, her interests had changed radically and her main interest now was the spiritual path. When I expressed interest, she willingly gave an account of her experiences.

1. Abbha's experiences

It was around September–October 2003 when life for me seemed to be really low, I hadn't been happy with the things happening in my life for quite a while. I can say today that I was depressed. I had stopped eating properly and mostly survived on sugarcane juice, cigarettes and biscuits. I was living in a hostel doing my post graduate study and would visit home once a week or so and eat proper food there. My health was not good. I started having asthma attacks and often I rushed to hospital for the incubator.

I was at home when I fell sick starting with high fever and weakness. After two days the fever was still increasing so Mom called the doctor. I was shivering and started passing urine in the bed and was too weak to walk. Early next morning Mom arranged for my sister's boss to drive me to the hospital. I can remember getting out of bed and Mom and my sister holding me in front of the lift. What happens next in real life is different to what I know of.

My version

The next thing I remember is opening my eyes in the Intensive Care Unit with the index finger of both hands tied to the hospital bed and also the big toe of both feet. One of my best friends was standing by the bed and I was complaining, "Look what they've done to

me – please ask them to open it up." So they opened the knots and set me free, then slowly people came in to visit me. Trust me when I say that I met people that day, for the first and last time, who had donated their blood for me, and when I look back I think of them as angels sent to save my life. That was quite an experience and lesson for me in life.

The IVs in my neck and hands were very uncomfortable. Lying on the bed for days I really had no idea how I was till one day I finally got out of hospital though they advised me to rest for the next two months. Once I was back home I felt better every single day with Mom and my sister helping me to bathe, take food, everything. I found out what had happened from my Mom's point of view. It came as such a surprise to me that I laughed, I could not relate to what she said had happened after I collapsed outside the lift. The 48-hour story that she and my family shared with me was quite different from the one I remembered.

My family's version

I was rushed to the ICCU. Upon arrival, they could not find my pulse or heartbeat. They cut open a small portion on the right side of my throat where they luckily found the last pulsating vein. They punctured it for the IV. The doctor examined me and said he would do his best but could not assure my Mom that I would be a normal person even if he was successful. He said I could have any organ failure or malfunction, loss of memory, etc. My haemoglobin had gone to 1.75 which in medical terms is the stage when a person is said to be clinically dead. They gave me a full blood transfusion and were giving me platelets, and white blood cells too. My Mom had got healing prayers done for my recovery too, and slowly slowly, after 48 hours work by the doctors, they revived me and I opened my eyes and regained consciousness by the grace of God.

I remember Mom waking me up and saying "We're taking you to the hospital." I remember her helping me into a jacket and getting me to the lift – I even remember her pressing the lift button. After that I have a very faint memory of being in a car, nothing very clear about that.

The next thing I remember very clearly is that I'm in this beautiful, very serene place. It's white all around. Everything is white, including the trees, plants, road, the sky, the whole of nature. There was a very strong feeling of peace, oneness and serenity there and purity in its truest form. I can never ever forget that place or that world I visited. That's all I remember – the feeling of that place. I cannot describe it but since I came back to life I still know I reached that place and can have that serene feeling when I close my eyes and think of it. It was as if everything was one. There was a very, very strong feeling of oneness, as if everything was nothing but the same thing in different forms and shapes. It was an awesome feeling. I had a very strong feeling of contentment and completeness in all senses. It was as if I was in a complete state of TRUE BLISS.

When I came back to consciousness and opened my eyes in the hospital I realized that such a place existed where everything is pure and one. I felt I always wanted to carry that place with me. Initially, all I needed to do was close my eyes and concentrate, I could always carry that place within me. I maintained that state of mind intermittently for the next few years until I got so caught up with worldly things again that slowly that memory and state of mind began to fade. Even today, when I really relax and go into a state of deep meditation I visit that place and the whole feeling of that place is experienced by every single cell of my body. It is rare but I do still manage to visit there.

I remember opening my eyes in this world and my best friend standing in front of me, but I wanted to go back

to that world – the world of oneness and purity. What a blissful place.

My reflections on my NDE

For the next few years I never could understand where I had been, but I knew for sure that I had been to that place, as it was not a dream but a real place that I actually visited. I did not have a rational explanation for it, but I knew it existed and that my feelings were true. At that time I did not know about NDEs as such – although my family had kept on telling me that I had come out of the mouth of death. Then, once, when I was sharing this experience of mine with someone, I suddenly realized that this was a NDE so slowly it made sense to me. I even started watching documentaries and reading about NDEs in order to understand what it really was that I actually experienced. After this research, I was sure that I'd had an NDE.

In my second life (as I call it), my spiritual journey began. In December 2003, I learned Reiki as I had found it so good when my mother did it for me in the Intensive Care Unit as well as afterwards when I came back home. In 2004, I went for vipassana meditation. That was another life transforming experience as I began to understand the significance of non-attachment and non-reaction.

In 2013, I felt a strong need for a spiritual Guru and after some signs and searching I found my Guru in Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati. After spending a year in my Guru's ashram doing a one-year diploma in yogic studies, I know that he is there besides me every moment of my life guiding me in the right direction to do the right karmas. My parents and my husband have also asked for mantra initiation from my Guru. Today I have no fear in my life. I feel so secure and never feel alone anymore as deep down I know he is always by my side and that is my biggest strength to face all the ups and downs of my life.

My approach to life has changed. My level of stress and anxiety came down dramatically. I became more sensitive to subtle energy and vibrations. A lot of queries in my life got answered and things started making sense. One fine day I realized that my NDE was nothing more than an experience of *Aham Brahmasmi*. Ever since then I have tried to keep this in mind while doing anything and everything. It is the lesson of my life. I know now that once I am able to extend that moment/experience into every single minute of my living, and actually live it, that I have attained everything required.

Abbha considers that this experience of a different stage of consciousness where she was perceiving things beyond the sensory limits of her own body changed her self-perception. The experiences and visions that she went through changed her values and her whole life.

Abbha told me her brother-in-law had also had an NDE. He had written an article about it some time ago so she thought he would be willing to share the experience. She enthusiastically emailed her brother-in-law, Khalid Abackar, and told him of this book and asked if he would send an account of his NDE. He did so and when Ajmal, his brother turned up to take his young wife Abbha home once she had successfully completed the diploma course, I asked him to check that what I had was a fair copy.

I asked him whether the experience had seemed to change Khalid's life in any way (as Abbha's had changed her). Ajmal mentioned that Khalid has now become interested in Sufism and hinted that the experience had not just affected Khalid but the whole family.

2. Khalid's experiences

I was working for the United Arab Emirates' military land force camp and stayed in a small town which was some distance away from my workplace. Travelling back home every day was not convenient so during the weekdays I

would stay at my workplace, but on Thursdays I would make sure I would return home for the weekend.

Ramadan (the holy month for Muslims) was going on and it was a Thursday so I decided to travel back home at night after breaking my fast and finishing my prayers. I had to carry some cash from the workplace to deposit in the bank on Sunday, thus I was very cautious as to whom I would travel back home with. After I'd finished my prayers that evening, I learned that one of my colleagues who was a military policeman was going to the town where I lived as he had to see off his parents who were going to Hajj that very night.

It was a windy day and we had to travel 50 km to reach my town on the desert roads. At night the roads were pretty empty, hardly any traffic, but that was the usual time for heavy trucks to commute, also there could always be unexpected sandstorms, so one had to be very careful. However, Arab people love speed and they tend to drive very fast. My Arabian colleague was also in a hurry to meet his parents before they left, so he was driving faster than usual. We were cruising at an average of 160 miles an hour.

The drive was going smoothly until on one right curve in the road, we saw a big truck coming quite fast from the opposite track. The officer applied his brakes quickly but the vehicle went out of control and skidded severely. The vehicle rolled thrice on the road with us inside – then I was finally thrown out into the desert. I had a strange feeling all the while of witnessing this whole accident. I felt, 'Something major is going to happen' and then the next moment I completely blacked out.

After some moments, when I regained my consciousness, I felt I was dead, but then I noticed my body getting wet (probably with my blood) which made me realize that I was still alive. Then I tried to move my hand towards my head, as I felt a lot of blood pouring out from my nose and ears. I found I was sitting still at the accident spot,

completely conscious, and in fact very concerned about the company's cash that I was carrying in my pocket. After some moments, some people came to check on us, and among them was one man who started going through my pockets and stole the money from me. I so badly wanted to scream out loud or move my hand to stop him from robbing me but all in vain.

After some time I was rushed to the hospital in a vehicle. I could hear what the doctors and nurses were saying but I was losing my consciousness off and on, and everything seemed like disconnected dreams. The next thing I remember is feeling a pipe inside my throat and I felt severe pain too. I could hear the discussion and worries that the doctor was sharing with his colleague regarding my life. I started going unconscious more often. I tried opening my eyes and could see a board with ICU written on it. My consciousness was switching on and off more rapidly.

In one of the conscious states I strongly remember an Indian nurse who was holding my hand and praying hard for my recovery and life. Her presence was giving me a strong level of comfort which I really cannot express in words. I could feel a strange but strong connection with her.

The next thing I remember is I'm travelling in a tunnel of light. I felt strong white light beams filling that tunnel, and I was slowly merging into that light. I could feel my life detaching from me slowly and gently. When I was going through all this feeling, it was strange but I could still feel the day and night passing by and the people and visitors at the hospital. I was going through that light tunnel with an awesome feeling and no worries about anything, not even my life, my parents or my much loved daughter. It was as if I was merging into death with all happiness. I had a feeling, 'I'm going to meet someone special'.

The next thing I remember is that I'm sitting in a handcart and an old man in white, with white hair and a

white beard, is dragging me up a cliff. I began to wonder about where he was taking me, and just then that man turned and gave me a beautiful smile. Next, I remember getting to the top of the cliff and getting mesmerized by all the beautiful scenery around. I remember jumping out of the cart and getting lost in the beauties of nature surrounding me. I remember all of nature was pure white – everything – including the sky, the waterfall, the pine trees, the road – everything. Everything was simply sparkling white. Everything seemed to be one yet in different forms. I remember turning round to see the old man but he had vanished.

Then the next thing I remember is hearing the beep sound in the hospital. I had regained my full consciousness and was back in reality. I could hear the cheerfulness in the doctor's voice. I was back from wherever I had gone.

I still have the memory of the old man dragging me up the cliff, his smile, and the beautiful serene nature I was surrounded by. The surprising part is that I never saw that nurse ever again in my life, even though I was in the hospital for a month after regaining full consciousness. Now, when I look back and think of her, I wonder if she was real or an angel.

Ajmal's comments on this whole experience and its effects on his brother were fascinating, so they are also included here.

Ajmal's analysis of Khalid's NDE

As a younger brother and good friend, I have heard Khalid's NDE from him many times. There are a few things which caught my attention regarding how cultural and social learning influences our manifestations even when we have an NDE.

Khalid saw an energetic man who was tall and had long white hair and a beard. This might be his projection of God or Allah – his early learning and understanding. Even though the concept of Allah in Islam is formless, timeless

and spaceless, people tend to imagine an old man with a white beard and hair who is residing in the sky.

The pine trees, the beautiful valley and waterfalls I thought might have come from the literature (especially German and Russian) he has read.

His experience was very compelling and got me interested in NDEs. When I researched more on NDEs, I could see there are many people who are experiencing white light or things in a white colour. White is the combination of all colours in the colour spectrum – in other words, when we are approaching death, we might experience a colourless world – when there are no colours, you can't differentiate things. All the things that we perceive in the world will merge into one universal consciousness, *Aham Brahmasmi*. That might be the ecstasy which people often experience while having NDEs. I would like to recollect one of the practices a Sufi (an Islamic mystic) asked me to do to experience God. He said, 'For the next month, start looking at the world without colours. If you do it with high alertness, you will start experiencing what is God.'

Another important thing I noticed was how disconnected Khalid was from his family, even though he was very close to his wife and four-year-old daughter. Also, it was strange that our mother sensed that something bad was going to happen to Khalid, her eldest son, before anyone brought this news home.

Let me explain the incident as I remember it

It was Ramadan. I was just a kid. Khalid's wife and daughter, my elder sister and my mother were at home. My father and another elder brother, Zubair, were out at the mosque for evening prayer when a family friend who rarely visits came by asking for my uncle and decided to wait.

When my uncle came home, immediately my mother started asking, "What has happened to my son Khalid?"

I felt it was very strange why she was specifically asking about Khalid since her husband and other son were also not at home. When I asked her about this afterwards, she confirmed that she had been having a strange feeling that day since 5 pm – that was Indian time – which is about 6.30 in the United Arab Emirates – and that was exactly around the time Khalid had his accident.

When I am analyzing the whole experience, I realize that our mother had an intuition about the accident, and so did Khalid. It shows that we know what is going to happen though maybe it will get transmitted into our understanding only when we are aware and know how to trust our intuition.

At times I wonder if the lady nurse who Khalid mentioned in his NDE was his manifestation of our mother. This is a strong possibility because our mother was praying so deeply until the time he recovered completely. The doctors at the hospital who treated Khalid later confirmed that it was just a miracle that he survived.

3. Sannyasi Jyotiprabha's experience

Sannyasi Jyotiprabha, from Bulgaria, had taken a book out of the ashram library on how to help the dying. I was wanting the same book and during the ensuing conversation she explained that she had died and been brought back to life when she was a teenager. The experiences at that time changed her life.

I had a Near Death Experience (NDE) when I was 16 years old. I was very sick. It was December, one or two days after Christmas. The temperature outside was below zero. I was waiting at a bus station to go home but the bus was an hour late. I was freezing and caught a cold – it was a usual cold but with coughing, fever and throat pain. In the evening I started taking the prescribed medicines but there was no improvement.

The next day I was worse. At that time my family home had only two rooms: one for my parents and my brother,

who was small, and one for me and my grandmother, which we also used for eating meals, cooking and even taking a bath in winter time. In the evening I was lying on the bed, covered with all the blankets we had and freezing. The family members started coming back home, but no one noticed anything unusual and I was not in a condition to give any sign that I was unwell.

When my Mom came home, she noticed the moment she entered the room, she was able to hear my unspoken plea for help – at this point I still wanted to be saved. She became afraid – why was I sleeping so early? She took my temperature and gave me analgesics. They didn't help. She called a nurse to give me injections for the fever, but they could not get my temperature below 40 degrees and I was taken to hospital. They had to give many medicines straight away to reduce the fever – there was no clear diagnosis, but they thought maybe the infection in the throat had spread. The pain was horrible. I was in the hospital emergency room. I knew I was dying, and I accepted it. It is very easy to accept when the body gives up.

My focus naturally turned towards death. My awareness extended. I knew my mother's condition. I became aware of the intentions of the doctor – what he was doing and why. He didn't allow me to lie down but kept me sitting up and asking me questions – I answered only with "Ah" or "Uhu", but he was checking to see if I was still conscious.

Suddenly he said, "What is your name?" I couldn't answer – it was too complicated. This indicated for me, as well as for the doctor, that the moment was very close. Then my out of the body experience started and at this point I didn't want to be saved and come back because of the intense pain – but the doctor started proceedings to bring me back.

People used to say that as you die, the whole of your life passes before your eyes. For me it was a broadening of awareness. Awareness of the whole life as one. Some moments were highlighted – like impressions, good or bad,

or moments when I was told a lie – I didn't know it was a lie at the time but in this condition I could recognize the lie – and I was aware of what was the truth also.

It was some state of truth and clearing and correcting of different information. Some things were appearing like obstacles on my way. The brightest or strongest obstacle was the understanding that my Mom would be very sad if I died – but even that was not strong enough to hold me and stop me from passing away. At that young age there is nothing solid – the mind is flexible, the heart is free, things are floating – even death.

I realized that nothing was important, I didn't need anything. I felt absolutely complete and self-sustained. There was no pain, no cold, no activity, no thoughts. There was no sensation or memory or awareness of the previous moments and experiences, it was only peace, comfort. I think that is the comfort the baby feels in the mother's womb.

At that time the doctor decided that I was young, and my heart was strong enough to handle a shock so he asked the nurses to take off all my clothes and wrap me with wet sheets. The difference of the temperature between my body temperature and the wet cold sheets was hard to handle. It can make your heart stop, but the difference between the state of peace and being back in the damaged body was huge – unbearable psychically as well. The whole transition was very rough. I couldn't do anything to stop the nurses. I tried to say something but I had no voice. The first sound to come was a cry, I thought, that's why babies cry when they take birth, because the transition is painful, at all levels and perceptions.

I spent many months in the hospitals. It took two years to recover completely so I had enough time to analyze, contemplate and recall this experience. I accepted it as God's will. I continue to live without fear of death because I realized that living is a constant disturbance to our

natural state. There are activities happening all the time mentally right from the moment we are born, even if we are not aware of them. Death is a relief from that, when the right time comes – so what is there to be afraid of?

4. Swami Shaktimudra's experience

Swami Shaktimudra had already dedicated her life to a spiritual path by taking sannyasa before her NDE, but she still counts the experience as life changing, causing a deepening in her level of commitment and her view of the meaning of life.

Once I got very sick in India. I had a typhoid and my bowel perforated, causing peritonitis. After a month in an Indian hospital I was flown back to Australia on the first day that I could survive the journey. Doctors in Melbourne did not believe what had happened – and said I should be dead. I had kept myself alive by doing mental nadi shodhana.

After another three weeks – seven weeks in total since I became sick – I was finally operated on. The surgeon called the family as he thought I may not survive the night.

After five and a half hours of meticulous surgery, I left my body. I was heading up and away when I was presented with a choice of death or life. I remember choosing to come back. The thought at the time was to learn how to live more graciously. So I came back into my body. I spent the next month very sick and was a total of three months in hospital. No one expected me to live – except the surgeon who saved my life, everyone thought I would die of complications in six days, six weeks, or six months maximum.

When I finally got out of hospital (eight different hospitals during the three months) I got gastroenteritis and was dying again. This time I was given the choice of being a sick person or a well person. I took courage to

make the decision to be a well person – vijnanamaya level. Then a lot of healing took place without a lot of effort on my part.

I did yoga nidra to a 20-minute tape. Afterwards I would not be able to move for the next two hours, experiencing light and healing pouring in. For six months I did 20 minutes of mental nadi shodhana each day at sunrise and sunset. This brought back my prana that had been totally depleted.

Sometimes I think that if I'd known how much effort it would take to be healthy for the first eight and a half years, I would have taken the decision to die.

I'm not sure I would have survived without Guru's grace. I got better by living at a yoga ashram: being able to give to others rather than being self-absorbed.

NDEs and evolution

The *Bardo Thodal* explains that we will experience illusions and subjective hallucinations as we pass through the moments of death. Just as the type of life one lives, and even the dreams one dreams in everyday material life, depend to a great extent on our conditioning and expectations, so also do the visions and experiences one encounters during death and in the bardos of death. But the point is, can we maintain the witnessing attitude, can we remain alert and aware and see what is going on? This is important in life, and when we are tugged by the current of the karmic river we experience after death, it is even more important.

In both life and death, we need to ask ourselves in what direction we are being pushed by our *samskaras*, our habitual interpreting mechanisms. So NDEs are evolutionary in the sense that afterwards, one tends to see oneself not mainly as a body-mind but more as a soul/mind housed in a body for the duration of this lifetime. Thoughts and drives geared for one's own survival and pleasure become less important; one feels an urge to serve others and begins to think more deeply about the purpose of life so one's nature becomes softer,

more enlightened. Also, it seems one becomes generally more aware of life and what it has to offer, and yet is able to retain the witnessing attitude.

Ramana Maharshi



Ramana Maharshi, in the last century, was recognized as a *jeevanmukti*, a saint of such high calibre that he was liberated while alive. Like Swami Sivananda, he exhibited saintly qualities even in childhood. At the age of 16, however, Ramana Maharshi went through an experience where he wilfully went into the experience of dying. We can think of this turning point in his life as an interesting variant on an NDE. There was no physical cause for the intense out-of-body-experience that he went through, it seems his urge to understand his own true nature and the truth about life and death catapulted him into the next phase of his life. He says:

> I was sitting alone in a room on the first floor of my uncle's house. I seldom had any sickness, and on that day there was nothing wrong with my health, but a sudden violent fear of death overtook me. There was nothing in my state of health to account for it, and I did not try to account for it or to find out if there was any reason for the fear. I just felt 'I am going to die' and began thinking what to do about it. It did not occur to me to consult a doctor or my elders or friends; I felt that I had to solve the problem myself, there and then.
>
> The shock of the fear of death drove my mind inwards and I said to myself mentally, without actually framing the words: 'Now death has come; what does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies.' And I at once dramatized the occurrence of death. I lay with my limbs stretched out stiff as though rigour mortis had set in

> and imitated a corpse so as to give greater reality to the enquiry. I held my breath and kept my lips tightly closed so that no sound could escape, so that neither the word 'I' nor any other word could be uttered. 'Well then,' I said to myself, 'this body is dead. It will be carried stiff to the burning ground and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body am I dead? Is the body 'I'? It is silent and inert but I feel the full force of my personality and even the voice of the 'I' within me, apart from it. So I am spirit transcending the body. The body dies but the Spirit that transcends it cannot be touched by death. That means I am the deathless Spirit.' All this was not dull thought; it flashed through me vividly as living truth which I perceived directly, almost without thought-process . . . From that moment onwards the 'I' or Self focused attention on itself by a powerful fascination. Fear of death had vanished once and for all. Absorption in the Self continued unbroken from that time on.[7]

It was when he came out of that experience that his whole life and expression changed. He left home, left body consciousness, and travelled to the feet of his guru (the mountain Arunachela) who taught through silence. To make this a bit easier, we can remember that this mountain in the south of India is thought of as a *shivalingam*, a symbol of Lord Shiva or higher consciousness.



[7] Osborne, Arthur, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, President Sri Ramanashramam, Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, India, 2010

9

Rebirth and Research

How much do we remember the concept of the Law of Karma governing our lives? This is thought of as a truism in most eastern cultures. There is some debate on how much is destined, and how much can be changed by effort, but generally speaking this resolves into a discussion of how one can skilfully adjust to or manage one's responses and behaviour within the general framework and force of karma. Dr Hiroshi Motoyama, a research scholar from Japan specializing in designing equipment to measure subtle energy flows, comments that although karma controls life, one can change the way the past manifests in one's life. For him, the point of a spiritual consultation is to teach ways to dissolve a specific karma that is manifesting problematically.

> I have grown to believe that the reason we are born here on Earth is to work on the dissolution of various karmas that bind us to this dimension in order to advance to a point where we are able to transcend karma completely.[1]

One might expect that an astrologer would definitely be on the side of karma causing unalterable destiny, but in fact that seems not to be the case. Vedic astrology is called *jyotisha*, meaning 'the eye of the Veda'. The science is subtle, and

[1] Motoyama, Dr. Hiroshi, ed and trans. RB Ouchi, *Karma & Reincarnation*, pub Judy Piathus, London, UK, 1992, p. 8

awareness is considered to be a force in itself. Being able to accept and understand why a particular thing is going to happen means one can deal with it more skilfully, and the results or the ensuing karma will therefore be more auspicious. Richard Houck, a western astrologer who has great respect for the Indian system of astrology, comments:



> The inevitability of death is life's most fundamental fact. Its acceptance, or avoidance, affects the fundamental quality of our anxieties and desires. These, in turn, affect the will and therefore our fundamental human behaviours. I would ask the reader to give some extended thought to how lives would be led if the moment of death was known to all from the moment of birth. My personal feeling is that such knowledge would be highly salubrious with regard to true spiritual development. But maybe not.[2]

Karma and rebirth

Most people do not know the time they will die – often they don't really believe they will die either – and in the West, many doubt that they will be reborn. This uncertainty and rejection in the face of death is not a world-wide phenomenon. The Tibetan culture has been based on the sure and certain knowledge that the Dalai Lama will be reborn, and will give directions so that his new incarnation can be found. The present Dalai Lama is the 14th, and was recognized at the age of two as replacing the 13th Dalai Lama.

People often ask questions wanting a particular sort of reply, but the answer may rather provoke a lot more

[2] Houck, Richard, *The Astrology of Death*, GP Groundswell Press, Gaithersburg, USA 1994, pp. 22–23

questions that one has to answer for oneself. For example, in April 2007 Swami Niranjanananda was asked:

Does rebirth exist?

It is a very interesting question and I would like to answer it, although it can be brushed off easily. The whole of humanity is divided into two: fifty-fifty. One half believes that incarnation or rebirth happens and the other half believes that it does not happen. Religions, intellectuals and thinkers are divided on this topic; some believe that rebirth can happen while others believe that it does not happen. You have heard all the discussions before both against and in favour of rebirth, so me telling you today whether it happens or not is not going to make any difference to you, therefore I am not even going to bother. Maybe it happens and maybe it does not happen. What I would like to look at however is the drawbacks and the merits of someone deciding that it happens or that it does not happen.

Let us say it does not happen. What are the merits and demerits of rebirth not happening? Think about that. If you believe that rebirth does not happen, then this is the only life that you live. In infinite time, this is the only one time when you appear, like a flash, and then disappear again. Therefore, in this life it might be better to just enjoy it; earn money, take loans and enjoy the good life before you die, because you are not accountable to anything or anyone and nobody is going to bug you after you die, anyway. This non-believing attitude gives birth to an aggressive, materialistic mentality which is known in India as the *charvak* philosophy, a system that accepts only what one can see as valid.

The merit in this idea is, 'Enjoy this life and that's it, nothing more to it'. The demerit is the aggressive, materialistic tendency which gives rise to the negative traits of personality: anger, possessiveness, hatred, the search for power. It distances you from the balancing and

positive qualities of life such as sympathy, compassion and affection. The mind and heart become very hard and instead of living the life of a human being, you will be living life in a different manner.

Now let us suppose that reincarnation happens. I see this as the check and control of life – the belief that one's consciousness is evolving continuously. If rebirth did not happen, if you only had to live one life and there was no rebirth, then there would be no ongoing evolution. Evolution is perceived as the changes that you observe in consciousness, it is a continuing process.



Look at the DNA helix for example. Is the information contained in the DNA helix acquired in one lifetime only, or is there something at the physical level that has come with you through all the generations? Genetic information has come down through all the generations of parents to you; their memories, their knowledge, their understanding, their impressions and their samskaras. If this is happening at the physical level, just imagine the mental DNA helix. Imagine the DNA helix of consciousness, which goes back into infinity. This continuity is the evolution of consciousness that everybody speaks about. The body may not be the same, that is all right, but the inner substance will continue.

The seed you plant today will break its shell in the course of time and a soft seedling will push itself through the hard shell, through the soil, through the hard ground, until it pops up above ground and grows. Then it grows flowers and fruit, and inside the fruit you will again find the same seed. In this case the seed has reincarnated as the seed again. It had undergone a metamorphosis into a tree, but has been reborn as a seed

. . . If one seed improves, then the quality of the subsequent seeds will also improve.

Similarly, if one brain improves, the quality of subsequent brains will improve. If one mind improves, the quality of subsequent minds will be of a better quality. If one's emotions improve, subsequent manifestations will be of the same improved quality. Therefore, evolution is refinement or improvement, and if one believes in evolution then one should acknowledge that rebirth has a role to play in the greater scheme of events . . . Consideration should be given to the role of believing in rebirth as an aid to the process of evolution and the growth of consciousness.

If you know that you are going to be around tomorrow, then you will improve your behaviour today and you will become better. However, if you believe that you are not going to be here tomorrow, then you might do anything you wish under the sun. sure you will still rest in peace after death, totally unaffected by your behaviours here today. That is my understanding, and from my perspective I can see that understanding about rebirth has a valid role to play in our lives and should not remain an intellectual, philosophical or religious debate.

Death and evolution

Many believe death is a stage in our evolution where, according to our karma, we are funnelled towards the next birth.

YES. BELIEVE IT.

We are not much evolved when it comes to integrating subtle or subliminal, or even gross or instinctual aspects of our personality into the small torchlight-zone of our awareness. Although the capacity may be there, it remains unactualized. Nevertheless, we should consider that who we are is much bigger than Mr. So and So who drives to work, loves his family and his pleasures, etc. If we think about the different views and information gathered on death, we see that:

1. Scriptural descriptions and instructions on the process of dying, on navigating the states of consciousness experienced after death and on the process of rebirth, are based on the actual experience of seers or saints, who are people specifically valued for their wisdom and probity. These scriptures unanimously assert the survival of an extended consciousness after death.
2. Near-death experiences show that one's consciousness is not necessarily limited to the body or the senses or one's immediate sensory environment.
3. The *siddhis* or psychic powers, acquired in yoga, tantra and other disciplines show that one can develop an extended consciousness which is not dependant on the physical body during life.
4. Many people experience undeniable subjective evidence of the survival of the 'spirit' after death, particularly when someone close to them dies and communicates with them. This can happen during the waking state and also in psychic dreams and apparitions.
5. Scriptures assure us that this rebirthing process is fuelled by the natural law of karma which works to refine the individual consciousness to the state where one can break free from the transmigratory cycle and merge in universal consciousness.

This has implications for the scientific and ethical future of humankind.

Looking at further research authenticating people's memories of past lives, it becomes clear that the karmic engine that transports people between lives is a good explanation of what is going on. It is not just that this view is spoken of in the scriptures and we can't argue with scriptures out of respect, or because we have been brain-washed, the doctrine of karma explains the facts.



Swami Sivananda on reincarnation

Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh is generally acknowledged as an avatara – his birth was accurately forecast in the scriptures, and he is described as an avatara of Lord Shiva. Swami Niranjanananda mentioned this in a satsang on 8th September 2017, in Ganga Darshan, Munger:

We are the followers of the tradition of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda. It is their teaching that we try to live in this place. It is their inspiration that flows through our veins and arteries. Today we honour this great personality, Sri Swami Sivananda, who in reality was an avatara of Shiva.

In the *Srimad Bhagavat*, there is a reference which said that the next incarnation of Shiva would take place in South India, beside the river Tamraparni, where Swami Sivananda was in fact born. The prophecy of *Srimad Bhagavat* describes the river, the area, the location where Shiva's incarnation would take place, details which correspond completely with the facts of Swami Sivananda's birth.

Swami Sivananda's birth was prophesied not only in the *Srimad Bhagavat*. An ancestor of Swami Sivananda, Appaya Dikshitar, was one of the greatest saints of India and a great devotee of Lord Shiva. One night, he had a dream in which he saw Lord Shiva manifest in front of him and proclaim, "I will take birth after seven generations in your family." Swami Sivananda was the seventh generation after Appaya Dikshitar.

Clearly, Swami Sivananda was not an ordinary person. Someone whose birth is prophesied in *Srimad Bhagavat* and its indication given to Sage Dikshitar seven generations ago, cannot be an ordinary person.

> If you look at the life of Swami Sivananda, it is full of the Shiva tattwa. He was a God-intoxicated person; he was someone who lived sat, chit and ananda throughout his life. He was the perfect karma yogi, perfect bhakta, and perfect jnani. Swami Sivananda epitomized every human goodness. Just as Buddha epitomized peace, just as Christ represents love and compassion, Swami Sivananda represents the goodness of human nature. If you want to know a person who is good through and through, just read the stories of Swami Sivananda, and you will discover what true goodness is. That was his character.

Swami Sivananda lived from 1887 to 1963, and trained and practised as a doctor, so he had more experience than usual with birth, birthmarks, children, general problems of the body and mind, and death. He had a very practical approach to the subject of reincarnation. He reminds us that karma is our own creation – and our own effort changes it. Although we speak of *prarabdha karma* as destiny, actually it is the result of self-effort in previous births.

Knowledge of past lives

The traces of past lives are perceivable in advanced forms of meditation, known as *samyama*, where one oscillates between dharana, dhyana and samadhi, and is enabled to dive deep into the unconscious and return with the information – rather than losing it as novices do. Patanjali first mentions a technique for understanding past life impressions in his discussion on yama and niyama, and in particular, on the fruits of *aparigraha*, non-possessiveness.

> On becoming steady in non-possessiveness, there arises the knowledge of how and from where birth (comes). (*Yoga Sutras* 2:39)
>
> *Aparigraha* is one of the most important virtues. It means giving up the tendency to accumulate objects of

utility and enjoyment. The aspirant keeps only those objects that are essential for living. This keeps the mind unoccupied and also he does not have to worry about anything because there is nothing there to be protected . . . The samskaras of possessiveness must first be completely washed away and then one can start a new life.

Thus aparigraha is a temporary course of sadhana in an aspirant's life. If this particular sadhana is continued beyond reasonable limits, it gives rise to weakness and obsession. However, it is necessary to practise in the beginning in order to break the old habits. When they are broken, one can have different things which are needed for social work and service to humanity. When this sadhana is firmly established, the aspirant comes to know about the previous birth – its kind, its time and its reason. Similarly, one can even know the next birth. Just as by seeing a cloud you know that there will be rain, similarly, you know about the previous or the next birth by being firmly established in aparigraha.[3]

Later, in his chapter on *vibhootis*, or spiritual accomplishments, he gives another reference to how we may know of our past lives:

> By direct perception of the impressions, knowledge of previous births (arises). (*Yoga Sutras* 3:18)[4]

The raja yoga technique of samyama gives the basis for most of the vibhootis that Patanjali refers to, including that of remembering past lives. Being aware of one's own samskaras means you become aware of the subtle residual impressions left behind in the consciousness during various births. You may choose to explain this as 'genetic impressions' or

[3] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Four Chapters on Freedom*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 1st ed., 1976, reprint 2013, pp. 197 and 198

[4] *ibid*., p. 250

'instincts', but definitely when one is first born, there are impressions or tendencies in the unconscious mind. They remain in a very subtle form throughout life, guiding our perceptions, inclinations and actions unconsciously. Children in particular, often remember details from past lives spontaneously. As adults, we can turn round and really focus on these recordings from our own past nature, but it is not advised; Patanjali is just mentioning milestones that indicate we are indeed going along the path, he's not advocating we hang the milestones round our necks.

The next birth

The guiding force behind the kind of existence one experiences after this life is dependent on this karma, which is self-created. If we are not aware of the deeper layers of our consciousness where these impressions are stored – if we have no access to the unconscious or superconscious realms of *nidra* and *turiya*, then we may just treat the whole concept of rebirth as a speculative intellectual concept. For a yogi who has accessed these realms through samyama, and has developed an awareness of the vijnana and anandamaya koshas, out of body experiences and after death experiences are just that – experiences – and exist just as much as dreams and sleep states. Even so, too much speculation on these experiences is not advised, instead one should remain in the present and work on improving oneself now. Swami Rama says:

> We do not consciously choose the factors of our next rebirth. They are determined, or chosen, by our previous actions, thoughts and desires. This accumulation of grooves or *samskaras* that define a person superficially as personality, travels from one birth to the next . . . the birth is perfectly matched to the spiritual needs of the evolving soul.
>
> Those who have realized the transient nature of life on earth or in heaven seek to avoid the endless

> repetitions of births and deaths. They aspire for the Brahma loka, the highest reality beyond the heavens from which one never returns . . . A liberated soul who has direct experience of the Atman does not come back to the physical plane unless he chooses to return to serve others. Such a jivanmukta is no longer tossed into the dualities like bondage versus liberation.[5]

There is no outside agency judging us as such; our inner nature and samskaras determine the next form our existence takes – and that form can be anything as it is simply a receptacle for the consciousness to experience what is necessary. Swami Sivananda explains:

> Hindu scriptures say that a man may become a deva or a beast or a bird or a vegetable or stone according to his merit or demerit. When a man takes the form of a deva, all human habits and tendencies will remain suppressed. When a man takes the form of a dog, the animal tendencies and habits only will manifest . . . After death this physical body composed of five elements is cast off like a slough or the coil of a snake. The inner astral body which consists of nineteen elements – five organs of action, five organs of knowledge, five pranas, mind, intellect, subconscious mind and egoism – goes to heaven, comes back to the physical plane, puts on another physical body and reincarnates. It is this body that contains the impressions of karmas. This body remains until one gets knowledge of the Self and consequent emancipation.[6]

Swami Sivananda's disciple, Swami Satyananda explains that we have so much to learn that we need many lives to learn it in.

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[5] Swami Rama, *Sacred Journey: Living Purposefully & Dying Graciously*, Full Circle, Delhi, India, 2001, pp. 115–116

[6] *op cit*., Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga*, *Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, p. 143



Death comes as a necessary backdrop between two births inasmuch as the activities go on behind the curtain. After the assimilation of a set of experiences from one life, the individual soul is provided with a new set of mental, emotional and pranic bodies, eminently suited for his next reincarnation. In this manner he travels from life to life, assimilating his diverse experiences. Death is only a change of consciousness. It is neither good nor bad. It is a stage in the process of evolution towards eternity.[7]

[7] *ibid*., p. 12

Why don't we all remember past lives?

It is interesting that Swami Sivananda quotes stories of children and adults who remember past lives in various publications and records them, after due investigation, as being factual.

> People want to know the exact period that elapses from the time of leaving the body and being born again . . . Now, there is no definite time in this matter. In main two factors decide this issue viz., the nature of the individual Karma and the last impression before death. It may vary from hundreds of years to a few months even. Those that work out some of their Karmas in other places in subtler regions, take a considerable time before entering a fresh body . . .
>
> A very sensual individual with strong cravings or one with intense attachment sometimes is reborn quickly. Also in cases where life is cut short by a violent death or a sudden unexpected accident . . . Usually in such cases of immediate rebirth the jiva often remembers many of the events of its previous life. It recognizes its former relatives and friends and identifies the old home and familiar objects. This sometimes leads to very queer developments. There are some instances where a murdered person, being reborn, has declared the manner of his death and revealed the identity of the killer in the recent past.
>
> Thus for instance, Dharmaraja reported (23rd March 1936) in a village in Gwalior, that a village Patwari offended one Thakur Chotey Lal by making some false entries in the village records prejudicial to the latter's interest. To avenge the wrong, the Thakur trapped the Patwari in an ambush, shot him in the chest and severed the fingers of his right hand. Some time later, a son was born to a person at a place 14 miles from the scene of the murder. The child had a gun shot mark in his chest with the fingers of the right hand missing.

> When the child could speak, the father one day asked him if the Creator had forgotten to make the fingers. The child at once replied that Chotey Lal Thakur had shot him in the chest and severed the fingers and gave details of the incident which were then verified . . .
>
> In the vast majority this memory is not present. This is really a blessing conferred by the all-wise Being. Such recollection would greatly complicate our present lives. The past is veiled to you until such time as it is good and helpful to remember it. When you attain perfection and reach the end of a cycle, all will be revealed and you will see a whole rosary of lives threaded upon the one personality.[8]

The practical point to remember here is that we don't have to aspire to memories of past lives and, if such memories come, there is no need to get hooked on them. With this, as with any psychic experience, we should maintain the attitude of a witness, a *drashta*, just as we do with the events, relationships and sensory experiences of daily life.

We should remember this because due to research carried out by respected scholars such as Professor Ian Stevenson, this aspect of particular souls reincarnating with their personalities intact is becoming more accepted once again in the West.

Professor Stevenson's research on children's memories of past lives

Professor Stevenson, who headed the Department of Psychology in the University of Virginia, USA, interviewed hundreds of children between the ages of three and eight years who were convinced that they remembered previous lives. Many of them had also been able to convince their families in their current and 'previous' lives of their previous identity

[8] Swami Sivananda, *What becomes of the soul after death?* The Divine Life Society & Yoga Forest Academy Press, Rishikesh, India, 1946, 7th ed., 1967, pp. 150–152

by recalling objects, situations, shared intimate experiences, etc. He reports 2,600 cases have been investigated including some with the infant's words recorded directly by the investigators.

Children who had undergone rapid rebirth were particularly helpful to Professor Stevenson's research, as he found that they could accurately describe places and relationships with people related to their previous lives and so could be taken to their previous 'home'. Many of his studies in which the 'next birth' had happened quickly are impressive because his team went to the former birthplace and meet people the child remembered from their previous life who could confirm intimate details of events and relationships. Also knowledge not known to anybody else – such as who caused their previous death – was often displayed by the children, so Swami Sivananda's research last century is vindicated.

When the death is sudden or violent (and many of the children describe such deaths) the next birth is often hastened. Professor Stevenson found the children often carried with them illnesses and attitudes which marked their previous lives. When their parents or Professor Stevenson's team take them to their previous home they recognize people and things, and resume relationships with household members, as per their previous persona to an amazing extent.

> Most of the children speak about the previous life with an intensity, even with strong emotion, that surprises the adults around them. Many of them at first do not distinguish past from the present, and they may use the present tense in referring to the previous life. They may say for example: "I *have* a wife and two sons. I *live* in Agra." Although some children make 50 or more statements, others make only a few but repeat these many times, often tediously . . .
>
> The content of what the child states nearly always includes some account of the death in the previous life. This is particularly so when the death was violent,

but occurs also – less frequently – when it was natural. Beyond that, the child usually speaks about the family of the previous life. Remembering the parents of that life, the child may often use some phrase like "my real parents" to distinguish the parents of the previous life from its parents. The child often asks, and frequently importunes its parents to take it to the previous family. Sooner or later most parents accede to these requests . . .

If the child has given sufficient and adequately specific details, especially of proper names and places, it is usually possible to identify a deceased person the facts of whose life closely match the child's statements.[9]

Several even had birthmarks or deformities marking the site of injuries, bullet wounds, etc., which caused their previous death. This is consistent with the beliefs in many countries and civilizations of the world, which accept as a matter of fact that one carries one's karma and experiences from life to life. In the West, Professor Stevenson's research gives good reason for re-examining our own beliefs.

The cases having birthmarks and birth defects are particularly important for three reasons. First, the birthmarks and birth defects provide an objective kind of evidence . . . for many of the cases we have a medical document, usually a post-mortem report, that gives us a written confirmation of the correspondence between the birthmark (or birth defect) and the wound on the deceased person whose life the child, when it can speak, will usually claim to remember . . . Second, the birthmarks and birth defects derive importance from the evidence they provide that a deceased personality – having survived death – may influence the form of a later-born baby . . . Third (and perhaps most important) the cases with birthmarks and birth defects provide a

[9] Stevenson, Ian, M.D., *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect*, Praeger, Westport, Cleveland, USA, 1997, pp. 5–6

better explanation than any other now available about why some persons have birth defects . . . We need to judge this claim against present knowledge of the causes of birth defects.[10]

Home-made research: memories of past lives

Because of my success in finding new 'near-death experiences' which are fairly common (one in thirty people according to Dr Moody) I conducted a small experiment into remembering past lives also. I began mentioning that I was writing this book at the ashram where there are about fifty residents at any one time, along with a varying number of students. In the course of mentioning to people the topic of this book and making it clear that any experiences they might have of death-related topics would be of great interest, I met Sannyasi Dharmaratna. She had spent a great deal of her life training to sit with and accompany people as they died and had valuable things to say on how to care for people as they are dying.

One of the most compelling aspects of this past life research for many are the birthmarks marking previous-life death wounds reported by very little children, and confirmed objectively from police and post-mortem reports. Sannyasi Dharmaratna also proved to be a person who had experienced an interesting variation on this theme of physical scars being transmitted from life to life. It is embedded in this account of her memories of past lives.

1. Sannyasi Dharmaratna's past life memories

I have recalled many of my past lives. In the Amerindian tradition, when you first enter the spiritual tradition there is a process called 'The Quest for Vision'. You go to the forest or mountains with your guide, you find the right place for yourself or the guide will help you find it. That place is for you alone, no one else is there.

[10] *ibid*., p. 2

The day before you prepare 72 little bundles of tobacco – special sacred tobacco – and in each little bundle is a prayer. You construct a square, one metre by one metre with the corners marked with four sticks and string the bundles along the sides of the square. This is for your protection. The square is a protected place and you are not allowed to leave the square. For four days and four nights you stay in that small square. There is no food and no water, though you can use amaroli if it gets very hard for you. You have nothing in your hands and no clothes; just a square of cloth is given to you to cover yourself with. The square is your protection, and the guiding master is close by, though you can't see him.

For the whole four days he doesn't sleep, he stays by his fire and sees in the fire whatever needs to be done to protect you; if there is any need he will come and maybe move you to another place. The master will initiate twenty to fifty people at once. They are real masters, they have to see everything in the fire, there are only about ten in the whole of Peru. It was those masters who encouraged me to practise yoga and learn more. They knew I would come back to them. Because of my grandmother I had met them all and I later invited two of them to France on different occasions for people who wanted to go through this ritual.

At the end of the four days and nights, on the fifth day, the master tells everyone what he saw in the fire. For that, everyone meets in the inipi which is constructed like a womb, made from supple tree branches covered with blankets. The inipi is always made near a water source, like a river or the ocean. Red hot stones are put in the middle so it becomes very hot. The fire in the centre is the Mother and there is a yajna there. There are four doors at the four directions, but they are very small and you have to crawl out – it's like rebirthing. Once you are out there is light and a big feast and maybe music and dancing too. It's a very strong experience.

Lives in India

On the second or third day of the Quest for Vision, you begin to see different experiences – they may be from this life or maybe from other lives – in your mental space, *chidakasha*. I discovered I had almost always been an Amerindian, but also I had been an Indian from India. Once as a doctor during Independence, I was running through the streets helping people who had been wounded. There was fighting and gunfire. That was in Kolkata. Also, once I was a woman, a very compassionate good woman in Chennai – and I felt that vision was confirmed by experiences I had in Chennai when I finally went there.

A life in France and South America

Sometimes it gets complicated the way the lives overlap. From childhood I had had very bad migraine headaches, but they stopped completely for several years when a doctor I met at the Tibetan monastery in the South of France explained the cause in this life. From there we moved northeast, to Champagne. The house was large and in beautiful country, but I felt the presence of angry and violent spirits in the house. I was unhappy there and we started having problems in the family, lots of arguments and so forth. My migraines started again and another strange thing happened. Although I had no accident, a thin but quite visible scar developed on my face. My friends also saw it and wondered where it had come from – look, you can still see the last trace of it in my left eyebrow! (The scar through the eyebrow could still be seen in 2015.) At that time, it went from my forehead, through the eyebrow and right down to my mouth – I even developed pain in the teeth on that side where the scar ended though the dentist could find no reason for it.

Once I was coming home from accompanying someone as they died. It was midnight. My husband and

children were elsewhere so I was coming back to an empty house. The stables had been converted into the garage and I was getting out of the car when I saw an angry man with an axe coming at me. I was terrified and ran away, slamming the door behind me but simultaneously realizing that if he was a ghost he could come straight through the door. Somehow I made it through that night but told a friend about it all because I felt I needed help.

I had decided to leave both that haunted house and my husband but my friend advised me to contact a medium she knew in the South of France – but just to tell her my address, date of birth, and that I needed help with the migraines – and this medium would give me a reading. I followed her advice exactly. The medium replied with a long reading. Among the things she said was that I was living in a haunted house. She also mentioned that the man with the axe was my husband in a previous life. He had been abusive and when I finally decided to leave him and went to tell him of this decision he had killed me with an axe blow to the head – and that was why I was experiencing the migraines. She said I needed to construct a 'chimney' of crystals in the middle of the house so the spirits there could get out and the house would be cleared.

I had learned how to work with crystals previously so I was able to follow her advice. The house was cleared, also the scar began to fade and the migraines stopped once again.

2. Personal experience

I have experienced remembering past lives myself, but unlike the young children interviewed by Professor Stevenson and his associates, did not retain memory of much more than just my death. One thing Professor Stevenson mentioned struck a chord with me – the way the conscious mind lets go of such experiences or realizations.

My first conscious memory of a previous life came at age thirteen when travelling with my family by ship to Australia. We stopped at Athens and employed a guide to see the Acropolis. While the family stayed with the guide I wandered off alone and suddenly felt the ground shake, saw clouds of dust and heard huge shouting and commotion down the hill. I didn't see anything distinct but was shaken by the experience – especially when I rejoined the family where it seemed no one had noticed anything going on.

Being a secretive child I didn't speak about this to anybody and soon 'forgot' the whole episode. Still, for some reason I chose Ancient History for study at school, and was fascinated by ancient Greece, the philosophers and so forth. While reading Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War, I became intensely, personally interested. Then I suddenly remembered this experience at the Acropolis which had completely slipped from my conscious mind and realized I had been part of the Athenian army associated with Alcibiades. I knew I had died when the Persians invaded – it happened during their attack on the Acropolis.

Even then I did not really recognize this as a past life experience, I just interpreted it as a strong memory which gave me a strong affinity with ancient Greece. The experience subsided again, I did not actually remember it until many years later in 2007 when I was driving with friends along the French coast. We came to a place where the tide came in quicker than a galloping horse, and I had another memory of death – remembering that I had died during an attempt to enter France as part of an army coming in from the sea. I remembered vividly lying on my back and seeing the blueness of the sky as I died.

I do hope I have now learned whatever is necessary about dying in battle.

When do the past life memories surface?

Professor Stevenson found that even before they can communicate coherently, the children with these memories start trying to communicate – that is between the ages of two and four years. The subject apparently becomes less vivid or urgent for them at about five years, and by about eight years the child stops speaking about it. He suggests the memories may just "go underground", the children may still think about them and maintain their beliefs on their real identity and their previous life.[11] This theory accords with my own experience to some extent.

The question of why these vivid experiences are repeatedly forgotten or put aside, and why not everybody experiences them seems important. Genuine past life experiences are significant in that they support the idea of reincarnation and thus change our attitude to life and death. Also they can explain otherwise inexplicable things about one's own personality. However, it is not recommended for sadhakas to seek them out. Swami Satyananda makes a very interesting comment on past life memories in *Steps to Yoga & Yoga Initiation Papers*.

> There will come a stage, when you might get stray visions pertaining to your previous life. Unless the visions are thrust upon your mind forcibly, you should always take them to be serious impediments.[12]

This knowledge of past lives is just accepted as background knowledge in the ancient yogic tradition. The Adi Shankaracharya makes a casual and rather disparaging reference to such knowledge in his commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*, topic 19 'People with a Mission', where he distinguishes them from people who are enlightened.

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[11] *ibid*., Ian Stevenson, M.D., *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect*, p. 5

[12] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Steps to Yoga & Yoga Initiation Papers (Letters to Viswaprem & Satyabrat)*, Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, Bihar, India, 1st ed. 1973, 2nd ed. 1984, pp. 50 and 153

> At the same time they cannot be classed with the (unenlightened) people who (merely) remember their past lives (jatismaranas).[13]

In a footnote, Swami Gambhirananda further explains:

> A *jatismarana* is one who has, perforce to leave the earlier body and enter another, and yet in the new body remembers the experiences of his past life. The enlightened man is, however, independent in his movements, and he remembers his identity under all circumstances.

Announcing dreams

Professor Stevenson's book on reincarnation abounds with cross-cultural references and cross-cultural case studies, and he became very impressed by the 'announcing dreams' that many cultures speak of. The birth of Sri Rama, the birth of Christ, the birth of Sri Adi Shankaracharya, the birth of Swami Sivananda, the births of distinguished lamas and many saints, have all been 'announced' through the dreams or waking visions of the parents or other significant people. For example, the divine revelation of the birth of John the Baptist is spoken of in the Bible:

> There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias of the line of Abia; and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were now well stricken in years . . . the angel said to him, 'Fear not Zacharias: for your prayer is heard: and your wife Elizabeth shall

[13] Swami Gambhirananda (translation), *The Brahma Sutra Bhashya of Shri Shankaracharya*, Advaita Ashram, Mayavati, Pithoragarh, Himalayas, India, 2nd ed. 1987, pp. 702 ff



> bear you a son, and you shall call him John . . . and he shall turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah . . . to make a people prepared for the Lord'.[14]

Even our own investigation of significant dreams gives the understanding that dreams access a larger area of consciousness than we are usually aware of in waking life. Professor Stevenson, as his research progressed, came across more and more accounts of such dreams relating to the children he was investigating. It is not claimed that these children are 'avataras' or highly evolved souls. Nevertheless, he says, there is . . .

> . . . often a dream or dreams in which a deceased person appears and expresses an intention to be reborn to particular parents. I call these announcing dreams. The dreamer is usually a woman who will be the mother of the baby in whose body the announcing deceased person intends to reincarnate. Sometimes other members of the family, or even friends, will have announcing dreams. Although such dreams occur in many different cultures, they are particularly prominent

[14] The Bible, *The Testament according to Luke*, 1:5 ff

> features in the cases of the Tlingit of Alaska and the Burmese . . . Recognizable announcing dreams rarely occur in the cases of Sri Lanka, the United States (other than the North American tribes), and Lebanon.[15]

As an experiment, therefore, it would be interesting to ask the families we know whether any such dreams are remembered from the time when their own children were born. It does not seem such an uncommon phenomenon, as Professor Stevenson found so many that he began to categorize them:

> A variant of the announcing dream occurs that I call a departing dream. In such a dream, a person who has died appears to a member of his or her family and tells the dreamer in what family he or she will reincarnate or perhaps has already incarnated. In a few cases, the information thus conveyed has enabled the family of the deceased person to locate and meet the newborn baby said to be the reincarnation of that person.[16]

Swami Sivananda and the lokas

Does Swami Sivananda, whose birth as an incarnation of Lord Shiva was announced seven generations prior to it actually happening, believe in the various hells that we find enumerated in the *Garuda Purana*? Does he believe that a human being may need to reincarnate as a stone, or as an animal? He explains that the scriptures are written as guidelines for life here and now. What may happen in other dimensions is dependent on what we actually do here – so the scriptures may need to be understood from that point of view.

> It is common nowadays to hear it said that the Puranas are very unreliable scriptures and that they indulge in

[15] *op cit*., Ian Stevenson, M.D., *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect*, p. 4

[16] *ibid*., p. 4

> unlimited exaggeration about very many things . . . a little thoughtful consideration will forthwith reveal that the sagely writers of the Puranas had a special purpose in writing certain things in the manner that they did. They deliberately emphasized and laid particular stress upon some subjects with a definite end in view. Underneath these graphic and detailed descriptions of the karmas and their consequences there is a shrewd psychology and insight being put to make a practical purpose.
>
> Until and unless Self-realization is attained, Knowledge Absolute is gained, there is ever the ebb and flow, the constant see-saw between the animal and the man in every human being.[17]

Swami Sivananda himself for the most part leaves detailed descriptions of the lokas aside. However, he shows no doubt that the after-life is in accordance with the karmas of this life, and that an essential inner self or atman survives these transitions. For him, the point of the cycle of birth and death is to free oneself for a very different state than this life where one is limited by a mortal body and, for the most part, forgetful of the immortal self.

> A passionate man whose mind is filled with lower appetites and strong sense-cravings, who has spent his life in much sensual indulgence in this earth plane, enters the Preta Loka after his death. He is unconscious for a short time after death. He is in a sleepy state. He awakens and finds himself in this loka or world.
>
> . . . If you do not wish to enter the Preta Loka and undergo the sufferings, learn to be wise. Learn to control the senses. Lead a well-regulated and disciplined life . . . If you practise self-restraint, you will enter the regions of bliss.[18]

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[17] *op cit*., Swami Sivananda, *What becomes of the soul after death?* pp. 113–114

[18] *ibid*., pp. 101–102

The word *preta* usually means ghost. The *Yoga Vasishtha* says there are six basic gradations of pretas: slightly sinful, ordinarily sinful, greatly sinful, slightly virtuous, ordinarily virtuous and greatly virtuous. Accordingly, they take birth in human, divine, demonic or other worlds. Another loka mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* is pitri loka, also known as chandra loka. Swami Sivananda explains:

> The heaven of the Fathers or Pitri Loka or Chandra Loka is not the highest abode of eternal Truth. It is the phenomenal universe. The dwellers of that loka or plane are bound by the Law of Karma, by the cause and effect, by the law of action and reaction. Their stay on that plane is temporary though it may last for thousands of years.
>
> The Pitris have no knowledge of Brahman or the Imperishable Soul. They are bound by desires. They cannot teach Brahma-Vidya to others as they are themselves imperfect.[19]

So far this sounds similar to the Christian ideas: there is a place of suffering for the sensual and the sinners, and an in-between place, like a purgatory, for the middle type, bound in the pleasures and responsibilities of the family. Heaven comes next, but with an interestingly different take: heaven is also to be avoided because it is not permanent, and one suffers once the reward is finished and one must return to Earth.

> When a man who has done meritorious actions dies, he becomes a Deva or God and dwells in heaven. He enjoys various kinds of pleasure in heaven. During his period of stay in heaven he does not do any fresh karma or action. Dwelling in heaven is simply a reward for his past good actions. In the Deva form he does not perform any karma at all.

[19] *ibid*., p. 105

> Abandon the idea of heaven. The idea of obtaining eternal happiness in heaven is a vain dream. It is a puerile idea. Seek the eternal bliss in your own Atman through meditation. You are the Immortal Soul, free, eternal; you are ever pure, ever blessed. Assert your birthright. Proclaim your freedom and be what you really are, ever free, ever blessed . . . Men who enjoy heaven suffer great misery and extreme regret in this world. Therefore do not desire to go to heaven. Try to reach that supreme abode of eternal bliss from where there will be no fall . . . Practise jnana yoga. Engage yourself in constant meditation on Para Brahman or the Supreme Self. Attain knowledge of the Imperishable and obtain the supreme state of emancipation, which is eternal. Then censure and praise will become equal to you. A brick, a stone and a piece of gold – all will become the same to you.[20]

Just as the *Bardo Thodal* keeps saying, these after-life bardos or lokas are no more real than this world, wheras union with the Clear Light mentioned there seems to be the achievement of 'the supreme state of emancipation' from a vedantic perspective. Swami Sivananda says:

> In the Vedas and Vedanta there is no mention of hell. Only the Puranas only speak of hell or places of torture. From the absolute viewpoint there is neither heaven nor hell. It is all mental creation. From the relative viewpoint, hell is as real as this world. For a man of discrimination, this world also is a hell. Hell and heaven though not absolutely real are not unreal as long as individuality persists, and are just as real as any plane of existence.[21]

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[20] *ibid*., pp. 110–113

[21] *ibid*., p. 120

Us non-avataras

Why are most of us here? Not because we're avataras, returning to Earth voluntarily out of compassion to help relieve the suffering; we're here because we have a lot to learn, especially about love and devotion. Swami Sivananda says:

> Births and deaths of the jiva, the individual soul, are attributed to a lack of devotion. Births and deaths cease forever when one attains perfect or supreme devotion . . . Rebirth and deaths originate from want of devotion and not from want of knowledge.[22]

So, is Swami Sivananda just expressing a philosophy here, that people today can discard as an outmoded or religious viewpoint? No. He is good heartedly telling people the traditional wisdom of the *rishis* – people with the ability to see or perceive or experience more dimensions that just this phenomenal plane fed to us by the senses through the brain. To reiterate: the term 'rishi' actually refers to a whole class of highly evolved people who are defined by the number of lokas that they can see, that they have access to, that are open to them.

Today such understandings are becoming acceptable in the West where little knowledge of life after death had survived in the general culture. The materialist view that has been predominant, is that the consciousness is generated by the brain rather than the brain being a tool for generating the mind along with the senses. This is because the materialist view confuses the mind (which is generated by the brain) with the consciousness. We have to stop, let the senses and thoughts become quiet, and really be aware of the eternal vast blissful consciousness within. If the part of the consciousness which is not restricted by the senses remains undeveloped, and is not the focus of our attention, we tend

[22] Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Coversations on the Science of Yoga, Bhakti Yoga Book 1: Experiences of the Heart*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, Ch. 3



not to identify with it. That is why we non-avataras do not see our own true nature as the inner self, or soul, or atma, and cannot grasp the necessity of understanding the process of reincarnation.

Reincarnation

We may be eager for rebirth but the traditional teaching explains that adepts able to 'consciously' participate in the choice of the next birth are by nature very discriminating, and do not take rebirth hastily. Also such siddhas and yogis are reborn with memories and faculties associated with their previous levels of attainment.

Neither Myers nor Dr Moody speak of reincarnation. However, Swami Sivananda and Prof Stevenson present many case histories of children who, almost as soon as they are able to speak, try to convince their families that they are in fact someone else. Rather than relating to the atma, they relate to the person they were in their last life, and try to prove their identity by sharing recollections of their previous lives. Renewing old relationships, they recount facts that only the person they claim to be could have known (often including their mode of death).

Now that raises a few intriguing scenarios. Just how closely are our reincarnations related to each other? Myers was asking whether the 'individual' personality persists after death. Swami Sivananda's teachings show that the personality of some people can certainly recognize itself in the next life. Professor Stevenson finds that this seems to be especially true for little children who died violently in their previous life. But Swami Sivananda's point is that, for sages and siddhas who are able to leave their body consciously and retain awareness throughout all the bardos, it is the eternal atma which is important – not a transitional persona. So for most of us who are consciously seeking evolution – probably the most important thing to learn first is not who we were, but to what extent we can free ourselves from the traces of our previous-life personalities and their conditionings, rather than being bound by them.

How tight is the chain of karma? Is the subliminal 'self' that Swami Sivananda and Myers refer to as the basis of our personality composed of the samskaras of our previous lives just as the yogis insist? Is that previously composed layer of 'self' the basis of the vijnanamaya and anandamaya koshas, the subtle sheaths of our present existence? Is that little 'self' the *sanchita karma*, the storehouse of our past brought forward into this life, to express itself in the form of *prarabdha karma,* our destiny?

The scriptures assert that although, the soul continuously survives both birth, i.e. embodiment on earth in the five koshas, and death, essentially it is free and does not have to be reborn. We are simply chained to the wheel of rebirth through our own attachments.

If so – how can we slip the chain?

Part 3
Transcendence

10

Swami Niranjanananda on Death and Evolution

They say that anyone who calls himself a guru is not: because that is a statement of the ego and so the speaker is automatically disqualified. Swami Niranjanananda, however, was born because his parents asked their guru, Swami Satyananda, to bless them with a child. To fulfil this wish or sankalpa, Swami Satyananda performed sadhana in the Himalayas at the source of the Ganga to bring down a special soul who would work for his spiritual mission.

These missions are still unfolding. One is of returning the science of yoga to the world in order to uplift the consciousness of humankind, another is the revival of the sannyasa tradition. Swami Satyananda has referred to Swami Niranjanananda, his disciple and spiritual successor, as *Gangaputra*, the son of the Ganga, and has even said Swami Niranjanananda is Bhishma, the famous Gangaputra of the *Mahabharata*, come again. If he meant this literally, this soul must be well practised in beaming down to Earth by now from the other side of death, because the *Mahabharata* chronicles a great war believed to have taken place at least 7,000 years ago.

Keep working for the welfare of the world

Swami Satyananda was not interested in philosophizing so much as implementing understandings for the welfare of the world. He says:

> One should only invoke those great souls, gurus, mystics and yogis who have completed their evolution and have no need for reincarnation. They reincarnate only to help and guide others, not for their own enjoyment or wish fulfillment. They have no need to evolve further, so reincarnation is not important for them. These souls can and should be called, not others. This is the first rule in invoking the departed souls. The second is that when such a great soul is invoked, the best way is through a picture or a statue. It is possible to invoke the soul into the body of a living person, but this creates great difficulty for that person . . . This invocation can be done by mantras or willpower, but the easier way is through devotion.[1]

It means that when he called or invoked the spirit of Swami Niranjanananda to Earth it was because he was undertaking a long-term mission to uplift the consciousness of humanity. Someone was needed to continue with that mission: a special person who would come and willingly spend his life in the service of humanity, and have sufficient power to change the course of world events.

Even though great souls do not have to come repeatedly, driven blindly by karma, they do come to help from time to time, taking different identities or (like the Dalai Lama) maintaining one 'identity'. More importantly for us, they come and go with awareness and therefore their attitudes towards, and comments on death, evolution, immortality and so forth are not blind speculation but record their own experiences and direct knowledge.

The importance of samskaras

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Bible, and other scriptures, we have seen that the circumstances surrounding the birth and death of enlightened people, or especially avataras, are

[1] Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga, Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, p. 78

often unusual. Also their parentage. This is acceptable today because the scientific view is that the parents are extremely significant in forming the consciousness of the child – and not only through the chromosomes:

> Carl Jung spoke of the child living in the unconscious of the parents. The parent's implicit beliefs and expectations are decisive factors in the formation of the child's world-self-view, even when not spoken or expressed in any way.[2]

Swami Niranjanananda lived with his guru, Swami Satyananda, from the age of six – he had been doing his level best to do so since the age of four – and his parents both dedicated their lives to Swami Satyananda and the Yoga Mission. Both became swamis in the real sense of the word. Swami Satyavratananda, Swami Niranjan's father, and Swami Dharmashakti, his mother, printed the *Yoga Vidya* magazine from their home in the town of Rajnandgaon which became



[2] Joseph Chilton Pearce, *Evolution's End – Claiming the Potential of our Intelligence*, Harper, San Francisco, USA, 1992, p. 63

a veritable ashram. After Swami Satyavratananda died, Swami Dharmashakti continued this work and published excerpts from her husband's diary showing his personal reflections. We can see that he was a man of great spiritual insight:

> The aim of human life is to attain knowledge of the self. Man is born for this purpose but he forgets this aim due to his attachment and ignorance and goes another way. However, man's rajasic nature responsible for this choice can be changed by daily satsang, keeping the company of yogis, sannyasins and mahatmas, and also through japa, study of the self, pilgrimage, faith and intense devotion. Then man does not forget his goal and in time succeeds in having the experience of the divine. There is no other easier path or belief to experience the divine.
>
> My Lord, I change my emotions and stream of thoughts by directing them towards Yourself and inspiring them towards devotion to Your lotus feet. Give rise to intense devotion in me towards none other than You. This is my only hope and desire. You are familiar with the emotions in my heart anyway.
>
> Give me a pure mind, the right knowledge, discrimination and bhakti. Give me the capacity to lead life with the right conduct. Direct and attach my excited and wavering mind towards Your lotus feet. Take away my wealth and knowledge, my wealth and riches, my property . . . everything. Produce in me a detachment towards my strength, even towards my son. Absorb and direct me towards Your enlightened feet.
>
> Don't let me feel a sense of comfort, don't let me become an intellectual. Ideas of grandeur will make me stray from Your lotus feet. My Lord, I want to experience Your mercy and compassion, not just understand it. Help me walk on the spiritual path.
>
> We should set up an industry to raise the quality of life. We could work with our hands and reflect on God

with our mind, since man's emotions are everything. God doesn't live only in temples. He can be experienced everywhere, every moment, and in all situations. Our homes and offices themselves are temples of God. They are *yajnashalas,* places consecrated for sacrifices, where we can do *seva*, serve without the motive of self-interest. We simply need to change the attitudes of our mind and vision. *Karma* (work) is yoga and yajna at the same time.

The presence of a Guru is extremely necessary in our life. Only the Guru can help us in walking on the spiritual path. Birth and death are the two shores of life. Whatever exists between these shores is our life. Our wanting to stay between these two shores is achieved only through meeting and going through both the shores of birth and death.

We don't have any private or personal source of power. Whatever power we have is from God. If we remove God's power from man, he will have nothing of his own. Even then we do not understand the importance of God and remain lost in our ego. This is the cause of our pain and sadness. When we acknowledge birth, life and death as one, a unified experience, we become free of worry. Death is the truth of life. The desire for a life removed from death is ignorance.

The death of a human being is not death. Being afraid of death is not appropriate. Whatever happens till death is a rehearsal. Actual life begins only after death. He who understands this and remains alert overcomes death. The rest are claimed by death for a repeat of the death experience.

Birth is death and death is birth. If man can understand this truth and prepare for real death, then he does not die even after his last breath.[3]

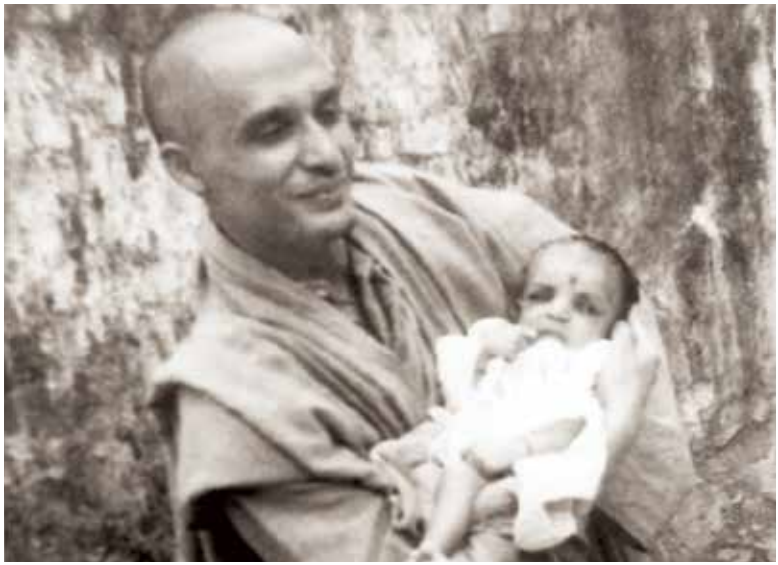
[3] Swami Satyavratananda Saraswati, from his diary published in *Yoga Vidya* magazine 1973, *Swarnima Sangraha Vol. 1*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, pp. 128–129,

Swami Satyavrat goes straight to the essence. It was such wisdom and the devotion inherent in Swami Dharmashakti which enabled them to have a child invoked by their guru to continue the mission. Such a child is born with a different state of consciousness.

Born for a mission

Patanjali explains in the *Yoga Sutras,* that some people are able to experience advanced states of consciousness right from birth (1:19):

> *Bhavapratyayo videhaprakritilayaanaam.*
>
> The videha and prakritlaya yogis have birth as the cause (of their asamprajnata samadhi).



Knowing that Swami Niranjanananda was chosen before his birth to continue the spiritual mission of Swami Satyananda, it follows that he must be one of those rare souls born for a particular mission. So, although walking and talking like other people, he must have an evolved consciousness, where

the samskaras in the chitta draw one through deep states of awareness – allowing asamprajnata samadhi to become one's natural state. Also, while researching the topic of death and evolution, I began to realize that successfully performing the Panchagni tapasya, as he and his guru before him have both done, implies that he is fully conversant with how the soul can catapult beyond the gravity of the circle of life and death. Therefore, I asked him to contribute something specifically for this book. He must have mulled things over for a few weeks, and then gave a satsang in Hindi and a satsang in English, which are combined here. He said:

> The Indian perspective on death will become clearer if you listen to this mythological story. The god of death has two names: one is 'Yamaraj' and the other is 'Dharmaraj'. So the god of death represents yama and dharma. He is the representative, and epitome, of dharma and yama.
>
> He is the only personality who has never been accused of any wrong doing because he epitomizes dharma. All the other gods and goddesses like Indra, Varuna, Agni and others have been behaving in a normal 'human' manner, but Dharmaraj has never made any mistake, except one. That was when he attempted to lasso Markandeya while he was embracing the shivalingam, immersed in meditation on Shiva, the highest consciousness. At that time Death's lasso flicked the shivalingam too, and Lord Shiva stepped in – saying, "You've overstepped this time. Death can't touch anyone immersed in me!" And so Markandeya became a *chiranjeevi*, one who stays young and never dies.
>
> One of Death's names is Yamaraj, one who is the ruler of the qualities, one in whom all the yamas are manifesting. Like in the yama and niyama, *yama* means restraint, it implies *sanyam*, self-discipline. Anything that you do under sanyam is always satisfying, gratifying, peaceful, happy. Anything that oversteps the boundaries



of sanyam will always disrupt harmony and become the cause of discord. So these two ideas are represented by yama, and death ultimately represents the continuation of yama and the continuation of dharma.

Now Death has an assistant whose job is to be the scribe. Everybody's work, whatever everybody does, it is written down. How everybody thinks is written down, how everybody behaves is written down. He is seeing what is being done according to dharma and according to yama. If anything is adharmic or not in accordance with yama, then you get a black mark in your resumé. And the scribe's name is Chitragupta – he is like the secretary to Yama.

And this is the interesting bit: *chitra* means picture and *gupta* means secret, so *chitragupta* literally means 'secret picture' and this is what Death's scribe records. What he writes is kept secret from the human mind, or the human level of awareness: humans don't know what is written. So, what is it in our life that is written but we don't know about? And yet we say, 'Ah, you will have to face the consequences of that act later on'? Karma and samskara. And these are stored where? In the chitta. And how do you store things in chitta? In the form of memory. And what is memory? It is a picture. It is not a word, it is not a sentence; a memory is in the form of a picture which is secret, hidden, kept away. So a memory of thirty years ago can be seen in the form of a picture, and you are then bringing out the *pratyaya*, hidden impressions, and looking at the picture of consciousness. So Death's secretary is Chitragupta – the recorder of chitta.

In the Hindu tradition, there is a belief that whatever your last thought is at the time of death, that's what you will become. There are many stories about this indication of destiny. There is the story of a saint who was very old and dying. While he was on his deathbed, he thought of eating a mango because he saw a mango tree with beautiful mangoes on it, but he died before he could fulfil his desire. So when his disciples were preparing his body, they noticed a strange thing, one finger was pointing upwards. So they said, "There must be a reason why at this last minute his finger is pointing up."

So one intuitive person looked where the finger was pointing, and he saw that finger was pointing to a mango, right? He said to other disciples, "It seems that our Guruji is stuck on that mango over there." And because of his seniority, disciples paid heed to what he was saying, looked up and saw the mango. So one of them said, "Let us bring that mango down."

They brought the mango down and in the mango there was a very fat worm slurping away at the juice and the pulp. Through his insight, that disciple discovered that the spirit in the worm was the spirit of the saint. So he said, "Listen, the last desire of Guruji was to eat a mango. As his pranas left the body, because he was thinking of that mango, that unfulfilled desire bound his soul to the mango so he was incarnated as a worm to enjoy the mango. Now, in order to liberate him, we have to squash him." None of the other disciples would, but that insightful disciple did, and as he squashed the worm, the spirit of the saint was released.

Now, this is only a story, but nevertheless, it indicates this concept that whatever you are thinking at the end, that is what you are going to become. The karmic law is seen in this story, and this karma is associated with yama and dharma. As long as your action and karma is according to the principles of yama and dharma, you are assured a seat in the higher dimensions, higher

lokas. If your karma is not according to yama and your dharma, then you are designated to lower lokas.

So, the thoughts that generally come at the end, from where are they coming? They are not thoughts from buddhi, they are not thoughts of manas, they are thoughts from chitta. The whole life flashes before you, from your childhood to your adolescence to your maturity and old age. All the scenes, all the images of your life, things that you have not even known you remembered, they flash before you at that time. If you happen to just pick on one image, attachment or association, with your wife, child, enemy or adversary, then that is the last impression that your chitta will carry with it when it dies. That has become the picture recorded by Chitragupta, and that is what you will become.

So the ultimate idea was that the last thought is what has to be recognized. Therefore, in India when people die, at the time of death they are told to do their mantra or to say 'Ram', a name of God. When you see dead bodies being taken to the cremation ground, the pallbearers are only chanting, *Ram naam satya hai! Ram naam satya hai!* – Ram's name is the only truth.

The idea of mantra being chanted at the time of death is to divert the attention from the material to the divine, so that you are not caught in the web of karma, but you are able to free yourself, or again take another birth if that is the destiny decided by God. So the concept of mantra reaches to the time of death, and if you are not remembering a mantra, even repeating the Name gives *mukti*, liberation.

There was one sinner whose name was Ajamila. He was an absolute atheist but he named one of his sons, by mistake, Narayana, which is a name of God. So when he was dying, he called out to his son, "Narayana." He called out to his son because he used to love him very much, but when he called him 'Narayana', the other Narayana came, because of the name, and gave him mukti.

From the yogic perspective, planting a positive idea or thought in chitta is wise because at the time of death it is going to become true. And looking at Sri Swamiji's life, he always used to say, "I want to come back and I am waiting for my return ticket." Last thought, right? "I am going to come back." If that was the last thought, it will happen. If that was not the last thought, it won't happen despite one's having said it. Because, if at the last moment he was thinking of his guru, then he was not thinking of the material body, but if he was thinking of the sankalpa, "Okay, I have got my return ticket, I am going to come back," then that intention will again bring him back in person. So that is the influence of impressions or *pratyayas* in the psyche: they can monitor and regulate events after death also. That is the power of chitta. Interesting?

Interesting. Then someone asked:

Does a realized soul return due to atmabhava?

Generally, the thinkers have said that we are born because of desires – *Apoorna vaasanaon ke chalte manushya ka janam baar baar hota hai* – we are born again and again because we have unfulfilled desires which have to be fulfilled. So, as long as desires are unfulfilled, one has to take birth again and again. But to have no desire is also not possible. So there are two ways one can go: the selfish desire way, and the selfless desire way. Self-oriented desire means that I am identifying with my family: what will happen to my child, what will happen to my son, what will happen to my grandson and that binds you to the immediate family.

There is a story of a person who had a guru and he used to bug his guru saying, "I want freedom from everything." So one day his guru thought, "Okay, let me test him." He said, "All right, come on, you have said you

want freedom for many years. Today I am going to give you freedom. You leave everything and come with me today!" The man said, "How can I? I have to care for my daughter and son until they marry. After their marriages, once I have completed my dharma, I will come."

A few years passed, the marriages happened, the master came again and said, "Come." The man said, "They have only got married recently. Give me some time so that I can see the face of my grandson and be assured that the bloodline is being carried forward." Ten months passed, the child was born. Again the master came and said, "Now you have seen your grandchild, come!" The man said, "What do you mean? Let me just enjoy him, let me see him frolic, play, study, become big." And he kept on delaying, and eventually he died.

So when the guru came next to take the disciple away, he found that the man was dead. He closed his eyes in meditation, and discovered that the man had become the dog sitting in front of the house. So: dog-speak – "Woof woof!" "Woof, woof-woof woof!!" And the discussion was, 'Okay, you died, now you are in a dog's body. Now you come with me!' And the dog is saying, 'How can I? The grandchildren are all young, my son is not at home, he goes out to work every day. I need to remain in this form to protect the house and the family from outsiders, I can't go with you now!!' And he remained as a dog.

Then, the next time Guruji comes, he sees the dog is dead. 'Now, where is that man again?' He finds out, and discovers that this time he has become a snake. So: snake-speak – "Hiss!" "Hisss." "Hiss?" "Hiss, hiiiss." "Hiss." – Guru says to the snake, 'Come, now you've been born from a snake's womb!' And the snake says, 'Yes, but I can't go.' 'Why?' 'Because as a snake I am the guardian of the wealth of the house, I guard the wealth from robbers and thieves.' So ultimately the master said, "Sorry, you have no hope."

You see, this is a story, but in the story again we are seeing the same sequence: that what you were, what you desire, where your association is – you become part of that. Who knows, maybe once upon a time, they were also residents of Ganga Darshan (indicating two Alsatians). I mean, it's difficult to say.



So the negative, or the limited individualistic way of 'me and my associations' is caused by *vasana*, it is attachment: my association. The other way is what Sri Swamiji did. With *atmabhava*, awareness of the one Self in all, he was able to connect to more than one immediate group of people. He had a far greater experience of the environment and of the pain and suffering that people go through, and that caused the idea, 'I will come back again to wipe away the tears of pain.' So here the intention is different. It is not a vasana, it is a dharma. So one way becomes selfish and the other way is selfless.[4]

[4] Swami Niranjanananda, in satsang at the Akhara in Ganga Darshan, Munger, Bihar, India, 7th June 2018

Samadhi and samskaras

In raja yoga, the ability to experience samadhi is explained in a systematic way as a series of states that an evolved consciousness develops through naturally as the positive samskaras accrue in the consciousness. In the *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali explains that some evolved souls are born with the ability to experience samadhi due to special samskaras. Others may be qualified for training in samadhi states, but there are past merits needed in order for one to experience the states of samadhi.

This can be understood in many ways. For example, there is the saying, "One sows an action and reaps a tendency, one sows a tendency and reaps a habit, one sows a habit and reaps a character, one sows a character and reaps a destiny."[5] Also, there are the findings in neuroplasticity, that as we continue in a particular activity, thought or emotion, the neurones of the brain and nervous system adapt to support that function. So, even if one is not born with the faculties developed, it is possible to attain samadhi states (1: 20):

> *Shraddhaa-veerya-smriti-samaadhi-prajnaa-poorvaka itareshaam.*
>
> Others (other than those disembodied and merged into prakriti) attain to asamprajnata samadhi through the stages of faith, strong will, memory and intelligence derived from samprajnata samadhi respectively.

The qualities needed include sustained practice, faith, courage, memory of previous experiences of higher consciousness, and a higher form of intelligence – *prajna* – which is like intuition, insight, or awareness of inner states. In his commentary on this sutra, Swami Satyananda explains, "this *samadhi prajna* is a peculiar faculty; it is the spiritual attitude or spiritual vision that one develops by constant satsang and

[5] *op cit*., Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga, Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, p. 147 (Swami Sivananda)

by constant self-purification."[6] It is needed because, in order to be able to traverse the stage called asamprajnata samadhi, the consciousness has to be ingrained with samskaras other than those related to worldly life. In asamprajnata samadhi, it is only the quality of the *samskaras*, the quality of the impressions in the consciousness – not effort, will-power or knowledge – that propels one through one stage of consciousness and into the next.

This means that it's like dying, where the deep impressions in the consciousness, your inner nature, the picture recorded by Chitragupta, is what guides you to the next stage in the after-death state.

Jivanmukta

There are various interesting terms in yoga dealing with the soul in various stages of evolution related to 'death', for example, guru, jivanmukti, videhamukti, and avatara.

> This physical body is the result of ignorance and the action of former births. It does not vanish immediately after the dawn of knowledge, when ignorance is destroyed, but lasts till the force of karma is spent. If it is destroyed soon after knowledge dawns, we will have no gurus or jivanmuktas.[7]

Swami Sivananda has written quite extensively about the interrelated states of samadhi and death, and helps us to understand why the term used for the 'death' of a saint is 'Maha samadhi'. His disciple, Swami Satyananda has explained that Swami Sivananda was in fact a *jivanmukta*, one who has liberated himself from karma and the compulsion of rebirth while still in the body. From our perspective, that means he was always conscious of the Clear Light of the *Bardo Thodal* – the clear light of consciousness within

[6] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Four Chapters on Freedom*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, reprint 2013, p. 75

[7] Swami Sivananda Saraswati, *Karma Yoga*, Divine Life Society, Tehri-Garhal, Uttar Pradesh, Himalaya, India, p. 145

was always recognized as his own nature – this was not a revelation first glimpsed at the instant of death.

> A jivanmukta lives for some time in order to fulfil divine acts of compassion. Then the final state of liberation comes and not only the spiritual consciousness, but also the physical consciousness is dissolved. When that state begins, the aspirant lives for only twenty-one days. He then departs this life, and there is no rebirth. There is no difference between realization and illumination. It is the same, only the expressions differ.
>
> In my life I have seen such a man in the final state of liberation: Swami Sivananda. With him there was no physical consciousness; he was always in Samadhi. When he achieved the state of final liberation, he told everyone to do his respective work and that he wanted to enter Samadhi. He became absolutely unconscious for twenty-one days; there were no physical actions at all. However, on the twenty-first day he opened his eyes and said, "Is this the twenty-first day?" He asked just that much. We did not know what was happening to him. We thought that maybe he had fallen ill or that he had fainted, or that he had had some sort of coronary or some other disease. You see, we are mere human beings, we cannot understand these highest states of existence!
>
> At this time, he asked a lady doctor to bring a piece of paper and a fountain pen and he wrote an important sentence: "My message is that God is real, everything else is unreal", and under that "Sivananda". That was the end of his message. It appeared that Swamiji was unconscious during those twenty-one days, but how did he know that it was the twenty-first day? There is some other consciousness which keeps functioning in the state of Samadhi.[8]

[8] Swami Satyananda, 'Jivanmukti and the Final Samadhi', *Avahan* Year 3; Issue 6, Sannyasa Peeth, Munger, Bihar, India, Nov–Dec 2014, pp. 8–9

The jivanmukta attains the state of liberation in this birth, although they may have also attained it in previous births.

In India, in the last two centuries, many spiritual leaders independently received a divine *adesha*, order, to take the previously secret knowledge of Vedanta and techniques of yoga to the world. Siddhas such as Swami Vivekananda, Paramahamsa Yogananda, Swami Sivananda, Swami Satyananda and Maharshi Mahesh Yogi, are often acclaimed as jivanmuktas. They have travelled around the world assessing the situation and giving teachings relevant to the needs of the time. They sent their disciples too. Ramana Maharshi in a silent sort of a way, contributed to this diaspora which seeded the world with a deep spiritual perspective, from the South of France to Australia, from Colombia to Bulgaria.

For centuries, the remote and isolated Tibetan nation based its society on the understanding that their spiritual leaders were consciously taking rebirth out of compassion, not compulsion. The recent annexation of that country resulted in spiritual adepts, trained people, leaving the isolated mountains and settling and teaching in other countries. Are such people jivanmuktas or some sort of partial avatara?

I REALLY CAN'T SAY, THEY'RE BEYOND ME.



Avatara

The *avatara* is deemed to be God descending in a form to achieve a particular divine purpose and as such is beyond the cycle of evolution that we whirl in. Swami Sivananda comments:

> Sometimes the king visits the jail and enters the cell of a prisoner to see how the matters are getting on in the prison. He does this for the good of the prisoners. He is quite independent, and yet out of his own free will he himself enters the cell. Even so, an avatara puts on a body out of his own free will for the ascent of man. He is quite independent like the king, while the jiva is a slave of nescience, *avidya*, as long as he has no Self-realization.[9]

Swami Sivananda also speaks of the 24 Lila Avataras. Not all of these avataras have the same degree of power or purity. Swami Sivananda comments:

> The rishis of yore have expounded the doctrine that the Lord of the universe exists in 16 expanding *kalas* or digits of manifestation, that one digit of His life manifests in the vegetable kingdom, two in the animal, and from five to eight in the human – according as we pass from the savage at one end of the scale to the highest evolved state at the other. The Lord's manifestation in his avataras ranges from nine to 16 digits or rays. The full or *poorna avataras* are those in who all 16 rays are present. Lord Krishna was a poorna



[9] Swami Sivananda, *Bhakti Yoga – Sivananda (Life & Works of Swami Sivananda Vol. 5)*, Divine Life Society, Tehri-Garwal, Uttar Pradesh, Himalaya, India 1986, p. 237



avatara with 16 rays. Lord Rama was an avatara of 14 rays, he was an *amsa-avatara* or partial avatara . . . Some people want to have contact with avataras without being endowed with the proper qualifications. Even if an avatara appears before you, you will not be able to find Him out. You have not got the eyes to see Him as such. You will take him for an ordinary man only. How many were able to detect the divinity of Lord Krishna?

. . . A neophyte or beginner on the spiritual path should prepare himself gradually. He must get spiritual instructions from spiritual teachers and follow them strictly. He should make himself fit to approach a spiritual guru, to practise meditation and to see the Lord in meditation.

If you are endowed with the four means of salvation . . . you will have Self-realization this very second! You will contact avataras and full-blown yogis this very second. First deserve and then desire.[10]

The message is that one can in fact meet these divine manifestations, but then what happens? Do we adore them or crucify them? Are we willing and able to learn, or do we fear and seek to destroy what we cannot understand?

There is a grand possibility of the descent of God in human form. This has occurred several times in the past and will continue to occur in the future as well. There are some preparatory signs that indicate the advent of an avatara. The ground is well prepared for His descent.

[10] *ibid*., pp. 240–242



People take interest in sankirtan and some pious people disseminate sankirtan bhakti far and wide. Some great souls are born beforehand and train people in selfless service and right conduct.

In the divine scheme of things avataras are indispensable for the uplift of humanity. In this Kali Yuga, Kalki-avatara is expected. May He bring supreme joy and peace to the world![11]

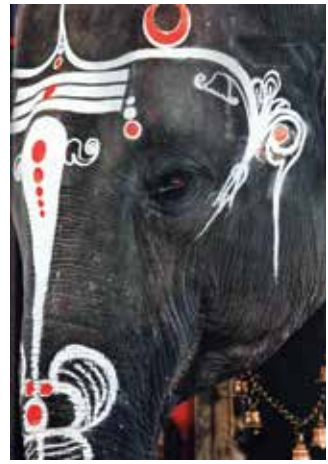
Why do they come?

The *Bhagavad Gita* explains that the avataras come when the world is in great need, when we are surrounded by darkness. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, it is understood that the reason why those who have attained jivanmukti choose to return is to preserve the teachings that can uplift the consciousness of humanity.

In Swami Niranjanananda's satsangs and teachings he occasionally speaks on those who have learned to manage their life and death, and who now come to help. Also on the different types of attainment, or stages of evolution that

[11] *ibid*., p. 243

are possible. In 2000 he spoke on avataras:



> When human values and the human mentality are undergoing changes in a very radical way, God does ensure a way by which we can again come to the path of justice and dharma. Any person may be the chosen one because each one is an instrument in God's hands. If the heart is open, then the spirit will descend. There are a few people who have come with their heart open, right from birth. The spirit descended into them, and they were later on identified as messengers of God, sons of God, God incarnate.
>
> You have to remember that God can choose anybody in this creation to represent Him. In every species there is a manifestation of God's energy, not only in humans but also in all the different species of the world. If you read the story of the Boddhisattwas in the Buddhist tradition, you will find that there was one elephant who was the rishi elephant, there was one rishi deer, even in birds, there was one rishi bird. They are not just stories, rather they are explanations of how that cosmic creative power can manifest in different life forms in order to bring them to the path of justice and dharma.
>
> Today, the people in whom God's energy flows strongly are the saints who are guiding the destiny of humanity. *Avatara* does not mean God actually appearing in full glory in a human form, rather it simply means the descent of spirit. In the Hindu mythology there is Matsya avatara, God incarnating in the form of a fish, Katchapavatara, God descending in the form of a turtle. Vamanavatara was God incarnating as a dwarf,

Narasimha avatara, was half man, half lion. Like this there are twenty-four avatars which go through all the different species of creation.

These avataras simply represent that in order to bring a semblance of order, justice and dharma, the spirit of God descended. So the advent of an avatara is something which can happen from time to time: it is like opening the doors of the room to allow fresh air to pass by.

And later in that year, in Ganga Darshan, Swami Niranjan was asked:

Are you an avatara?

His reply takes the question out of the arena of spectator sports and encourages us to look at ourselves:

How does it matter if I say yes, and how does it matter if I say no? All of us are avatars. What is the meaning of an avatara? An avatara is the descent of spirit in a body, and that spirit has descended in each one of us. What is inside you? The spirit. Why are you living today? Because of the spirit. If the spirit goes, then you are finished: *Hari Om Tat Sat*. So, in that sense, we are all avataras. The spirit has descended in all of us, and it is because of this that we are alive today and have the ability to laugh and cry, play and rest. So, you are an avatar, I am an avatara.

The question is – are we able to experience that spirit or not? Those people who in the course of their lives are able to realize the existence of the spirit within themselves, not as an intellectual concept only but as a living experience, have achieved a state of enlightenment which indicates the ability to realize that they are one with God. Then God's energy flows through you, and

you are able to harness and express that energy. Then you are recognized as an incarnation, otherwise not.

In 2001, he was asked:

What is the spirit with which we should celebrate Christmas?

He was speaking to a large international audience, many of whom had just attended yajna programs in Rikhia, presided over by Paramahamsa Satyanandaji. He answered with a more classical explanation:

> If you remember, a few days back Paramahamsaji was saying that God descends on Earth and takes a human form. God is not a person, God is not an entity, but an energy. The nature of a magnet is such that it will attract another piece of iron, or another magnet. The nature of this Cosmic Energy is such that it can be attracted, using the right tools, to take a human form, and the right tools are known as prayers. Not the prayers we pray in our daily life but the prayers which come from the depth of one's being. Normally it is the mind crying, but whenever the soul cries, the prayers of the soul are heard, and then God descends.
>
> When atrocities are committed, when there is an increase of sufferings in life and when we seek the solution in liberation, and the desire is not merely intellectual but is a real desire to find peace and happiness, then that feeling is converted into a prayer and it attracts the Cosmic Energy. This has been stated in the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* in relation to the birth of Sri Krishna. It has been stated in the *Ramayana* that there was a similar situation at the time of birth of Sri Rama. There was so much atrocity in the world, so much suffering, that the pious people prayed, and it was their prayer which acted like a magnet to attract God in a physical form. Furthermore, it has also been stated by God, that "I

come down to earth for the joy of good people and for the eradication of evil". The most important thing is that it is for the joy of the good people, he answers their request to come down and to spread the message of peace, wellbeing and joy as an avatara.

The process in the Indian tradition is known as the *avatara*, coming down, the Divine Grace coming down and this grace which comes down can take different forms. In the case of Rama, in the case of Krishna, in the case of other gods and goddesses, the energy which came down became the cause for a global political and social transformation of civilization. The same energy which came down in the form of Buddha, in the form of Mahavir, in the form of Christ, in the form of Mohammed, became the cause for a change in the mental, emotional, religious beliefs. How are we able to see something in a different way, how are we able to change ourselves and live in a different way, feeling more connected with that cosmic nature and not separated? From time to time the arrival of God has heralded a new perspective in one's life: that is the concept of avatara.

The avataras need not take human form. The *atma*, the immortal spirit, permeates everything and all life forms.

Classical lists

The classical list for Lord Vishnu, the deity dedicated to preservation of creation, contains ten avataras as chronicled in the *Bhagavata Purana*. Each represents a stage of evolution, and each came with a main purpose.[12]

1. *Matsya* (the fish) came to save Vaivasvata Manu from destruction by a deluge.
2. *Kurma* (the tortoise) came to enable the world to retrieve some precious things lost in the deluge and

[12] *op cit*., Swami Sivananda, *Bhakti Yoga – Sivananda (Life & Works of Swami Sivananda Vol. 5*), pp. 238–240

so offered his back for the gods and asuras to rest their churning rod on when they churned the ocean of milk.

3. *Varaha* (the boar) to rescue Earth from the waters where it had been dragged by the demon Hiranyaksha.
4. *Narasimha* (the man-lion) to free the world, and the devoted child Prahlada from the demon Hiranyakasipu (Prahlada's father).
5. *Vamana* (the dwarf) to restore the power of the gods who had been eclipsed by the tapasya and devotion of the asura king Bali.
6. *Parasurama* (Rama with the axe) to stop the oppression by the kshatriya rulers, he destroyed their race 24 times.
7. *Rama* (Ramachandra, hero of the *Ramayana* and *Ramacharitamanasa*) to destroy the asura emperor Ravana.
8. *Sri Krishna* (hero of the Mahabharata and a full avatara) to destroy Kamsa and other demons, to establish the teachings contained in the *Bhagavad Gita* and to become the foundation for the bhakti movement in India.
9. *Buddha* (the prince-ascetic, founder of Buddhism) to end animal sacrifices.
10. *Kalki* (the hero on a white horse who will come at the end of the Kali Yuga) to destroy the wicked and re-establish virtue.

In 2003 Swami Niranjanananda again spoke to an international gathering where he was asked:

Who becomes or is identified as an avatara?

There are different areas of expression and different qualities expressed in an avatara. Avataras who bring new ideas, new concepts, new definitions to the secrets of existence and life, tend to develop a nature which is austere and with their austerity, with their sadhana,

they are able to overcome temptations. Jesus was taken to the mountain top by the Devil where he was tempted with the riches of the world, dancing girls, prosperity and wealth, but Jesus declined, and having overcome these temptations he became established as the Christ. Buddha also, during his austerities, confronted the demon Mara, Satan or the Devil who tempted him with many riches and pleasures. Buddha declined, resisted the temptations, and became established as the Buddha.

In the Upanishads, Nachiketa was tempted thrice; he declined and was given three different boons. Those who give way to temptation come under the control of the Devil. Those who are able to master the temptation become the Buddha, the Christ, the avatara. So here we see that the stories are similar. One of the names of Jesus was *Maranath*: *nath* means master, *mara* means Devil, 'Lord of the Devil'. Buddha also conquered the Devil called Mara, and Buddha is also referred to as Maranath.

Ten avataras

In Indian culture and belief, Vishnu takes birth as an avatara to change the negative tendencies and to establish joy and righteousness in life. Ten avataras have been described, from Matsya avatara to Kalki avatara. Nine avataras have gone by, the ninth being Buddha. The tenth is awaited and it is said he will come at the end of the Kali Yuga, which is still a long way away. We are in the beginning of Kali Yuga, and the cycle is very long – maybe 6,400,000 years according to mythology.

We find that the process which brings joy into people's lives and establishes dharma is differently expressed in each avatara. In Buddha avatara it was serenity and the adherence to the ideals of *dhairya* and *kshama*: patience and forgiveness; *ahimsa* and *shanti*, non-violence and peace. These were the instruments that Buddha used to deal with the negative tendencies existing at that time.

This approach and attitude was adopted by many other luminaries of the past.



Then, for example, a different, radical, lord-like approach was adopted by Parashuram avatara. According to the mythology, he wiped out so many generations of the *kshatriya* class, the kingly class. Then there were the people like Krishna who expressed love for life and said that happiness is not alien to spiritual life. He demonstrated that you can live a full life and be spiritual at the same time. In this way, different methods have been adopted by different avatars to bring joy, to establish dharma, and to deal with the prevalent environment and situation of that time. Buddha came only 2,500 years ago and Kalki is awaited.

Where prana goes, we go too

Taking birth, and dying, relates to the movement of energy and consciousness in the body. The Upanishads and yogic scriptures speak of 72,000 (more or less in different texts) currents of energy, or *prana*, in the body, known as *nadis*. There are three main ones: ida, pingala and sushumna, and sushumna is the supremely important one. There are also ten 'gates'. The prana enters through these gates at birth and you are connected to external life in the world. Thus these gates relate mainly to the ten powers which facilitate perception and action: the nose, tongue, eyes, ears, skin, anus, reproductive organs, feet, hands and vocal cords. The eleventh gate is *brahmarandhra*, the opening to the world of Brahma or the immortal self, at the crown of the head. In

newly born babies the skull is open there and a pulse can be seen or felt through the skin. In the traditional Hindu funeral rites, and maybe in other cultures, the skull is ceremonially opened there at the funeral so the spirit can escape in this most auspicious direction.

The prana will escape through any of these gates at death, mostly through the one that you have been most intensely involved in during life, and you end up in the associated dimensions of consciousness. In death as in life, one's direction is bound by one's attachments. Any spiritual seeker who is devoted to a particular concept of the immortal self will go in that direction. An accomplished yogi knows how to control the mind and the senses, and the prana. Rather than being attached to the world of the senses, they identify and desire union with Atman or Brahman and therefore leave through the brahmarandhra as an act of conscious will, so their 'death' is termed mahasamadhi.

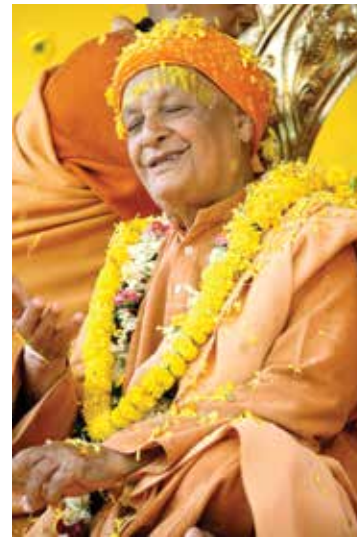
Mahasamadhi

The example of his guru allowed Swami Satyananda himself to master this stage of evolution. Many disciples from around the world testified to seeing him after his mahasamadhi, particularly in dreams or during meditation, but also during waking states. Swami Niranjanananda explains:

> *Samadhi* means absorption, becoming one with the higher nature. The samadhi that was taken by Sri Swami Satyananda does not fall in the categories of Sage Patanjali's samadhi. The samadhi of Sri Swamiji is *yoga samadhi*, which means samadhi that leads to union. It was not a samadhi that he attained by practising meditation; he attained it by willfully invoking a state of consciousness. Other people have to meditate for hours before they have even one momentary experience of samadhi, whereas Sri Swamiji just sat down and said, 'Okay. Pranas, soul. Hari Om Tat Sat. Go!' and that was it. It was a conscious willful samadhi.

In his satsangs he clearly said, "I have come to Deoghar to leave my body, not to establish an institution or to gather disciples. I have come to Deoghar to leave my body." In later years he said, "I have received a one-way ticket, but this one-way ticket will lead me to moksha. I don't want moksha. I want to come back not once, but again and again and again. I want to be born in a family where at the time of my birth my mother says to me: *Shuddhosi buddhosi niranjanosi; samsara maya parivarjitosi* – 'You are pure, you are enlightened, go and help others.' I want to live every lifetime of mine as a sannyasin.

As a sannyasin I can serve others without considering myself. I don't have anybody in front or behind to care for or consider. In a family people are dependent. In sannyasa one is independent and it is my only wish to remove suffering from the lives of people. For that, I want to come back again and again until everyone experiences peace and bliss. I have applied to God for that. The day I receive my confirmed return ticket, 'Yes, your train is booked to come back on this day', I shall leave this body, go to the destination, get on the train and come back."



Even on 2nd December 2009, the last day of Sat Chandi Mahayajna, he had mentioned, "I am still waiting for my return ticket. Remember, the moment it comes, I will leave instantly." Three days later at night on the 5th, he called one of the sannyasa disciples, Swami Satsangi, and said to her, "I have received my return ticket, my train is coming

and I have to get on the train now. No more wasting time." Then he sat down, started doing his mantra, folded his hands in prayer and said, "God, I am ready. Take me whenever you want to." He chanted the mantra *Om*, three times and *Hari Om Tat Sat*. It was a conscious, willful departure. That is yoga samadhi.

Before departing he told us the number of his return train, and that train has arrived. The return train has come back and today we know that he has returned. That is yoga samadhi.

. . . There are different people who have defined samadhi from different areas and angles. The highest in all of them is yoga samadhi where as a siddha you can control your own departure, arrival and destiny.

Sri Swamiji used to say, "The only person who can stop me from leaving this body is Niranjan and I don't want him around me when I leave the body." He also said, "The only person who can call me back again is Niranjan." He said this many years ago and it is published. I am for calling him, not for letting him go. If I was there he would not have been able to go. In fact, in 1968, in a satsang he said, "I have called Niranjan. In the future, Niranjan is going to call me."[13]

The breakthrough

The Pashupat Astra Yajna is an ancient and powerful practice that had not been performed for centuries; it was lost knowledge to the extent that the Varanasi pandits that Swami Niranjanananda called to perform it had to research the scriptures for the chants and procedures in order to conduct it. The Pashupat Astra Yajna is part of the culmination of the Panchagni sadhana. Fundamentally, it breaks through the three *granthis*, or knots which bind us to samsara and the cycle of rebirth:

[13] Swami Niranjanananda, 'Yoga Samadhi of Sri Swami Satyananda', *Avahan* Year 3; Issue 6, Sannyasa Peeth, Munger, Bihar India, Nov–Dec 2014, pp. 12–13

Even Sri Krishna had to transcend that last vestige or grain of self-identity, because you see, tamas is not only a negative act; *tamas* is containment, conditioning. *Brahma granthi*, for example, represents the activity of the senses: the karmendriyas and jnanendriyas. *Vishnu granthi* represents the activity of the total mind, the greater mind, the *mahat*, also known as the inner instrument, the *antah karana*. *Rudra granthi* represents the identity: "I am that I am: *Aham Brahmasmi*".

Now, when you say *aham*, you are identifying one particular entity, yourself; it is not *sarvam*, everything. That 'aham' is the asmita identity, 'I am'. So this Rudra granthi is also tamasic, because it is a containment, a conditioning: 'aham'. And so even this is to be transcended, and Krishna had to go through this, because an embodied spirit is always surrounded by tamas. It is the effulgence or luminosity of consciousness which is the aim; and the realization of that consciousness is the aim of the pashupat darshan.[14]



[14] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, satsang 11th March 2014, Day 3 of Pashupat Astra Yajna, Munger, Bihar, India

There are five *kleshas*, or things that cause pain: avidya, asmita, raga, dwesha and abhinivesha. We have met *abhinivesha*, the fear of death. It leads to *raga*, being attracted to some things, and d*wesha*, trying to avoid other things, and these two control us like the reins of a horse. Why? Because we want to hang on to the *asmita* identity that Swami Niranjanananda refers to here: the limited self-identity that sees us as separate from everything else.

People wanting to preserve the asmita identity may desire to make the body and everyday mind immortal, which is peculiar as well as impossible. Why want to stay in a limited cage which has played out its purpose? Death opens the door to an upgrade if we play the lila of life well.

The Sanatana dharma teaches that immortality is our very nature, the body and mind are simply vehicles for the present life. This realization is fundamental to the Sanatana dharma and to yoga. The teachings aim to clarify this single point: when we see the nature of the mind, and identify with the spirit in all beings 'aham' becomes 'sarvam'. This frees us from the fear of death. The avataras came to put humankind on the track of righteousness and help us realize the truth of life.

The cycle of evolution

The guru is able to recognize your karma and thus help you in the continuing journey from life to life. It is not possible to really become established in meditation until one has purified the samskaras lodged in the unconscious mind. Swami Niranjanananda is now releasing new practices of yoga that his guru gave him in seed form, to be kept safe until the time is right for planting them in the consciousness of humanity. This will help in our present lives, but more importantly, it can help clear the consciousness to enable us to experience meditation and eventually the state of samadhi. That state is natural for human beings, we experience something like it in the remarkable state of sleep, that we so much take for granted.

That pure state of consciousness is also what remains of us in the process of death and rebirth. So we should be eager for the state of samadhi and start preparing ourselves now. The house is burning, we have to get out of here and find the temple. Swami Niranjanananda explains:

> Rebirth is a natural process which keeps on happening until one uses the faculties of the spirit, the consciousness, to break the cycle of birth and death which happens again and again . . . the normal understanding of human existence is only half the circle. One thinks that by expanding the sensorial, intellectual and emotional faculties, by opening the intellect and the heart, one will become realized. This is only a process that allows one to exhaust the karmas and samskaras. Why does one meditate? To realize and exhaust one's karmas and samskaras. Spirituality is the knowledge of this entire process of evolution, which goes through a full circle, from life to life, from pure consciousness to externalized consciousness and back to pure consciousness.[15]

As the Shanti Mantra of the *Ishavasya Upanishad* states:

> *Om poornamadah poornamidam poornaat poornamudachyate; Poornasya poornamaadaaya poornameva avashishyate.*
>
> That is full and this is full. Remove a part from the full, what you have removed is full, and what is left behind is full.[16]

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[15] *op cit*., Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga, Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, pp. 91 and 105

[16] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, text, transliteration, translation & notes, *Nine Principal Upanishads*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2004, p. 89

11

Panchagni and Transcendence

Panchagni: *pancha agni*, means five fires. A *sadhana* is a practice that is performed for a long time without interruption, and with reverence or respect for the process, the aim and the forces that are involved. The physical component involves sitting in the centre of four fires for about eight hours a day. The fires are close around the yogi, about a metre away at most. The sadhana is started in the cold months, but as the practice continues it extends up to six months and the fifth fire is the sun burning overhead. The



concentration intensifies, in part to enable the yogi to endure the physical circumstances, with temperatures reaching 80 degrees Celsius. During that time mantra anushthanas and meditations are performed. Whether focusing internally or externally, the chitta is purified like gold.

Introduction to Panchagni sadhana

In this chapter, we will first look at the people known to have practised this sadhana. Maybe sannyasins have done some form of this tapasya hidden in the jungles, mountains or ashrams of India, but the half dozen names clearly associated with this sadhana are legendary. Secondly we will look at some of the scriptures which have preserved the guidelines on how to perform it.

The most well-known references to the Panchagni vidya are in the *Kathopanishad*, and they are examined later in this chapter. Those in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* are less known. The references in the *Chandogya Upanishad* are not often given. Swami Sivananda points out that the *Chandogya* gives the same meditations as the *Brihadaranyaka* with a few minor variations.

In all these scriptures, Panchagni is said to ultimately lead to freedom from the samsara chakra; though that may not be the reason why one becomes pledged to the sadhana in the first place. The references to Panchagni vidya are not generally well known, although the surrounding stories may be. Sri Adi Shankaracharya mentions Panchagni vidya in his commentaries. His style somehow discourages people who are only interested in the narrative, but we will close with his views.

Known practitioners of Panchagni sadhana

First, there was Devi Parvati who practised as part of her effort to attract Lord Shiva (cosmic consciousness) indicating that for union with cosmic consciousness one has to undergo tapasya.[1]

[1] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Shiva Charita: Narratives of Shiva*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, p. 137

There was Nachiketas, the son of a famous yogi called Vajashrava. His story is reported in detail in the *Kathopanishad*, one of the oldest and most revered of the Upanishads. We will look at that report, and a couple of commentaries on it to try and understand what the implications of this multi-layered sadhana are. And we have already met Aruni, also called Gautama, whose instruction on the interrelatedness of all creation and transmigration form part of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. If you remember from Chapter 2: Sanatana Dharma, Aruni taught his son Svetaketu all he knew, but Svetaketu found he still could not answer the questions on death put to him by the king Pravahana. Aruni therefore went humbly as a disciple to the king, and learned the Panchagni vidya.

In modern times, Sarada Devi practised Panchagni sadhana as she searched for a reason to continue living after the mahasamadhi of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. After her tapasya she received prophetic visions and the understanding and ability to continue his work.

> When the day for observance of *panchatapa* finally arrived, my heart began to pound – the fear of having to enter the fire unnerved me. Just picture it to yourself – four solid blazing encirclements of dung-cakes placed in four corners at a distance of about five feet each and the midday sun burning fiercely right overhead! The summer heat too was at its worst.
>
> After bathing in the Ganga, I stood pondering how to enter the ring of fire when daughter Yogin urged me, 'Go in, Mother, there is nothing to fear.' Encouraged by her words and with the thought of the Master in my heart, I entered (the ring of fire) and sat down in the centre till sundown. I observed this for as many as five days. The fire in my heart cooled only when my body was charred like a piece of burnt wood.
>
> Sushil Maharaj asked, "Where was the need for you to undertake all this?" Mother answered, "My child, do

you know why? It was for all of you. Would it be possible for my sons to perform all these? Just see, how Gopala is sleeping free of care! That's why all this had to be done. What I have done is quite insignificant compared to all that Master had done.[2]

She observed the Panchagni tapasya for five days, sitting each day till sundown practising prayer and meditation. The insights generated filled her mind with a sense of purpose. She began to see that her Master, Paramahamsa Ramakrishna, lived his mission and that he worked through those whom he made his instruments in its fulfilment. Her own part in it began to dawn on her little by little.[3]



Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati, Peethadishwari of Rikhiapeeth, inspired by her guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, practised Panchagni for one month, the traditional maximum for female tapasvis, for five years. She has explained the transformative experience of living on the threshold of internal and external awareness which is necessary to survive during this tapasya.

Swami Satyananda practised *Panchagni sadhana*, the spiritual practice involving five fires, for about ten years. Five years of preparation, then five years relentlessly sitting for six months of the year between four fires with the fifth fire – the sun – over head. We wondered why. He didn't make a big

[2] Swami Purnatmananda, compiled & ed. *Reminiscences of Sri Sarada Devi*, 'Holy Mother' by Ashutosh Mishra, Advaita Ashram, Kolkata, West BengalIndia, 2004, pp.157 ff

[3] *The Gospel of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, recorded by her devotee-children, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, Tamil Nadu, India, 1986, p. xxviii



fuss about doing it. He wandered off into the middle of rural India and when his disciples tracked him down and wouldn't leave, he got them to build a wall around him and keep the other people out. Just he and his Alsatian dog, Bholenath were allowed inside the enclosure. He never really explained why he was doing it. His presence was such that when we finally were allowed to see him, no one thought to ask. The mind went blank. Years later he explained the importance of preserving the ancient vedic sadhanas that destroy the limiting ego and the sense of doership which makes every action a karma binding us to the samsara chakra.

The Panchagni sadhana is not for everyone – very few could endure just the physical hardships involved – but it frees one from revolving helplessly in the never-ending karmas that drive our life and the cycle of birth and rebirth. As Swami Satyananda's spiritual successor, Swami Niranjanananda took up the sadhana also. It started to become clear that this was a profound part of a traditional training that has survived in the sannyasa tradition. Powerful sadhanas are often termed secret. Panchagni sadhana is secret in the sense that only very few people can really focus on it, let alone actually do it. It is a sadhana that stretches the limits of our reality.

Why would somebody do such a thing voluntarily? Because this particular tapasya gives one the understanding



of how the universe is constructed, how everything is interrelated, of how the essence is one, so say the Upanishads.

Swami Niranjanananda, as a child, had allowed the scientists in USA to access and be confounded by his brainwave patterns. He had been raised since birth by his guru, the rishi and scientist, Swami Satyananda whose laboratory was the world, whose tool was the greater mind, and who contemplated, embodied and worked for the establishment of the culture of truly human beings. Maybe many sannyasins have done some form of this tapasya, but none have offered themselves for public scrutiny. So maybe it was natural for Swami Niranjan, as well as fortunate for us, that he offered his sadhana like an open book for us to witness and learn from according to our individual capacity.

Who is eligible for Panchagni and what is the purpose?

To become free from the chain of life and death it is necessary to achieve Brahmavidya, according to Vedanta and the teachings of saints and siddhas across the centuries:

> Those who think of the reward will receive benefit in the shape of that reward. Liberation is the work of Shiva-Shakti, and is gained only by *brahmajnana*, the destruction of the will to separate life, and realization

> of unity with the Supreme. All accompanying action must be without thought of self. With the cessation of desire, the tie which ties man to the samsara is broken. According to the Tantra, the sadhana and achara appropriate to an individual depends upon his karma. A man's tendencies, character and temperament is moulded by his sanchita karma.[4]

Only those whose *swabhava*, inner nature, yearns for moksha are eligible for moksha. This does not imply understanding something intellectually. It means being transformed from something mortal to something immortal. Maybe we can understand it as the progression from being a dewdrop to being its atoms to being the basic space and energy that constitutes that ephemeral structure.

The *Bhagavad Gita* speaks of the yama and niyama as being tapasyas, fires that burn and transform the elements of our personality and inner nature. Adi Shankaracharya insists that students achieve some level of proficiency in the *sadhana chatushtaya*, the fourfold practice, before they are even considered as eligible for higher teachings.

1. *Viveka*, discrimination between the real and the unreal.
2. *Vairagya*, non-attachment to the unreal.
3. The *shadsampatti*: or six treasures: *shama*, removing desires or attraction to external objects, *dama*, restraint of the indriyas, *uparati*, turning away from sense objects, *shraddha*, faith in the teachings of the scriptures and guru, *samadhana*, unwavering contemplation of the truth (Brahman), *titiksha*, uncomplaining endurance.
4. *Mumukshutva*, the strong urge for liberation.

Swami Satyananda remarked several times that only one who has conquered the inner fires of passion, anger, greed,

[4] Arthur Avalon, *Tantra of the Great Liberation (Mahanirvana Tantra): A Translation from the Sanskrit with Introduction and Commentary*, Dover Publications Inc, New York, 1972, pp. cxxxix ff

envy, delusion and egotistic arrogance can hope to survive the Panchagni tapasya. These are the classical six enemies, which are also referred to in the account of the after-life by the Tibetan Buddhists.

In the *Chonyid Bardo* there is specific reference during the first five days to the Peaceful deities relating not only to the five tattwas but to the five enemies of humanity. The same revelation is given in the tantras. Arthur Avalon remarks, in his introduction to *Tantra of the Great Liberation*:

> The six chief sins are *kama, krodha, lobha, moha, mada, matsarya* – lust, anger, covetousness, ignorance or delusion, pride and envy. All wrong is at base self-seeking, in ignorance or disregard of the unity of the Self in all creatures. Virtue, *punya,* therefore, as the contrary of sin, is that which is the cause of happiness, *sukhajanakam punyam*. That happiness is produced either in this or future births, or leads to the enjoyment of heaven, *swarga*.[5]

It means that just recognizing these things in our selves is not enough. Just being able to control our words, thought and actions in the light of that knowledge is not enough, though it sure is a good beginning and is needed in this world. It means just being able to reorient ourselves so that such elements are not part of our basic desires and are eradicated from our conditioning is not enough, though that would assure us of heaven in this life (and after-life according to many traditions).

IT MEANS BURN BABY BURN IN THE FIRE OF ENLIGHTENMENT IF YOU DON'T WANT TO MEET ME ANYMORE.

Mmm, yes. But, Death, this sort of understanding makes it clear you're not at all a blood-thirsty entity to be feared – really you're just absolutely impartial in your duty . . .

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[5] *ibid*., pp. cxxxvii–cxxxviii

Recognizing one's samskaras

Just as Myers and more recent scientists have understood that the consciousness of humankind is far greater than the waking state alone would have us believe, so did the rishis. That should mean that we can walk out of the movie theatre at the end of this particular life story and keep on being conscious and aware. But then what are we going to do? Just find another movie, another real life drama? Or become serious about giving up the superficials of life and look deeper?

A friend went for a journey with expert rafters on the river going from Pokhara through big rapids. He noticed they had absolute skill and no fear, though they were playing with the mighty force of the water. Also he noticed specific tasks were delegated to the four crew members in each canoe so they could get through the rapids. He asked, "How can you know so clearly what to do – the river here changes every day, every hour, because we're so close to the meltdown from the Himalayas?" The crew explained, "In the dry season, we walk the river bed and learn where all the big boulders are, and where the chasms are. So we know what obstructions are there, and will remain there, even when we can't see them because so much water is flowing over them."

Listening to this, it struck me that this relates to the flow of consciousness, which runs like a deep river, with the main current deep down, unconscious. In fact, our life is like a river of water running through the river bed of our karmas. How can we get to know it? One step is by acknowledging the six enemies in ourselves. To walk the river bed would mean putting aside the rush of small selfish pursuits and perceptions, and absorbing ourselves in the discipline of living the yamas and niyamas, the sadhana chatushtaya or whatever other techniques the guru gives, so we can see where our boulders and chasms are.

Trying to live the yamas and niyamas sincerely is tough enough to increase knowledge of our own weaknesses and also to increase positive qualities, inner strengths and motivation. Yogis who have walked the riverbed become

fearless and are established in doing the right thing naturally. Performing continuous spiritual sadhanas becomes the lifestyle, because that life of the spirit is what they are primarily aware of. Death for them is liberation from the body – its sense organs, thinking mind, etc., are a limitation of the extra-sensory awareness and inner communion. We little tadpoles get helplessly washed around in the stream of our karmas after death, and get rushed into a new birth. But they remain the drashta, aware and witnessing, and that awareness becomes everything. It is actually a sacrifice if such compassionate beings choose to take birth to help.

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* on Panchagni

We have looked at aspects of the Sanatana dharma as presented in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, and in particular its instructions on the Panchagni sadhana. Among other lessons, it teaches that ignorance of the law of the universe, the divine law, is the cause of suffering. Through meditations on the very common incident of the birth of a child, the process of cosmic creation as a whole is taught. The *Brihadaranyaka* tells us that the creation of the universe is a sacrifice and all our actions are oblations in this universal sacrifice.

Each limb and organ of the body performs its natural function, not for its own sake, but for the person of whom it forms a part. And so is the case with the great sacrifice identified as the creation of the universe: the purpose of the work is beyond the individual part. This all-comprehensive concept is the background of the Panchagni sadhana. The knowledge of the interrelatedness of the parts of the universe, is the central achievement of the Panchagni meditations, which can lead to the higher heavenly lokas after death, or transcendence – freedom from the samsara chakra.

From the greatest being down to the smallest creature, creation starts with vibration. No one is isolated from the rest of the universe. The apparent causes for each single birth are linked to subtler causes which are neither known, nor felt by us while we remain dependent on, and limited by, the

senses. This is why yoga, our tool for approaching wisdom, emphasizes the importance of pratyahara and meditation, and that again returns us to the tough sadhana of practising the yamas and niyamas – that is, living the resulting insights.

The scriptures don't speak about the creation of the universe as a historical incident that took place at some time in the past. The descriptions in the scriptures are there to help meditation. In essence the teachings are one, and though in this section we will look at the Panchagni sadhana as described in different Upanishads, do not feel you have to read it all now. If you need practical help to manage death and dying right now, then turn to Part 4: Here and Now. Also, you can start practising the meditations in Part 5, The point of the following pages is to show that seeing death as part of our evolution is not new age – it's old gold wisdom.

Panchagni vidya in the *Chandogya Upanishad*

Chandogya Upanishad, chapter 5, section 3 mantras 1–7 tells basically the same narrative as the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* – this knowledge was previously only for kings, *kshatriyas*, there is a drama between a Brahmana father and son, and then come the questions.[6]

Questions and meditative answers

1. Do you know where the creatures go from here when they die?
2. Do you know how they return again?
3. Do you know where the path of the gods and the path of the ancestors' part?
4. Do you know how the world does not become filled up with all these life forms returning again and again?
5. Do you know how water comes to be known by the word 'person' after the fifth oblation?

[6] Swami Gambhirananda, trans, *Chandogya Upanishad & Commentary by Adi Shankaracharya*, Advaita Ashram, Calcutta, West Bengal, India, 1st ed. 1983, pp. 334–377

We will quote quite a lot of the *Chandogya* here. The slight differences of the *Chandogya's* answers from those of the *Brihadaranyaka* are indicated by bold type so that one can compare the explanation of the path.

First Meditation

O Gautama, the yonder world is indeed the fire. Of that the sun is indeed the fuel, the rays are the smoke, the day is the flame, **the moon is the ember, the stars are the sparks.** (verse 4:1)

Second Meditation

O Gautama, the deity of cloud is indeed the fire; of it, **air** is verily the fuel, cloud is the smoke, lightning is the flame, thunder is the ember, the rumblings of thunder are the clouds. (verse 5:1)

In that fire which is such, the gods offer the bright moon as an oblation. Rain originates from that oblation. (verse 5:2)

Third Meditation

O Gautama, the earth is indeed the fire, of that, the **year** is verily the fuel, the **sky** is the smoke, night is the flame, the **four main directions** are the embers, the **intermediate directions** are the sparks. (verse 6:1)

In that fire which is such, the gods offer rainfall as an oblation; from that oblation grows food. (verse 6:2)

Fourth Meditation

O Gautama, man is indeed the fire, his **speech** is verily the fuel, **outgoing breath** is the smoke, the tongue is the flame, the eye is the ember, the ear is the spark. (verse 7:1)

In that fire which is such, the gods offer food as an oblation. From that oblation originates semen. (verse 7:2)

Fifth Meditation



O Gautama, woman is indeed the fire . . . In that fire which is such, the gods offer semen as the oblation. From that oblation the foetus comes into being. (verse 8:1–2)

The answers to questions on life and death

The fifth question is answered first: it is through the stages of faith, moon, rainfall, food and semen, which are offered as oblations that those waters themselves become the foetus of a person.

> Thus indeed, after the fifth oblation, water is to be called a person. Covered by a membrane, that foetus having slept inside for ten or nine months, or the time needed, takes birth thereafter. (verse 9:1)

Then the first question is answered:

> After he is born, he lives as long as he is destined to live. When he dies for going to his merited world, then, they carry him verily to the fire, from which indeed he had come and from which he takes birth. (verse 9:2)



Shankara says: he is destined to live for as long a period as he has earned through his actions, performing rites and duties for coming and going, again and again, like a Persian Wheel (moving up and down), or moving horizontally like a potter's wheel.

Then the third question is answered along with the first: The path of the gods is the northern 'path of light'. Those on the path of light move to other dimensions for various long periods of time.

> Among them who know thus, and those in the forest who practise with diligence, faith and austerity, they reach the deity of flame. From the flame they reach the daylight; from the daylight to the bright fortnight, from the bright fortnight to the six months during which the sun moves northward; from those six months to the year; from the year to the sun, from the sun to the moon; from the moon to lightning. There a superhuman person leads them to Brahma (Hiranyagarbha). This is the divine path. (verse 10:1–2)

> *Shankara says*: . . . since they are pure in mind owing to their abandonment of cruelty, falsehood, simulation, non-celibacy, etc., and since they are free of dross owing to avoidance of love and hatred for friends and foes, etc, it is proper that they should have the Northern Path.

Then comes a description of the Southern Path or the dark path. This is the other half of the answer to the third question – explaining the fate of those on the path of the manes (the ancestors).

> Then those in the village, who remain devoted to acts of sacrifice, public welfare, charity, etc., they reach the smoke; from smoke to night, from night to the dark fortnight, from the dark fortnight to the six months

during which the sun moves southward. These do not reach the year.

From the months to the world of the manes, from the world of the manes to the interspace, from the interspace to the moon. This is the King Soma. That is food for the gods. Him the gods eat. (verse 10:4)

Then the second question is answered. In Shankara's explanation of how they return to this world, we come again to the understanding that birth as a human being is a great opportunity. It isn't to be taken for granted because – it ain't necessarily so . . .

Having lived there till the exhaustion of the fruits, he again returns along the very path by which he had gone. He reaches the intermediate space; from the intermediate space he returns to the air; becoming identified with air he turns into smoke, becoming smoke he turns into white cloud. (verse 10:5)

Shankara says: . . . the results of actions, which can be enjoyed in various incompatible kinds of bodies can, at a time, lead to the birth of only one kind of a creature. Besides, it is not possible to enjoy the results of all actions in a single life . . . the various incompatible tendencies acquired by the experiences in earlier lives as man, peacock, monkey and others, do not (all) get eliminated when a monkey-life is begun.

After becoming the white cloud, it turns into (thick) cloud. After becoming the (thick) cloud it comes down as rain. Those individual souls are born here as paddy, barley, herbs, sesamum, black pulse, etc. It is certainly more difficult to come out of these. He takes birth in the very form of him whosoever eats food, whoever ejects semen.

Among them, those who were performers of meritorious deeds here; they will attain good birth indeed,



> in a quick manner – birth as a Brahmin, or birth as a Kshatriya, or birth as a Vaisya. On the other hand, those who were performers of bad deeds here, they will attain bad births indeed in a quick manner – birth as a dog, or birth as a pig, or birth as a Chandala. (verse 10:6–7)
>
> *Shankara says*: . . . But those who are twice born, the performers of meritorious deeds, who follow their own duties and undertake sacrifices etc., they depart and return again and again through the path of smoke etc., like moving on a Persian-wheel. But if they take recourse to meditation, then they go along the path of flame, etc.

Then comes the answer to the fourth question: Do you know how the world does not become filled up with all the returning souls?

> On the other hand, through neither of these two paths, are born those small creatures which transmigrate again and again. This third state is indicated by the words, 'Be born and die'. Thereby the other world does not get filled up. (verse 10:8)

. . . Again, anyone who knows these five fires thus, does not become besmeared with sin, even though he mixes with them. Anyone who knows thus, becomes unsullied, pure, and a dweller in the world of virtue. (verse 10:10)

Panchagni vidya in the *Kathopanishad*

The *Kathopanishad* from the *Krishna Yajurveda* must be very ancient as the *Bhagavad Gita* quotes from it. Nachiketas is the young hero. Nachiketas' father has three names: Gautama, Auddalaki Aruni (meaning *Auddalaki*, son of Aruna), and Vajashrava. In the story as recorded in the *Kathopanishad*, Nachiketas' father, Vajashrava, was performing a sacrifice but gave old cows instead of ones that could still give milk. Nachiketas was worried that this would have consequences bad for his father and repeatedly asked him – "To whom will you give me?" Vajashrava eventually said, "I'll give you to Death!" Obeying his father, Nachiketas immediately left for Lord Yama's kingdom (Death) to honour his father's word. Thus we need the guru to throw us out of our self-righteousness.



When Nachiketas arrived at Death's door, no one was there so he waited without food, drink or shelter (i.e. he was performing tapas), for Lord Yama to return.

So I insisted he choose three boons – one for each night he waited.

Nachiketa said, "Well first, when I return to my father, I want him to be happy to see me."

I thought, what a good boy! So I said, no problem. what's your next wish?

He said, "I want to live a good life so I can attain heaven where there is no fear of death."

I wanted to reassure him, so I said, someone like you doesn't have to go around being scared of me. I'll show you the fire sacrifice that takes you to Brahma Loka (alias Satya Loka or Hiranyagarbha). You can stay there till the end of this whole cycle of creation, enjoy all the pleasures, the siddhis etc. No problem!

He was a bright kid. He learned everything so perfectly I call it 'The Nachiketa Fire Sacrice'now. Then I asked, and your third boon?

Then he said, "Tell me how to conquer death."

Naturally I hesitated. I offered him all kinds of pleasures and powers instead, but he was completely uninterested. A real vairagi, not interested in the mortal world or the other lokas either. He was a real mumukshu, so I had no option, he was qualified. I taught him the real Nachiketa's Sacrifice – for moksha, total merger in Brahman, totally beyond death for all eternity.

It's all been recorded in the *Kathopanishad* – The Lord of Death (my humble self) says:

> I know well the fire (sacrifice) O Nachiketas, which leads to heaven and I will tell it to thee. Learn it from me. Know that it is the means of attainment of eternal heaven and also the support of the Universe, and is seated in the cavity (of the heart of the learned). (1:1:14)

You see, actually sitting amongst the five fires is almost impossible for the mortal body, but the external part of this tapasya is not so important as the inner meditative process. That's something people tend to forget because the external process is so spectacular.

The psychic knots

The *Kathopanishad* begins with the ritual religion of the *Brahmanas* but does not stop there, like all Upanishads it pushes both thought and technique further. The ritual is significant, but the symbols have to be subjectively realized for the sadhaka to attain final and eternal liberation. And in Swami Sivananda's commentary there is a definite connection made between the external fires and the inner *granthis*, or knots, that limit the consciousness, and which one must strive to break through.

We can practise awareness of the three major *granthis*, the psychic knots which tie us to different levels of existence and aspiration. *Brahma granthi*, at mooladhara chakra level, ties us to objects, the material universe, fear of the unknown, attachments, instinctual responses and the tamasic aspect of our nature. *Vishnu granthi*, at anahata chakra, ties us to relationships, aspirations, our emotions and the rajasic aspects of our nature that give the sense of doership and tie us here. *Rudra granthi*, at ajna chakra, ties us to the love of knowledge, the sense of our own separateness – to ahamkara, and untying it allows the sattwic aspects of our nature to shine forth. Swami Niranjanananda says if we dissolve the last granthi, then there is no need for rebirth, there is nothing to tie us here.

It is necessary to overcome all desires, therefore intense vairagya on all levels must become a natural state – this is called the *Nachiketa bhava*. The Pashupata Yajna is a culmination of the Panchagni sadhana that Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjanananda have performed. In 2018, after five years of the Panchagni sadhana, Swami Niranjanananda spoke again of the necessity of breaking through the three granthis.

> They say that Shivaji used his strength only once in his lifetime; only once. He had it all the time, but he used it only once and after using it once, he gave it to King Janaka, the father of Sita, who kept it and worshipped



it. The power of Shiva was too great for king Janaka to utilize in any way, he could not even harness it. He just had it and worshipped it. . .

Shiva used his power, his shakti, once to pierce the three cities called Tripura, and that is the image seen where Shivaji points his bow at three satellites, three cities and he has to pierce them in one shot. The first city is made out of iron, the second city is made out of silver, and the third city is made out of gold. The metal of the first city is the heaviest, and the most impure. It has to be purified a lot to make it usable. Gold is the most pure and the most valuable. Iron is not so valuable as gold. So iron represents the conditioned manifest nature, the raw material of the manifest nature, the crude material, and that is tamas. Silver represents the



dynamic nature, the *kriya*, the motion, the movement – rajas, and gold represents the luminous effulgent nature, the pure untainted nature – sattwa.

The strength that we all have is to be used in spiritual life for breaking through these three cities or knots, *granthi*s: Brahma granthi, Vishnu granthi, Rudra granthi. Only after the three cities or the three knots are pierced by the strength of Shiva do you achieve transcendence.

There is a very unexpected and interesting idea given here. We can understand the knot of Brahma, the conditioned, the manifest, the created. We can understand the knot of Narayana, Vishnu, where everything is maintained, preserved, developed, sustained. But when it comes to the knot of Shiva, the name isn't, 'Shiva's knot', it is Rudra's knot, Rudra granthi. And the word *Rudra* is derived from the root '*rud*' which means 'to cry'.

So even that last aspect of the sattwic nature has to be transcended – and there the cry happens, because you are being separated from your identity. The cry happens twice from Rudra granthi. When you are born, what do you do, first thing, as soon as you come out? As soon as you emerge from the womb and look at the world? With your eyes closed you say, Ooohhh, God, where have I come? And you begin to cry. That is the first act. That means that the soul is coming down from higher regions, down through Rudra granthi and you begin to cry.

Then what is the next act? You are given nourishment. Mother's milk is the first drop that goes into your stomach and that fires up the Narayana, Vishnu granthi, right? Nourishment suddenly goes to all regions of the body,

into the blood, into the cells, into the whole body. For nine months you didn't have anything except what was there naturally but now, Vishnu in the outer world takes over and that is the beginning of the Vishnu, the preservation aspect. And then as you grow, you get stuck in the Brahma granthi; we are all stuck in the Brahma granthi.

So 'Rudra granthi' is very appropriate because that is the place where one cries: first, when you are leaving the higher world to enter this idiotic world, and second, when you have identified with this idiotic world and you don't want to leave it to go to the higher world. *Asmita*, self-identity, comes in, self-awareness comes in, self comes in and breaking of that *ahamkara* leads to *rudan,* crying, again. Even in sattwa – after all, you are only able to experience sattwa because you have something in your mind to experience it.

So even in sattwa, there is duality. How do you know that you are in sattwa? Because there is something that tells you that you are experiencing something else: something external to 'me'. So still there is duality, and that duality is there because of *ahamkara*, 'me' as an identity, 'I'. So when you are breaking through sattwa to go to that realm, whether you call it transcendental or divine, again you cry, 'Oh, what a lovely life I had down there. I loved, I hated, I was born, I grew up, I was ignorant, I became educated, I earned name and fame. I am losing all that and going there? Merging with God?' And you cry again and once you have cried, and you have detached yourself, you are one with that.

These are the two cries of Rudra granthi: at the time of arrival, when the stamp at the Customs is put on the passport, and at the time of departure when the stamp of departure is put on the passport. That is Rudra granthi, the final Customs.[7]

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[7] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, satsang 10th February 2018, Day 2 of the Pashupat Astra Yajna, Munger, Bihar, India

Beyond the samsara chakra

Worshipping the fire – they call it *Agni vidya* – purifies, burns up the rubbish and gives pure ash. Such tapasya is beyond most people, trapped in the *samsara chakra*, the cycle of rebirth, by our passions and desires, but we are all encouraged to begin to deal with the inner fires and blocks.

The three major granthis are *Brahma granthi* tying us to tamas and the material dimension, *Vishnu granthi* tying us to rajasic drives, and *Rudra granthi* tying us at the level of ahamkara. If we are attached to the body, our actions and self-importance, we continue to desire rebirth. On a pranic and psychic level, it is explained that the granthis prevent the kundalini rising through sushumna and thus prevent the individual from realizing the unity of jivatma with paramatma.

A jivanmukta has broken through the granthis, but most human beings, while embodied, do not experience oneness with the cosmic soul. In his commentary, Swami Sivananda notes that we are bound to our mortality until we overcome the granthis.

> When all the knots of the heart are severed here on earth, then the mortal becomes immortal, so far is the instruction (of all Vedanta). (2:3:15)
>
> There are hundred and one nerves of the heart. One of them (Sushumna) penetrates the crown of the head, moving upward by it one (at the time of death) attains immortality, the other nerves are of various course. (2:3:16)
>
> *Swami Sivananda notes*: *Hridayasya granthayah* – knots of the heart, knots of ignorance. Ignorance, *avidya*, desire, *kama*, action, *karma*, are the three important knots. Egoism, hatred, lust, jealousy and pride born of ignorance are small knots. The beliefs 'I am this body' . . . (etc) . . . are destroyed by the rise of the contrary belief in the identity of the Atman, Brahman,

in the form, 'I am certainly Brahman.' When all the knots of the heart are destroyed then the mortal attains immortality.[8]

It is only after untying oneself from the granthis that the energy is able to rise through sushumna. And for a siddha, this energy can be summoned at the time of death, rocketing one to the target.

Inner attainment

In the *Kathopanishad*, it says meditating on *Aum* as *saguna Brahma*, God with form or qualities, leads to heaven, (Hiranyagarbha), while meditating on *Aum* as *nirguna Brahman*, God without any particular form, leads to liberation, *moksha*. Likewise, there is a difference between the performance of the Panchagni at different levels of attainment corresponding to the inner experience of the one performing it.

> Whoever performs three times this sacrifice of Nachiketas fire and has been united with the three (father, mother and teacher) and has performed the three duties (study, sacrifice and alms-giving) overcomes birth and death. When he has understood this adorable, bright, omniscient fire born of Brahman and realized him, then he obtains everlasting peace. (1:1:17)
>
> He who knows the three Nachiketas fires, and propitiates the Nachiketas fire with this knowledge, throws off the chains of death, goes beyond sorrow and rejoices in heaven. (1:1:18)

Here the chains of death are vice: ignorance, desire, greed, attachment, hatred, etc.

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[8] Swami Sivananda, *The Principal Upanishads*, The Divine life So0ciety, Tehri-Garhwal, Uttar Pradesh, India, 4th ed 1998, pp. 124 and 125

> This, O Nachiketas, is thy fire which leads to heaven and which thou hast chosen as thy second boon; people will call this fire thine alone. Choose now, O Nachiketas, thy third boon. (1:1:19)[9]

The instruction continues in Chapter 1:3, and again refers specifically to performing the Nachiketas sacrifice three times. What does this mean? Does it mean one has to physically sit amongst the five fires three times? Could it be referring to overcoming the five inner enemies at three different levels?

1. At the level of *karma*, being able to restrain one's actions, so one never actually acts from moha, mada, lobha, krodha, or matsarya.
2. Then at the level of *kama*, never even having the internal desire or inclination to act due to infatuation, arrogance, greed, anger or jealousy.
3. And finally, due to *vidya*, seeing the Self in all, overcoming *avidya*, overcoming the ignorance which gives rise to these inner enemies which chain us to death and rebirth in a seemingly endless cycle.

Maybe the inner attitude shifts like this in order to transform the same ritual from being a path to heaven to being the one that leads to moksha, total merger with Brahman? The *Taittirya Brahmana* raises another aspect to the sadhana which may throw light on this question.

Taittiriya Brahmana: What were the three boons?

The Upanishads form part of the *Jnanakand* of the Vedas, where the important thing is knowledge, *vidya*, only. In the Upanishads it is the meditative intent, understanding and experience of the performer of the ritual that is of paramount importance in determining the purpose and result of the Panchagni sadhana. The *Taittiriya Brahmana* forms part

[9] *ibid*., pp. 57 and 58

of the Karmakanda of the Vedas and there also the story of Nachiketas unfolds. It is like a recap of the *Kathopanishad*. Freedom from death and birth is obtained by the performance of a special sacrifice in the form of a fire ceremony, but in the Brahmana, the emphasis is on action, behaviour.

The *Taittiriya Brahmana* (3:11:43) speaks of the three boons that Nachiketas wins as being:

1. *Prajnaa ta iti* – for society
2. *Pashu(ng) sta iti* – for the person living an ordinary life
3. *Saadhukrityaam iti* – for the person behaving like a sannyasi.

Nachiketa wants his father to be happy, not to suffer any ill effects due to his giving away only old cows in sacrifice, and not to suffer because he gave his son to death either. This boon is *Prajnaa ta iti* – for society. Religions around the world have spoken of divine justice in this life and in the after-life. Such ideas motivate people to be good and sometimes to make the effort to improve their attitude, behaviour and awareness by following the disciplines of a spiritual path.

As a reward for his tapasya and faith, Nachiketa's first thought is to benefit others: he doesn't want his father to suffer, he wants him to be happy. This is the first boon of the Panchagni sadhana, and it relates to mastery of karma.

When offered a second boon, Nachiketa asked to be able to go to heaven, a higher divine dimension where all desires are fulfilled, and so all is bliss. This boon is *Pashu(ng) sta iti* – for the person living an ordinary life. It's what we generally want: not an unhappy life, and definitely not hell after death; but then not moksha either, not losing one's identity in some cosmic entity.

In the Vedas, the after-life lokas culminate in *Brahmaloka*, also known as *Satyaloka* or *Hiranyagarbha*, inhabited by divine beings for as long as the universe exists. Only the siddhas can reach so high but lesser heavenly dimensions are open to more ordinary folk. The idea is that through intense tapasya such as the Panchagni sadhana, ordinary human beings can

become full human beings and even divine beings in this life itself. Otherwise there is a process of gradual evolution as we garner experience and strive for self-improvement life after life. Our desires for material pleasures become attenuated and our samskaras more sattwic, taking us towards the divine life.

The third boon leads to *moksha*: the end of transmigration, the cycle of birth and death, and complete merger with Brahman for all eternity – beyond the periodic creation and destruction of the universe or multiverses. This is *Saadhu-krityaam iti* – for the person who has renounced the ignorance of ahamkara and desire, and is beyond the ties of karma totally: one who is totally dedicated to God.

What do we want?

Many people find comfort and inspiration in the ideas of an after-life and rebirth. Because they are attached to life, they want to live again. But identifying one's self with the body and the programming and the actions and relationships results in sticky karma which pulls one back into birth again and again, and *samsarati, iti samsarah*: what keeps on circling – that's samsara. For one who does not identify with the mortal body-mind but with the eternal spirit, their trajectory may circle Earth but only to utilize the gravitational field. For the ultimate sannyasi, there is no more compulsory journey or travel – This, verily is That.

So, rebirth is mainly for ordinary folk. It therefore relates to the second boon, intended for human beings who have not attained perfection, who still worship *saguna Brahman* – God in some form and with some qualities.

Adi Shankaracharya

This point is made clear by Adi Shankaracharya in his commentary of the *Brahma Sutras* of Vyasa in Topic 18:

> The path of the gods is for all worshippers of qualified Brahman.

But he stipulates that faith, austerity and excellence in meditation are necessary in any practice relating to saguna Brahman. The Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gita* teach there are basically two paths: one of light and one of shadow. *Bhagavad Gita* says (8:26):



> Those two paths of light and darkness are there for this world through eternity; going by the one a man never returns, while going by the other he has to come back.

We can understand the dark path (the path of smoke or shade) as being under the pull of karma. It is related to our ancestors and previous karma and therefore one undergoes speedy rebirth without much control. The light path leads to the *devas* – beings of light – and the Sun or inner Self. Though the verse says one never returns from the path of light, it seems to mean that a person following this path is not forced into quick rebirth, but one still undergoes rebirth when necessary for evolution or for some mission.

So why do people like Swamiji do Panchagni sadhana? Sri Adi Shankaracharya says in the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*:

People with a mission

> Those who have a mission to fulfill continue in the corporeal state as long as the mission demands it.
>
> *Vedantin*: . . . For the fulfillment of their mission they move on from one body to another with perfect liberty, as though from one house to another, while ridding themselves of the residual karmas that have begun bearing fruits once for all in those particular lives; and while retaining an unobliterated memory (of their identity

> etc.) they do this by creating new bodies, and owning them either simultaneously or successively, for they are the masters of the materials which produce the bodies and senses . . . a man with a spiritual mission has the corporeal existence as long as the mission demands it.[10]

Conclusion to Panchagni sadhana

If still caught up in the samsara chakra, one is sure of rebirth, either human or lower than that, and living righteously helps attain heaven. If one can dissolve the *granthis*, the attachments to various levels of existence, then the kundalini can flow in sushumna, and the siddha can die consciously and be reborn as necessary to complete a spiritual mission.

The Upanishads indicate Panchagni sadhana can be performed at different levels. Performing the Nachiketas sacrifice three times refers to the ability of purifying oneself at the level of karma, kama and avidya. The three boons won by the Panchagni sadhana can be related to the three levels of attainment:

1. Rebirth, in a human birth of various grades due to beneficial karma or mastery of karma.
2. Relative immortality in the heavenly realms due to victory over desire.
3. *Moksha* or *nirvana*, where one is always free of avidya and the pains of rebirth.

When we look at the words of someone actually practising the sadhana, Swami Niranjanananda advocates *maryada*, righteousness, or staying within the borders of correct behaviour in life as the sadhana for most people. Swami Satyananda often stated that he was not interested in a stay in the highest realms of heaven, but would be reborn to help the poor and the suffering. We have their teachings but we better start practising them because they are doing sadhana preparatory for leaving the whole cycle of transmigration.

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[10] Swami Gambhirananda (translation), *The Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, Advaita Ashram, Calcutta, West Bengal, India, Topic 19–32, pp. 702 ff

Part 4
Here and Now

12

Preparation for Death

This chapter is about how we should begin preparing for our own death. And basically, in order to do that, we have to live this life well, so we look at what attitudes we should develop during life and at the attitudes which are specifically helpful or necessary as our life approaches its end. To do this, we need to get a perspective on life and its purpose, and therefore we look at life from the viewpoint of what lifestyle helps us to develop and evolve more fully.

For those willing to begin their conscious preparation for the spiritual journey early, Chapter 13 goes into some detail on sadhanas that we can begin practising as they become relevant to us, but we must be aware that yogic practices and techniques are not enough. The lifestyle aspect of yoga is required, where one works on improving one's behavior and expressions because that affects the *samskaras*, the impressions or seeds in the consciousness, which survive death and frame our future destiny.

Reprogram the mind

Sadhanas such as pranayama and concentration techniques, including work with mantras and yantras that are recognized as archetypes, or ancient keys to the mind, clear and reprogram the mind. The six internal enemies that have to be overthrown according to the scriptures (anger, greed, lust, etc.) are actually tamasic or rajasic expressions of the

basic survival programming necessary for life in this earthly dimension, this *bhu loka*. They come with us naturally when we take birth into this dimension, and so Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati calls them our 'six friends', who are with us throughout life. But when we are leaving bhu loka and heading somewhere else, they are no longer necessary. We need to delete them to get more disc space for the sattwic qualities that will help us in a different loka.

The thing is, we can only manage such a radical transition of values and capacity when we practise with our day-to-day life, our lifestyle and expressions; just attending a class or two a week, of even maintaining a daily practice for an hour or so each day, is not enough. To attain the poised and balanced inner silence we earnestly desire in life and death, we have to live it. And in order to unselfconsciously focus on preparations for death, we have to be clear on why preparing for death in life is beneficial. Otherwise it feels a little – you know – embarrassingly morbid.

REALLY?

Afraid so. I mean, people look at you funny when you want to discuss death – no offence intended.

NONE TAKEN.

It's not exactly that you're a taboo subject, but . . .

PEOPLE LIKE TO AVOID ME.

Well, yes, it's sort of programed into us.

I KNOW, I KNOW. BUT DO YOU REALLY WANT TO IMPROVE THE PROGRAMMING? DO YOU WANT TO LIVE THE DHARMA AND DROP THE AHAMKARA?

Mmm. Yes?

THEN YOU'LL NEED A LITTLE HELP.

Seeking guidance

The *Bhagavad Gita* is set on the battlefield, where people are poised on the threshold of death, ready to kill or be killed. Arjuna, the hero, wants to avoid the war, knowing the suffering it will cause. Sri Krishna, the divine incarnation born to re-establish dharma on Earth, points out that we can never avoid death (2:27 and 28):

> For certain is death for the born, and certain is birth for the dead; death is sure to happen to that which is born. Birth and death are certainly unavoidable; therefore, you shouldn't grieve over the inevitable.
>
> Beings are unmanifested in their beginning, manifested in their middle state, O Arjuna, and unmanifested again in their end. What is there to grieve about?[1]

On a practical level, this is a very good realization to have about one's own death. It helps give courage to face a very demanding situation because it puts things into a context that we can handle – a bit like that pledge of the Alcoholics Anonymous:

> God give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change
> Courage to change the things I can
> And wisdom to know the difference.[2]

We may understand the whole *Bhagavad Gita* as being symbolic – seeing the war as a battle between our own inner divine and demonic nature. That's probably true on one level, but, however interested we may be in death philosophically, it's an extreme experience for all us mortals and one that we all have to go through. Therefore, we should acknowledge the importance of seeking guidance and actually implementing, living, those attitudes and

[1] Swami Sivananda, *The Bhagavad Gita*, The Divine Life Society, Tehri-Garhwal, Uttar Pradesh, Himalaya, India, 10th ed., 1995

[2] Reinhold Niebuhr, an American theologian (1892–1971) whose 'Serenity Prayer' was adapted by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and other 12-step programs

techniques, as we prepare for it. The *Bardo Thodal* points out this is not just an abstract religious experience; this is a practical matter.

> Whatever the religious practices of any one may have been – whether extensive or limited – during the moments of death various misleading illusions occur; and thence this Thodal is indispensable. To those who have meditated much, the real Truth dawns as soon as the body and consciousness-principle part. The acquiring of experience while living is important: they who have (then) recognized (the true nature of) their own being, and thus have had some experience, obtain great power during the Bardo of the Moments of Death, when the Clear Light dawns.[3]

The last thought

It is interesting to remember here the importance that so many cultures place on the last thought at the time of death. In Christianity it is believed truly repenting for one's misdeeds, and calling on Jesus Christ during the last breaths will save one from all one's sins. Otherwise? One reaps the reward of one's own nature – of one's own acts, thoughts, habits and so forth. Such thoughts are reflected in the Tibetan teachings also . . .

> The natural bardo of this life is of the utmost importance. It is here and now that the whole preparation for all the bardos takes place. "The supreme way of preparing" it is said, "is now – to become enlightened in this lifetime".[4]

We die as we live, that is the message. The scriptures and the yogic practices urge us to practise expansion of consciousness

[3] Evans-Wentz, W.Y., ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*, according to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering, Oxford University Press, London, UK, 3rd ed 1957 (1st 1927), Thodal p. 151

[4] Sogyal Rimpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Rupa & Co, New Delhi, India, 10th impression 1996, p. 110

during our lives because it affects the quality of this life itself; but then it also affects us at death, and during the after-life, and it affects the quality of future births. So we have to be aware of what we are thinking about, right now. We should be aware of who we are essentially and what we are aiming for, right now.

Belief in, and knowledge of, karma and rebirth is basic to the eastern culture. The possibility of rebirth is a topic that fascinates the West, but there, many people think death is the end. For some this may give solace, but for many this idea is very frightening. So many find that the basic premise of life and death being part of an evolutionary process removes fear from both life and death to some extent. Especially because, if one practises spiritual sadhanas, gradual dawning of awareness about the nature of consciousness and the conviction that life and death are both necessary parts of this evolutionary journey comes about naturally.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* (8:2–8), Arjuna asked Krishna, his guru: At the time of death, how are you to be known by one who has attained self-control? Sri Krishna replies that if one has engaged in constant spiritual practice, one will automatically think of the Lord at the time of death. Even though one has lived a full life and enthusiastically engaged in worldly pursuits, the last thought depends on one's true focus.

Only for that person who has focused his/her mind on God throughout life, will the last thought be of God. The practice of *Aum* mantra japa fixes the mind on the light, but it won't be one's last thought if one just practices for a few weeks or a month, so best to start now and keep going on a daily basis. It's a life-long practice – but we don't know how long life is, so it's a good idea to start today.

If a spiritual friend is present with you as you are dying, they can help focus your mind by chanting *Aum* themselves, or by reading whatever prayers are given by the gurus of your spiritual path – just like in Tibet, the priests chant the *Bardo Thodal* to help guide the dying person before, during

and after death. If you're alone, just remember your guru, or your *ishta devata*, your chosen form of the divine. They promise: "Think of Me and I am there."

Fear of death

We fear death so much because we are so attached to the body-mind-vehicle for our consciousness, and have identified with the vehicle throughout our lives, rather than the driver, the inner self, the consciousness itself. Because we are so attached to the physical body and the part of the mind related to the senses, and that ends with death, we are terrified of death. Swami Niranjanananda was asked a question that gave him an opportunity to speak on this subject: It is said that everyone is afraid of death. I do not experience this. I wonder if the fear is being deeply suppressed or if I really have accepted my own death? He replied:

> How can we analyze the instinctive level of consciousness? It is a matter of analyzing and observing our own nature, of meditating, contemplating, going through the different areas of our mental awareness. For example, we can view the areas of our emotional attachments in the light of death: "I love my parents", "I love my friends", "I love my house", "I love my life". At the time of death there is going to be a complete disconnection from these things we now hold dear in life and which we are intimately attached to. That intimate attachment is very deep inside our personality. We cannot rationalize it. It is so deep that in the seed-form it has taken the shape of the instinct for survival. When that instinct arises at the time of death, it is very painful and difficult to face. You may go through the process of detachment intellectually. You may think about death philosophically and logically, but by thinking about it, can you change the nature of that primordial instinct for survival?
>
> I feel your fear is suppressed, because the moment the innate fear of death is released, I am one hundred

percent sure that one becomes immortal. Immortal in the sense of letting go of the fear of dying and realizing that existence is one evolutionary process from body to body, life after life; the same consciousness continuing in different forms and shapes – not immortal in the sense of the preservation of the body. Your fear of death must be suppressed because, although you may not experience it intellectually, deep inside that survival instinct still lives on.

Death is only the changing of clothing of the spirit as it enters different bodies. This teaching is also given in the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana,* Vedas, Upanishads, tantras, nyayas and smritis. The shedding of the body, as a snake sheds its skin, is not a major concern for those who understand the eastern tradition. Sri Swamiji says that people are afraid of death and do not want to even hear the word 'death', because it brings with it the sense of losing everything that they hold dear. There is the fear of losing those things that are known to us, which we consider to be our own.

Death means entering a totally unexplored area of existence, so it definitely provokes a lot of fear, bur Sri Swamiji says that people should be glad when the time of death comes, because at that time God is giving them the opportunity to enter a new model vehicle. He says that his car is a 1923 model, and that you cannot even get spare parts for it nowadays, so it is better if that vehicle is disposed of and God gives him a new model.

This has always been the attitude of people in India: it is ingrained in the basic philosophy and in the psychological structure of the people. It is in this context that yoga and sannyasa speak about death and dying. Sannyasins traditionally perform their last rites on the day they take sannyasa: they are supposed to die a total death before they actually become sannyasins. It's similar to when an ordinary person dies, they perform all the rites of death, the different ceremonies and poojas,

the feeding of people, and go through the period of mourning, before they actually take sannyasa. For such people the fear of death has no meaning, because mentally and emotionally they are supposed to be dead already: they start out on a new life where the attitude of *vairagya* or non-attachment, is developed.

Yoga also speaks of death, philosophically, in different yogic texts including the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali where death is seen as a transition from one life to the next. This transition has to be made in a positive way and not with a fearful, insecure state of mind. One's mind should be firm and stable at the time of death. In order to attain this tranquil and balanced state of mind, one has to go through the practices of pratyahara and dharana before actually encountering the death experience. Different books have outlined what kind of preparation should be done in the way of meditation practices, so at the time of death we can be free from attachments, likes and dislikes, and with a centred, focused awareness pass on to the next life.[5]

Changing the attitude

In Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* he speaks of the causes of suffering, the *kleshas*, as being five: *avidya, asmita, raga, dwesha* and *abhinivesha,* that is, ignorance, I-ness, attraction to pleasure, repulsion towards pain, and the fear of death. These five interconnect. Fear of death is caused by ignorance of one's real self, and of what life and death really mean. Therefore, one wants to cling on to life, attracted to its pleasures and avoiding the pains which teach serious lessons, identifying with the limited mortal self and remaining ignorant of reality.

Avidya and abhinivesha: and between the two is our mundane life – composed of ourselves at the centre, trying

[5] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *On the Wings of the Swan, Volume VI* Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013



to move towards pleasure and avoid any suggestion of pain or suffering – that's asmita, raga and dwesha. In order to help ourselves through the process of living and dying, and in order to help others, whether they are living or dying, it is necessary to gradually re-orient our attitude to the natural pain and suffering that comes our way. Swami Niranjanananda remarks:

> The outcome of pain and suffering should be the development of spiritual awareness. This awareness is the natural result of inner mental evolution, when the mind is fed up with the pains of the world. To improve the mind, pain is necessary because pain represents the evolutionary process of consciousness. If there is only pleasantness and pleasure all the time, the faculties of mind will not evolve, and a kind of stagnation will take place within the personality.
>
> Pain and suffering are states of the manifest mind identifying with the world. However, when the mind identifies with the spirit this pain and suffering takes the form of ecstasy. Only very aware people can utilize

the experience of pain and suffering to develop faculties which are not yet active, yet it is in this light that acceptance of suffering is a must at some stage in life. Acceptance of pain and suffering means that our mind is not the master of our life, but that we, as part of consciousness, become masters of the gross dimension – and the stage where one is able to contact a higher reality at any time is called surrender.

Letting go

How can we help when we are with someone who is dying is one question. How can we help ourselves – because we are also going to die eventually – is another question. That is also an important question, and not one that should be brushed off as being morbid; it is being realistic and using that rare faculty called common sense. There are insights collected in the Sanatana dharma of understandings to be developed while we are very much alive – and also when we are in that phase thought of as 'dying' in the West: where the process of dying is gradual. The process should begin (latest) in the vanaprastha ashrama of retirement and intensify when one is ready to enter the traditional sannyasa ashrama of life at the age of 75 or 90 years of age, or earlier if one contracted a fatal illness. In the West, in ancient Buddhist teachings and also in yogic texts, guidelines on attitudes and actual practices can be found that help one to die well.

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati has commenced teaching this vidya to aspirants who have been practising yoga for some time. It develops awareness of *buddhi*, the deeper level of the mind connected with viveka and vairagya, with knowing what is appropriate and being able to live the dharma. We may not have a guru to give systematic teaching and guidance from the point we're at, but we can begin by developing a witnessing yet kindly attitude. This attitude should apply in regard to the external environment and community, in regard to our relationships, and especially towards our own personality. In each of these areas there

should be ongoing efforts to practise *viveka*, being alert and discriminating between what is real and eternal, and what is unreal and transitory, and *vairagya*, being able to let go of the illusions for the reality.

Why is this so important in the context of death and evolution? The *Bardo Thodol* explains that for those of us who are not adepts it is very difficult to remain aware as we die. Most of us lose consciousness for some time, and when we come to, it is very difficult to accept what has happened and to let go of where we have just come from. We still identify with the body, the life, our people, etc. We have to let go of all that and maintain a spiritual aspiration or conviction. An abstract connection isn't going to help so much as a strong relationship with the guru.

> You see your relatives and connections and speak to them, but receive no reply. Then seeing them and your family weeping, you think, 'I am dead! What shall I do?' And feeling great misery like a fish cast out (of water) on red hot embers. Such misery you will be feeling at present. But feeling miserable will avail you nothing now. If you have a divine guru, pray to him.[6]

If one does some serious practice in refining one's consciousness, one comes to regard life as a journey with definite stages, each stage requiring and teaching different attitudes. If we have developed our awareness, willpower, positivity and one-pointedness through the practices of yama and niyama, pratyahara and dharana, our awareness of ourselves is not limited to our daily interactions and physical situations – which are what we are going to lose in death. Instead of being afraid of dying and remaining in a swooning or denial state after death, we have a fallback position, we may not be siddhas but we know, deep down, that it is important to stay aware and focus on the inner light in all circumstances.

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[6] *op cit*., Evans-Wentz, W.Y., ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*, according to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering, pp. 160–161

The ashrama system

The ashrama system is specifically designed by the seers to give that essential perspective of life being part of an ongoing journey. It values each stage of life, ensuring meaningful harmonious progression through the course of a full natural lifespan. It gives a clear purpose for engaging fully with life, and as we learn about ourselves and the nature of life, it leads to a natural letting go as a preparation for death – for death is seen as the next stage of the journey.

The Vedas speak of a human being living a full life of 120 years – 120 journeys around the Sun – though these days people usually speak of 100 years as being about the maximum. The vedic lifestyle, advocated in the Sanatana dharma, divides this lifespan into four parts:

1. *Brahmacharya ashrama*, corresponds to the first quarter of life, when one absorbs so many new samskaras, as a baby and young child, from the parents and the surroundings, grows up, studies, and learns how to become independent.
2. Then one enters *grihastha ashrama*, where one looks after the household, the *griha,* marries, has children to care for, duties to the family and society, and ambitions to fulfil.
3. Eventually one's duties to the family are fulfilled, and one is able to enter *vanaprastha ashrama*, retiring to the *vana*, literally 'the forest', at about fifty or sixty years of age. At this stage, one should let go of family and work-related responsibilities, enjoy the beauties of nature. Go on pilgrimages. Spend more time in sadhana and self-study.
4. Once one has circled the Sun seventy-five or ninety times as an inhabitant of this planet Earth, and has acquired a bit of perspective – and is less dependent on the senses and has become steeped in viveka and vairagya – one enters *sannyasa ashrama*, where one can be totally dedicated to spiritual development.

These four ashramas each have attendant disciplines and yogas to help one live that stage of life fully, and achieve the aims of that stage of development. Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati has introduced a set of yamas and niyamas which are not confined to any particular stage of life, nor to any particular branch of yoga, rather they are aids to yogic lifestyle. They are designed in accordance with the needs of people of our time, living in this present society.

The first pair are *manahprasad*, the practice of being happy, and *japa*, repeating mantras which form a bedrock of positive samskaras, leading to remembrance of the divine or of our own inner self.[7] Then comes *kshama*, the ability to forgive, and *namaskara*, the practice of greeting people with respect, these both help us to manage the ego. The next pair is *danti*, restraining the negative tendencies of the mind and cultivating positive thoughts, and *indriya nigraha*, restraint of the senses. Fourth comes *adweshta*, being free from duality – marking the end of tamasic ego and the dawning ability to recognize the divine atma in all beings, and *maitri* selfless friendship.[8] One can recognize a progression in these practices corresponding to the perspectives, aims and attainments of the four ashramas.

Similarly, different practices from hatha and raja yoga become appropriate as we mature, and one is encouraged to practise yoga throughout life to attain and maintain good health physically, mentally, emotionally, and in one's lifestyle and conduct. However, preparations for the spiritual path can begin in earnest once your duties as a householder are finished and you can retire to vanaprastha ashrama: thus the whole of life is imbued with purpose.

In the vedic culture, challenges and benefits are known to attend each step of life's journey, and our present life is seen as our *karma bhoomi*, the ground where we work to make

[7] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Yoga Chakra 2*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar,India, 2015

[8] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Yoga Chakra 4*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2017

the foundation for our future destiny. The vedic science of ayurveda is concerned with the vitality of life, and explains that the doshas of the body change with age. Such changes are complementary to the different aims and capacities that become important at different stages of life.

Ageing and death are not so frightening when we begin to relish the decreasing power of the senses and instincts to railroad the mind. It enables us to amass some experience of deeper levels of consciousness that are not limited by the senses and body-mind. That in turn, develops the conviction that life and death complement each other, and are part of a wider education. The concept of there being different stages to life, each with specific aims, is very simple and very profound. It changes the attitude to life on a daily basis and gives overall perspective. If it is also a fairly new concept, then it is interesting to see the traditional sadhanas of each stage.

Brahmacharya ashrama

The attitudes and lifestyle of the family are absorbed by the young. It is good to show respect for the people, places, attitudes and practices that you value if you want your children to adopt and respect them too. Go to spiritual gatherings, places of natural beauty, and practise acts of kindness along with your children, this will purify your chitta and lay good samskaras for them.

If children see you practising sadhana each day and enjoying it, they will probably want to join in. As far as sadhana for children goes, it is best to start relatively young. Traditionally at around eight years of age, children are given daily practices that help them to be balanced, and to maintain inner happiness and spirituality. The practices are simple but build up healthy habits, an appreciation of beauty and an appreciation of the interconnectedness of life. They include:

1. *Surya namaskara*, salutations to the sun, a balanced series of asanas giving flexibility, strength and vitality, limbering the muscles and joints, and harmonizing the endocrine



glands. Surya namaskara is a series of 12 *asanas*, or positions that flow like a dance. It is best performed at dawn facing the Sun, and with awareness of the Sun rising and giving light to the world, and symbolizing the light of the *atma* or spirit that resides in everyone's heart.

2. *Gayatri mantra*, a series of sound vibrations designed to help one attain wisdom. Again the practice is best performed at dawn, facing the Sun. The mantra *Aum bhuh bhuvah swaha, tat savitur varenyam. Bhargo devasya dheemahi dhi yoyo nah prachodayat* is repeated with reverence for the rising Sun, for the learning given to us in life, and with a prayer for our continuing ability to learn whatever is necessary.
3. *Nadi shodhana pranayama*, which cleanses the energy channels with the aid of the breath, focuses energy at ajna chakra, balances the nervous system and integrates the functioning of the brain hemispheres.

It means that from the age of eight, children can enjoy practising the stretches of surya namaskara, the chanting of Gayatri manta, and experience becoming quiet and a little introverted and one-pointed with nadi shodhana. It establishes a lifestyle where one experiences the peacefulness

and beauty of dawn each day. From an early age, one gets up early, appreciating that early morning freshness and peacefulness. The practices improve physical health and the whole breathing process, enhance the ability to learn and to concentrate and give emotional balance.

Grihastha ashrama

As one matures and works to look after the family, and society, and one's own ambitions, one can progress systematically through the different branches of yoga, training oneself to meet the challenges of life successfully and steadily, with kindness, goodness and insight. Efforts should be made to stay healthy and to increase the health of the surroundings wherever one goes. Sadhanas include:

1. *Yamas* and *niyamas*, disciplines and self-restraints that help the mind stay peaceful. In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*,[9] a text meant for householders, ten yamas and ten niyamas are listed, which give guidance on where to live, cleanliness, diet, sexual matters and so forth. In raja yoga, Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*[10] give five yamas and five niyamas that build strength of character, self-control and the equanimity which enables meditation. Some of these disciplines strengthen the personality and encourage respect for all beings, such as *ahimsa*, non-violence and *asteya*, non-stealing. Others awaken awareness of divine forces, such as *santosha*, contentment, and *ishwara pranidhana*, surrender to God. They build up inner strength and faith, helpful qualities as one becomes aware that this life is part of an ongoing journey.
2. *Hatha yoga shatkarmas*, the six cleansing practices plus asana, pranayama, pratyahara and concentration practices such as *trataka*, steady gazing. These strengthen and purify the physical body, *annamaya kosha*, and more

[9] Swami Muktibodhananda ed., *Hatha Yoga Pradipika by Yogi Swatmarama*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 1985

[10] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Four Chapters on Freedom*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 1976



specifically the *pranamaya kosha*, the energy system or sheath comprised of the nadis and chakras, as well as *manomaya kosha*, the mental sheath.

3. *Tantra*: yogis notice that breathing through the right or left nostril influences the way we think, feel, relate to each other, and the outcome of our actions. This knowledge, accumulated for centuries, forms the tantric science of swara yoga. It is only now that science is catching up with this knowledge and is able to scientifically prove, via brain imaging and research into neuroplasticity, what the rishis discovered through prolonged introspection centuries ago: that there are distinct forces shaping our lives related to the brain.

   The state of our body and mind is reflected in the alternation of the swara cycles. If either nadi predominates for too long, it is a sign or warning that one of the branches of the autonomic nervous system is being overstressed and only one of the brain hemispheres is being fully utilized.[11]

[11] Swami Muktibodhananda, *Swara Yoga, The Tantric Science of Brain Breathing*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2008, p. 102

Swara yoga also makes it clear that one can reprogram oneself to be more harmonious and balanced.

Changing attitudes and habits, along with the actual neuronal structure of the nervous system and brain takes time and continuous effort. Another aid to rezoning the brain is the practice of mudra and bandha. *Mudras* are psycho-physiological gestures that affect the body's nerves and glands along with the emotions and mental state. *Bandhas* lock down and intensify the energy in specific parts of the body and psyche.

Other efforts to lay down new pathways in one's *antah karana*, inner instrument, can include *yoga nidra* and *sankalpa*, deep relaxation and positive resolves, and practising the yamas and niyamas as a practical adjunct to one's lifestyle. Basically, whatever one practices regularly for a long period of time becomes a samskara in the consciousness and is reflected in changes in the body-mind complex too.

> Function is reflected in volume throughout the central nervous system, in the cerebrum, cerebellum and spinal cord. A nice example, which not only illustrates the point but suggests that brain areas in individuals may actually grow in response to use, is the fact that the right posterior hippocampus, the area of the brain which stores complex three-dimensional maps in space, is larger in London cabbies, taxi drivers with extensive navigational experience.[12]

4. *Raja yoga*: continual effort maintained over a long period of time, is called *sadhana* or *abhyasa* and raja yoga can only begin after considerable preparatory sadhana has been practised. *Raja* means king, and raja yoga employs the royal road of *sushumna nadi*, which corresponds to the ability to balance and witness our nature through

[12] McGilchrist, Iain, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, Yale University Press, New Haven, USA, & London, UK, 2010, p. 24

different levels of consciousness and expression. An important practice used to make the mind more positive is *pratipaksha bhavana*: whenever a negative thought comes up, the practice is to immediately think of and feel the opposite quality, and dwell on that. Sustained efforts to train the brain and one's own mind through pratipaksha bhavana achieves resilience and fortitude. One becomes able to practise the yamas and niyamas in all circumstances. This is a very powerful practice, and in the course of time, due to the neuroplasticity of the brain, this altruistic, dharmic behaviour becomes our natural reflex, giving inner peace and strengthening the will.

Through combining techniques of *kumbhaka*, stopping the breath, *pratyahara*, sense control, and *dharana*, concentration, the yogi begins to enter more continuous meditative states. This includes stilling the mind, so we can see through it just like looking through the clear waters of a lake. We can catch sight of the rocks, mud, plants and living things right at the bottom. More importantly, we can also focus on the Clear Light of cosmic consciousness – and this is what we need to do at the time of death according to the ancient Upanishads and the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

Vanaprastha ashrama

An important aspect of this growing up process is facing the negative aspects of one's own personality and working to overcome them. It involves *swadhyaya*, self-study, and the systematic taking of resolves to improve one's self and the circumstances of those one encounters. This isn't going to happen if we remain complacent and become increasingly concerned with our own comfort as we enter the third quarter of our lives.

In a materialistic culture, many people deny or ignore their own spiritual nature. We are not encouraged to put as much effort into developing this side of our nature as we are to trying to keep the body healthy or the mind alert.

People may feel defeated at having to leave their businesses and influential positions, rather than feeling liberated from mundane responsibilities and freed to finally delve into their deeper nature. Hanging on to things passed makes it very difficult to appreciate the subtle advantages of the natural ageing process, such as being able to drop the conviction that we and our family are the important ones in any given situation.

Once one has free time from the responsibilities of one's own family, it's time to get a better sense of perspective. One can go on pilgrimage – maybe to the spiritual centres scattered about the planet, but definitely on an inner pilgrimage. Vanaprastha ashrama is the time to engage earnestly in deep sadhana for one's own welfare, and to employ one's self in service for the welfare of the world. It's the time we can do good in life. Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati gives five stages of vanaprastha sadhana as swadhyaya, sadhana, satsang, seva and sanyam.

1. *Swadhyaya* has two main aspects: studying one's self and studying the scriptures which are guidebooks telling us of the real nature of the self. In the area of self-study Swami Niranjanananda says to begin with the SWAN technique which gives insight into one's strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs. It can be applied in many different ways. Swadhyaya also leads to developing awareness of the subtler aspects of our being.

   It is vijnanamaya kosha which is often opened spontaneously during out-of-the-body experiences and NDEs. People report that they feel freed from the fear of death because their own experience assures them that the consciousness is not dependent on the body, that the essential part of themselves will actually be freed when the body drops away. People begin to see themselves as essentially one immortal spirit, *atma*, merely inhabiting a physical body for its lifespan.

   Those who miss the opportunity to develop themselves as the *drashta*, the witnessing consciousness, and to

cultivate their own samskaras during the vanaprastha stage of life often have a hard time dying because of *abhinivesha*, the fear of death. In practical terms, it means they deny their own mortality until they are desperately sick or weak, or very old.

THEY SIMPLY RUN OUT OF TIME TO GET TO KNOW THEMSELVES.

2. *Sadhana* also leads to the experience of vijnanamaya kosha. Kundalini and kriya yoga uses some of the techniques of both hatha and raja yoga, but empowers and refines them with the use of mantra repetition and concentration on yantra and mandala. Its techniques aim to stimulate and balance the chakras, and are concerned with the opening of *sushumna*, the most important central nadi, so that the released energy of the chakras and their different dimensions of consciousness can be safely navigated. We then begin to experience the *vijnanamaya kosha*, the psychic, intuitive dimension of our personality.

   Along with swadhyaya the sadhana of tattwa shuddhi is very helpful. It is a psychic cleansing or recycling practice which works through the power of sankalpas and dharma. We don't have to pretend to be good, or be afraid that we are not really good. In tattwa shuddhi we admit our failings and faults and resolve to eliminate them – and in the practice we burn them up symbolically again and again. And then we identify with the strengths and the inner goodness that we know is there.

   Tattwa means element, *shuddhi* means purification. Earth, water, fire, air and space are the five elements referred to in the first stage of the tattwa shuddhi practice; in the second stage you look at the inner elements of your own nature. Tattwa shuddhi is an important practice for if you really want to purify yourself from the darker aspects of your character and enhance your strengths.

   It can be commenced by a relative beginner in yoga although it may bring up deep seated problems for our inspection and correction, and it does require the ability

to concentrate and visualize to be successful. So, it is better not taught until the student has become aware of the subtler aspects of the personality and, through introspection, has both dedicated him or herself to becoming a better person, and figured out what practical steps this will entail.



The tattwa shuddhi practice is life affirming: designed as a purification so one can begin removing the blocks that prevent the experience of subtle states of consciousness and samadhi. Its techniques are drawn from scriptures that straddle life and death as part of the same journey, such as the *Mahanirvana Tantra*. In the yogic, Buddhist and Upanishadic traditions, the skill of recognizing the tattwas and their connection to subtle states of consciousness is used to better know one's self, and to purify the mind. The disintegration or dissolution

of the tattwas can also give foreknowledge of the time and (immediate) cause of death, and be used as signposts or milestones during the process of dying – to give one's self some sort of timeline of what is happening.

3. *Satsang* means keeping company with truth. During vanaprastha one can go to temples, attend gatherings of good people chanting and studying scriptures to deepen swadhyaya. One can go on pilgrimage-adventures, or go and work in the guru's ashram. One may also merge inwardly, pondering the teaching one has received, remembering the guru or the *ishta devata*, one's chosen form of God.

   The *Bardo Thodal* says one who is not totally absorbed in higher consciousness but has positive or sattwic karma can merge with one of the deities in the Chonyid Bardo. The White Buddha (Vajrasattva) is connected to the water element. The Yellow Buddha (Ratnasambhav) is connected to the earth element. The Red Buddha (Amitabh) is connected with the fire element. The Green Buddha (Vairoshana) is connected to air. Merging with these divine forces means one may go to another loka for some appreciable length of time, otherwise there is an inexorable process which pushes one to rebirth.

   Other cultures would have other names for these forces, but the lesson seems to be that if one is able to remain focused on one's *ishta devat*a, chosen form of God, at the time of death, that divine element or essence or divine figure can indeed offer a heavenly reward.

   And in the Sidpa Bardo, the best chance is to remember one's guru to escape from the misery one feels. The grey twilight-like Intermediate State of the Sidpa Bardo is experienced for about twenty-two 'days'; but, because of the determining influence of *karma*, a fixed period is not assured. During this time the frightening karmic illusions are related to the tattwas, and one's inner development in recognizing, witnessing and purifying these elements comes in good stead.

There are moments when the mind is far freer than usual, moments far more powerful than others, which carry a far larger karmic charge and implication. The supreme one of these is the moment of death. For at that moment the body is left behind, and we are offered the greatest possible opportunity for liberation.

However consummate our spiritual mastery may be, we are limited by the body and its karma. But with the physical release of death comes the marvelous opportunity to fulfil everything we have been striving for in our practice and our life . . . This is not, however, possible unless you have become acquainted and really familiar with the nature of mind in your lifetime through spiritual practice.[13]



4. *Seva*: the practice of seva should be followed wholeheartedly to give us greater awareness of anandamaya kosha, and to make ourselves and others happy. Thinking of others and working on their behalf gives one practice in self-restraint and lessens the ego, paving the way for

[13] *op cit*., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*, pp. 106–107

sanyam. The urge to share good things is a fundamental aspect of seva. Seva implies selfless action, being generous, wanting to do good and to be good. It is the way we can act in the world without amassing any future karma to tie us to the circle of life and death.

5. *Sanyam*: all the sadhanas, from yama, niyama, through karma yoga seva and practices such as tattwa shuddhi, ajapa japa, the deeper stages of yoga nidra and kundalini kriyas can be incorporated as part of the daily lifestyle. Along with swadhyaya, they further develop the vijnanamaya and anandamaya koshas, that part of ourselves which accompanies the spirit headed for rebirth.

   Also, pilgrimages can be taken to holy places, to break the habits of a lifetime and to invigorate and elevate the body and mind. This brings a feeling of bliss and fulfillment into our lives, and enables us to share it. If one has not already linked with a spiritual tradition, or found a spiritual teacher, vanaprastha ashrama is the time to make that search too. The traditions tell us that the most essential thing is the *guru*, the one who removes the darkness of ignorance and self-arrogating ego, and brings in the light.



Sannyasa ashrama



Initiation into sannyasa at a young age is extremely rare, and rightly so, as we have to work our way through the desires which brought us back here in the first place – we are here to learn through life. Swami Satyananda has said, "In old age most people try to think of God, but if they were to remember God from their childhood, they would reap a rich spiritual harvest in old age." In the ashrama system of the Sanatana dharma, even the most worldly people can take vanaprastha ashrama as a turning point, where one moves from self-orientated pursuits, for one's own wellbeing and the wellbeing of one's family to working for the development of spiritual consciousness, and ultimately, the wellbeing of all.

After a full life, however, after the age of seventy-five or ninety or so, the vedic culture decreed that everyone has entered the sannyasa ashrama. It is time to start training oneself in earnest for the next stage of the big journey which extends beyond material existence: it's the time to be good, not just do good. By then one should have already become unattached to worldly affairs, be established in pratyahara, and *swadhyaya*, self-study and study of the scriptures, and be living a life concerned for the wellbeing of all.

In ayurveda, the *Ashtadga Hridayam*, explains that the three doshas, in their respective order of vata, pitta and kapha are predominant in different periods of life from *Sutra Sthanam (*Chapter 1 verse 7):

Vayo'horatribhuktaanaam te anta madhyaadigaah kramaat.

Vata is the dosha predominant in the last forty or so years of life. It is made up of *akasha*, space and *vayu*, wind or air. Akasha helps one's vision to move from earthly concerns, and it is important at this stage of life to develop vairagya. Vayu, the wind element, is very dynamic, and at the end of life one needs this sort of energy to be ready to leave this dimension and start travelling.

If one is established in the witnessing attitude of the drashta, from that state, death is not so frightening: it is the beginning of a new journey. The yogic process of self-study and faith in the Self gives the spiritual samskaras which transform the experience of death, but even without such training, by the time people have led a full life and have achieved a ripe old age, many welcome death.

I mean, I'm there for Everyone. Really I offer refuge – think of it that way. Just like a midwife helps release the baby from the mother's womb, I'm helping you drop the body and this life so you can move into a new dimension.

We should make friends with death.

Certainly. I'm here for everyone. And who else is so faithful in their duty?

And we don't have to wait until we're actively dying to begin training for the expansion of consciousness. When one is really established as the drashta, one is no longer restricted to just witnessing events of daily life. One's own senses, the thoughts, one's own reactions, also become 'external'. It is possible to review one's own samskaras, the DNA of rebirth. One becomes really free to let go of body consciousness and explore the other realms of consciousness available to us. Until then, one may read the scriptures, even revere them, but one doesn't apply them because one doesn't realize they are talking about one's own real situation.

New perspective

The yogic view is clear: death has been over-dramatized, turned into a catastrophe, feared and ignored, when actually it is a natural part of existence and a most important event that should be looked at squarely and prepared for practically and calmly, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Seers from all cultures maintain the actual process of dying can be mastered. Everyone, from the age of fifty or sixty, should gradually begin to look forward to death and expand their perspective beyond the limiting passions of life. Why be concerned with this life only? Begin to get ready for the next stage of the journey. Swami Niranjanananda was asked:

How should one prepare for death?

How does one prepare for a journey? One packs one's bags, cleans one's room, takes all the necessary items for the journey and checks the bags three times to see whether everything is really necessary or not: "Shall I take this or that, or shall I leave this behind?" One has to prepare for death in the same manner. Death is travelling, and it is necessary to see which commitments, obligations and duties have been fulfilled. It is clearing one's slate.

In 2009, while talking to a group of people, Swami Satyananda said one sentence that stayed in my mind: "Remember everything that I am saying because I am wiping everything from my hard disk. After telling you, I won't remember what I have said because I am cleaning my hard disk."

It was only one sentence. He was not keeping anything in mind, good or bad, neutral, positive or negative, optimistic or pessimistic, happy or sad. Nothing. He just cleared his mind of everything, of all associations, attachments, duties, obligations and promises. That is preparation. The most important preparation is clearing out. This happens when the mind is relatively

free of its own desires and expectations; then one can say, "All right, the slate is clear." But as long as the mind is subject to the influences of desires, thoughts, feelings and emotions, the appropriate action may not be possible at the time of death.[14]

Only pack the essentials

Swami Satyanandaji was able to 'clear the slate', because he had already gone through the stages of sadhana that we now need to practise: pratyahara and dharana. As a tapasvi, he was no longer troubled by the senses or the mind, had cleared his duties, paid his debts and kept his promises to humankind and human society, and was able to turn heart and soul to God. For people who have led a full life but have not yet completed or handed over their duties or attachments, such whole-heartedness is not possible. It's actually hard to let go of one's position and the feeling of having special skills, to train a successor in whatever one's position is, and then stand back graciously and 'retire'. But that does not mean that we should shirk the task; rather one should choose and train carefully and with gusto and discrimination, as Swami Satyananda did. Whatever wealth we have, whether spiritual or in practical skills, in family, money, animal friends or property, we should allocate them to the best of our ability. Not making a will is not going to mean that we can take it all with us.

The point is, one should become one-pointed on the guru or on the *Ishta*, one's chosen deity, who will then guide you through. If, when dying, one is still attached to one's buffalo, or grandchild, or wealth, or even one's body it's okay – but they are not going to guide you through. If you are still full of desires at the point of death, restless and agitated, you won't be able to concentrate unless something very attractive pulls your consciousness towards it. That is

[14] *op cit*., Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga, Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, p. 34

why the concept of the Ishta is so important – it is the One that attracts you really, really strongly.

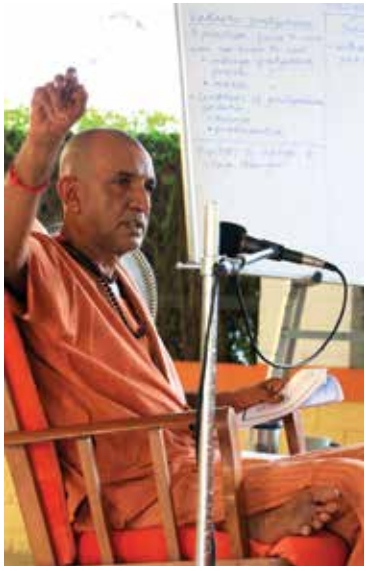
Of course, one may not have an Ishta or a guru these days because many of us don't have spiritual backgrounds. However, if we can see death as the next great adventure and cling on to our awareness and basic goodness – despite our mistakes – that will definitely help us through the inevitable experience of death. After all, to be pragmatic about it, death is something we just have to experience – so why not do the practices that respected people insist will help us do it well. After all, these practices have survived for millennia, they're almost immortal in themselves.

To commit oneself fully to the path is a life-long effort and struggle, but any effort we have made to wrest control of our lives from the six inner enemies is recommended again and again by the scriptures and the spiritual masters. Why? It means we can truly begin to help fellow travellers. Also, the *Bardo Thodal* explains that if one fails to recognize one's true self and ascend from the gravitational pull of Earth, so to speak, then one is pulled back into another life, and in the Sidpa Bardo, which precedes rebirth, one becomes subject to frightening karmic illusions of vision and sound. One is blocked by three precipices which are actually the internal enemies, anger, lust and stupidity. Falling down represents birth into the mother's womb, tumbling back into the five tattwas: space, air, fire, water and earth, from which our manifest universe is constructed.

> When these sounds come, one, being terrified by them, will flee before them in every direction, not caring where one flees. But the way will be obstructed by three awful precipices – white and black and red. They will be terror-inspiring and deep, and one will feel as if one were about to fall down them. O nobly-born, they are not really precipices; they are Anger, Lust and Stupidity.
>
> Know at that time it is the Sidpa Bardo (in which you are). Invoking by name the Compassionate One, pray

earnestly thus: 'O Compassionate Lord, and my Guru, and the precious Trinity, suffer it not that I (so and so by name) fall into the unhappy worlds'. Act so as to not forget this.[15]

Travelling towards the light



The teachings of the guru are relevant to where we are at the moment. Without humility, if we think we already know everything and don't neeed a guru, how can we learn? If we think, 'I've been practising all this for so many years, now I want the big spiritual illumination', we need to think again: it's a long walk to freedom. We may want samadhi and kundalini awakening but the gurus emphasize restraint and selflessness. We are asked to serve others and to practise pratyahara and the yamas and niyamas as the basis of our lifestyle. This is what we need to focus on, humbly and sincerely. There are sadhanas such as Panchagni, and they say Nachiketa's fire is the bridge to cross the misery of samsara, achieve moksha and become merged in the indestructible Brahman. But is such a sadhana within our grasp? Are we able to sit unmoved by the external and internal fires and meditate on the benevolent harmonies of the universe?

When the senses are still extroverted by nature and constantly pull us towards objects of enjoyment, we see life through the prism of our own desires. If our main

[15] *op cit*., Evans-Wentz, W.Y., ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*, pp. 162–163

motivation in this life is sense enjoyment, we will want the same in any other existence, and be attracted back into the samsara chakra quite quickly. If we strengthen and build up the positive qualities of buddhi, then we can overcome the compulsions of attraction and repulsion, and follow dharma. This creates positive samskaras in this life and is the next practical step in our evolutionary process. Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati has given pratyahara sadhanas that can help us to start working earnestly on ourselves. These improve the quality of our life and will help us at our own death. Also, our spiritual conviction about what being a human being really means, and where we are really going, makes us the greatest possible help when we sit with someone who is dying. Sogyal Rimpoche says:

> Everything that we see around us is seen as it is because we have been repeatedly solidifying our experience of inner and outer reality in the same way, lifetime after lifetime, and this has led to the mistaken assumption that what we see is objectively real. In fact, as we go further along the spiritual path, we learn how to work directly with our fixed perceptions. All our old concepts of the world or matter or even ourselves are purified and dissolved, and an entirely new, what you could call, "heavenly" field of vision and perception opens up.[16]

If we have built up our own deep understanding of the purpose of life and death, it is communicated to others without words. Swami Sivananda was asked:

Which is more dreadful, life or death?

> Life and death are both processes of gaining more and more fresh experiences in the progress of evolution tending towards the fruition of the wishes of the experiencer. Life is a scene where the individual puts on the dress or the form of a certain amount of desires which

[16] *op cit*., Sogyal Rimpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, p. 115

can be fulfilled in the special environment afforded by it. Death is the time when the individual goes behind the screen and puts on a new dress to appear in another scene of life and fulfil another quality of desires which cannot find the required atmosphere for fruition in the present life, but demand a fresh and suitable environment. Hence when properly understood, neither of them is dreadful. Both are necessary processes for breaking the barriers and tearing the veils on the path to perfection. To the ignorant man, however, both are dreadful experiences. He imagines death to be more dreadful.

Death and the opportunity for transcendence: *Aum*

Practices such as tattwa shuddhi require a fairly sattwic disposition to begin with and the kundalini kriyas may need years of preparation. However, we should remember that the Upanishads recommend *Aum* chanting at the time of death. Chanting *Aum* is also advocated in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Yoga Sutras* and many other scriptures, and also by people working with those who are dying. The *Brahmabindu Upanishad* (sometimes called the *Amritabindu Upanishad*) explains that to attain the highest state of liberation – that union with nirguna Brahman which means there is no rebirth – silence is the way. For those who are still learning, evolving and revolving on the wheel of rebirth, however, it is the mantra *Aum* that is most efficacious.

As the space which a jar encloses: when the jar is broken to pieces, the jar alone breaks, not the space. Life is like the jar. (13)

All forms are like the jar, unceasingly they break to pieces. When departed; they are unaware, still he is aware eternally. (14)

One who is enveloped in word-delusion remains caught up in the heart-lotus, but when the darkness grows clear, he sees the unity all alone. (15)

> Brahman is the syllable *Aum*; when it fades off, what remains – the wise, the seekers of the peace of the soul, meditate on that eternal One. (16)[17]

We have seen how important the chanting of *Aum* is for increasing the awareness of different dimensions of consciousness. It ties in with the importance of the last thought in the mind as one dies, which is also a continuing theme in all the scriptures. We can start practising the *Aum* mantra right now, and we can share this practice with people who are dying because it is so simple and so effective. The *Mandukya Upanishad* explains how this relates directly to refining and strengthening ourselves at different levels of consciousness. In the *Yogakandam* of the *Vasishtha Samhita*, Rishi Vasishtha says (6:30):

> He who gives up his body by chanting the Pranava orally becomes Brahman, hence O son! He also becomes the conqueror of death.

Well, that's very reassuring. But for any journey it's good to prepare, don't you think?

YOU REALLY DON'T HAVE TO PREPARE FOR ME – I JUST TAKE PEOPLE AS THEY ARE.

But we make preparations for meeting anyone we respect – and it's not as though we meet you every day.

THANK YOU. THAT'S A NICE WAY TO PUT IT. BUT WHAT I MEANT WAS, IT'S WHO YOU REALLY ARE THAT COUNTS, NOT WHAT YOU THINK YOU SHOULD BE. MAKE THE BEST YOU CAN OF THIS LIFE ACCORDING TO WHO YOU REALLY ARE – YOUR NEXT LIFE WILL BE JUST EXACTLY AS IT NEEDS TO BE. I LIKE WHAT SWAMI SATYANANDA SAID – JUST DO YOUR BEST IN THIS LIFE, THAT'S ALL THAT'S NECESSARY.

[17] Deussen Paul, *Yoga Upanishads: Sixty Upanishads of the Vedas Volume 2*, Motilal Banarsidass Pvt Ltd, Delhi, India, 1992

Swami Satyananda always saw the best, and brought out the best in the people he met. And he assures us:

Even an alcoholic can die an honorable death.

Many years ago, I had a disciple who died at the age of ninety-eight. He was a wealthy man who was always drunk. He used to drink twenty-four hours of the day. For him, drinking was a constant process just like ajapa japa. From time to time I used to visit this man and every time I stayed with him, he used to follow one set of rules. The day I stepped into his house, he ordered his family not to prepare any meat or cook fish. Nobody was allowed to smoke or take wine in the home, and he purchased from the market a special set of utensils for cooking my food. Hindus have a peculiar custom when swamis come to their home, they will not cook food for them in their own vessels if they have been used for cooking meat. So, every non-vegetarian family has a special set of utensils for preparing our food. Likewise, this disciple of mine made this rule for himself.

Once I stayed with him for three months. It was so difficult for him because he was a chain smoker and he could not smoke, he was a habitual drinker and he could not drink, and he generally ate meat four times a day but he had to stop this too. He did not know what to do and I was aware of his difficulties. I was only going to stay with him for two months but one day I told him I would stay for one month more. After some thought, he came to me and said, "You know Swamiji, one day you should go to Allahabad, have a bath in the Ganga and then come back." I knew he just wanted me out of the way for eight to ten hours so he could drink and smoke and resume his other habits. So I told him, "No, I'm not going." I stayed for one month more.

One day I told him, "I am so comfortable with you that I do not want to go. I will stay here for another month. Also I do not have the money to go." Then, do

you know what he did? He went straight to his bank and withdrew Rs. 5,000 and gave it to me. In those days Rs. 5,000 was such a big amount that you could buy more with that than with $5,000 today. He said, "Swamiji, please take this money. You can visit all the pilgrim places and pray to all the gods for me." I had no option. I left.

When this man was ninety-six years old, I met him again, and he told me one thing that still hovers in my mind. He said he had been a true disciple to me all these years, but because I did not tell him to give up alcohol, he never did. He put the whole blame on me: "You did not tell me to give it up and you did not ask me to stop eating meat, therefore even now I still have these habits. Now that I have only a few more years to live, I will not try to give these things up anymore."

Five days before his death, he called all his relatives from different parts of India, and he predicted the exact time of his death. I also went to his home and on the appointed morning we all gathered at his side. He just sat down calmly in lotus posture, recited two slokas from the *Gita* and then took a deep breath in. The breath never came out; he died at that moment.

So, even an alcoholic can have a very honourable death. If you know when you are going to die and you know how to die, and if you die in front of all your relatives and with your guru before you, what more honourable death can you have?[18]

[18] Swami Satyananda, Zinal Conference, Switzerland, 1981, *Yoga* magazine, Vol 20, No 6 (June 1982)

13

Useful Practices

This chapter goes into some detail on sadhanas that we can begin practising to prepare ourselves for death. Basically they help establish us in pratyahara and dharana, control of the senses and the mind, and the ability to introvert and stay aware at will. To gain the maximum benefit of these life-enhancing sadhanas, they need to be done systematically over a considerable length of time so that they become established in our consciousness, neuronal systems and lifestyle. Also they are far more beneficial when done as part of a balanced lifestyle and with appropriate guidance from a well experienced teacher.

We may practise without ever thinking about the role of our mental and psychic development in preparing for death, but the pratyahara practices of yoga expand the consciousness, giving control of the senses in an introverted sense (such as inner vision) as well as in their more usual external functions. This, along with increased mental flexibility and resilience, enhances the ability to concentrate and remain brave, positive and aware, in extreme circumstances. They help us at the transition point of death, just as they do with the vagaries of life.

Hatha yoga practices are very relevant for people who are struggling to regain health, suffering from life-threatening illnesses, or who are ageing but are determined to stay energetic, cheerful and flexible. Raja yoga practices are

for those who realize that they need to sort themselves out mentally, emotionally and spiritually before they go. We may be plagued by regrets regarding what we have done and not done with our lives once we realize that death is approaching. This is not a bad thing. We have to admit our failings and faults to ourselves, otherwise how can we ever work to correct them and let the inner goodness that we know is there shine out?

TATTWA SHUDDHI

Cleaning up

Under the guidance of Swami Satyananda, Swami Satyasangananda distilled an elegantly simple practice for the inner purification that everyone needs[1], either before engaging in further sadhanas that are designed to explode the trouble spots within us, or when preparing for 'the judgement day' when our karmas take over. But it's subtle. One must have a fine ability to concentrate, the ability to visualize, the ability to face up to what we are actually trying to clear out of our primitive mental conditionings and a sincere wish to purify oneself, to really engage in this practice. Tattwa shuddhi can appear to be a soothing sattwic practice, but it has explosive potential. As Sri Swamiji mentioned, the more refined uranium is the more powerful it is. Tattwa shuddhi is quite refined, so one needs some capacity for witnessing one's own internal enemies, which we may have allowed to rule our lives in many circumstances, without despair or guilt – rather with a sober resolve to reduce them to ash, and to identify with the positive and sattwic qualities that we want to nurture within us.

Traditionally, tantric purification practices aim to help one experience expanded states of consciousness, and to free one's energy from gross restrictions. Subtle aspects of

[1] Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati, *Tattwa Shuddhi*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2000

life become revered, and one practises maintaining balance in the presence of humbling realizations about oneself. Therefore, tattwa shuddhi is a practice which helps one to become more aware of the subtleties of life, and can also be used as a training to help one maintain awareness at the end of life, and die well. People with very little yogic experience sometimes find great solace in this practice. This may be surprising but then, I guess when we are about to die we are just about as refined as we are going to get, this time at least. And it is a beautiful practice – one we can enjoy without having any idea . . .

I GIVE HINTS THAT I'M COMING BEFOREHAND. WHETHER YOU RECOGNIZE THEM IS UP TO YOU, BUT UNDERSTANDING THAT THEIR PHYSICAL BODY IS JUST A COMPOSITION OF THE ELEMENTS DOES HELP SOME PEOPLE TO REALIZE IT'S JUST A VEHICLE.

What sort of hints?

FIRST THE EARTH ELEMENT GOES, AND YOU FEEL HEAVY, THEN THE WATER, AND YOU START WETTING YOURSELF. THEN THE FIRE ELEMENT AND YOU START FEELING COLD AND SORT OF DISSOCIATED FROM YOUR BODY . . .

Thank you, er, then you think we should practise tattwa shuddhi, so that when this life is ending, we'll have some understanding of what is going on and be able to guide the outcome a little? Are people more peaceful or even welcoming towards you when they've had some preparation for death?

SOMETIMES. BUT IT'S AN INDIVIDUAL MATTER. FOR MANY PREPARATION WILL NOT BE NECESSARY.

No, well, . . . I'm sure Nature, Karma and you, of course, have done this sort of thing since forever – well, I mean, that's your duty.

EXACTLY

But, don't you think people who have understood the vedantic views on life and death, or have heard the *Bardo*

Thodal, for example, have a better chance of attaining the White Light and escaping from the whole rebirth cycle? I mean, what is your experience?

I LIKE TO KEEP BUSY. AND I TREAT EVERYONE EQUALLY.

But, you know, it's been proved that if people actually know what to do before an earthquake happens, for example, they are much less likely to freeze up and become helpless, or panic and jump down from the roof to get out of the house. They recognize what's happening faster, stay calm and aware and survive better. So wouldn't that apply here? Wouldn't it make your job easier? I'd think it would reduce your workload – more people escaping from samsara and so forth.

NURSES RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS AFTER A WHILE. ONCE YOU'VE SAT WITH ONE PERSON WHO'S DYING, YOU TEND TO PICK UP THE SEQUENCE. IT'S A FAIRLY UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE. SO YES, MAYBE PEOPLE COULD SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES TO HELP OTHERS.

Sharing experiences

Swami Omgyanam offered the following account of her mother's death and return because she felt sure it would help people who were accompanying someone through death for the first time.

> My mother was almost 88 and was in good health apart from a tiny tumour in her liver bile duct. She was not on medication. Her mind was clear and sharp. Suddenly she fell into a high fever. Since it was wintertime, it looked like flue, but as the fever raged on for days and nights, and no medication helped, part of me knew that it was the end.
>
> I was nursing her all the time, then one day she developed a rattle-breath. It is something that is not normally experienced. It sounded like the lungs were connected to a powerful machine which rides on the breath mercilessly. Her tiny thin body was moving

strongly with those regular, rhythmical loud, inhuman breaths. I remembered a TV movie on death we watched in the ashram – that was the very last battle. Still, I did not want to make any conclusions. I was open and observant. I thought she might live. Life is a mystery, but that day, when she was on the 'rattle machine' the atmosphere in the room was very heavy and dark. It was very hard to be around there. I feel now that it was the period when she was releasing her pratyayas, samskaras and energies, and was sometimes trapped by them.

Late that evening I changed her clothes and noticed that her big toes were of a strange colour. I had never seen such a thing. They were both deep red and grey, a shade from the underworld. It gave me a pang in my heart. At dawn, the fever was gone, the rattle was subdued and peace enveloped her room. I gave her a slow and thorough bath, sometimes whispering some words to her. Her bed was clean, she was clean and fresh – and she was thirsty. Then I noticed she could not drink as her tongue was out of control. She could not even speak! I thought that she had had a stroke due to the strain, but then I noticed that she was trying to take hold of a glass, grasping in the air like a blind person. She was completely aware, she was trying to tell me, but the tongue wouldn't talk. Then she mimed trying to pry open her eyes with her fingers – her eyes were already open – she was trying to tell me that she couldn't see.

I understood, I am witnessing the pranas leaving the body, starting from the toes to the eyes. I eased her back in the bed. It was a quiet morning. The birds were chirping as divine shanti filled the room. I started chanting the Mahamrityunjaya mantra mentally. Occasionally I repeated aloud, 'Do not worry, everything will be all right.' She was lying completely still and peaceful, breathing quietly. The feeling of purity was predominant. I watched her chest. The breath was slowing down. The gaps between the breaths were longer. And then there

was the last breath: soundless, long, subtle. The next breath never came.

She had her eyes half opened and I closed them. In the room was such strong peace, divine shanti. I have never experienced peace in such intensity, only to some extent being in silence with my guru. This strong experience was just majestic and divine. I did not cry. Everything was perfectly all right. The death of my mother was not a sad or horrifying experience. It was a powerful but positive spiritual experience. It left a deep feeling of an encounter with God.

In the following months I was wondering what was happening with my mother. I expected some signs, some feelings, as we were very close psychically – but no. Then, after seven and a half months, a strong dream came. It was one of those that we occasionally have in life that are more real than reality. The 'dream' started with a strong feeling of my mother's presence. I knew, 'She is here with me'. What I saw was a half prepared meal. Then I found my mother asleep. In her sleep she murmurs, 'Let me sleep, I can't finish the lunch.' I take her in my arms; she shrinks to baby size. I hold her in my arms and then against my shoulder, and I feel that her diaper is full. I am confused: my mother never used them! She just keeps on repeating, 'I'm so tired, I'm very tired, let me sleep. I had such a long journey, let me sleep. Looong journey, please . . . let me just sleep.' When I woke up I knew that my mother has continued her journey in a new body.

I must say that I didn't believe in reincarnation. I do not know what happens to the soul after death. I am open to truth, but I need to know it first. I think I know it now. That interaction with my mom was so real, so deep, so true, that I know now. Since that day, everything has changed. Things at her home are not charged with her personality any more. Now her pranas are completely withdrawn, and the memory is just

confined to the minds of her dear ones. And I wish to meet her once again as she is a fine soul.

Being aware in life and death



Yoga teaches that we have five major dimensions of our being: *annamaya kosha*, the physical body, *pranamaya kosha*, the energy body, *manomaya kosha*, the mental body, *vijnanamaya kosha*, the psychic body or higher mind, and *anandamaya kosha*, the realm of realization and bliss. The subtler elements of some of these koshas accompany the *atma*, the soul, or immortal self after death through different lokas or bardo planes and from birth to birth. They all drop away during the final moksha after which there is no rebirth.

Most people are mainly aware of the physical body. Yoga develops awareness, to some extent, of the pranamaya kosha which includes breath and emotions, and manomaya kosha, the practical side of the mind 'developed' in schools. People who are naturally aware of the psychic side of things are often considered 'freaky' or even 'mentally unbalanced' in modern society, because few others share their perceptions; we are not taught how to communicate with animals or trees in schools. In the yogic framework such experiences are described as being aspects of vijnanamaya kosha. One is advised not to dabble indiscriminately, or unnecessarily in psi phenomena: *siddhis* or powers can be traps, but as blocks are removed clairvoyance and telepathy just happen, and intuition is an invaluable aspect of vijnanamaya kosha.

One dimension of our very existence, *anandamaya kosha*, comprised of subtle levels of bliss, is not really given credence by society, 'You mean ecstasy – isn't that some kind of drug? But the saints and siddhas are always described as

radiating love and bliss, and this can be experienced in the presence of masters even today.

> At the time of death, the physical body along with the conscious mind, are separated from the immortal part. There are no sense perceptions after death because the sense organs are left behind with the body. Senses do not function on the subtle level.
>
> In the process of discarding the outer vehicles or sheaths after death, one comes briefly in touch with the blissful sheath, anandamaya kosha. Those persons who have documented near death experiences are describing this brief contact when they speak of being drawn to a brilliant light that overwhelms them with love. Such experiences are possible because they have nothing to do with Self-realization or enlightenment.[2]

The physical body, the *annamaya kosha*, doesn't survive death. Only traces of pranamaya and manomaya kosha continue. So if we don't feel at home with vijnanamaya kosha and anandamaya kosha, if we haven't actually been aware of these aspects of our being throughout life, we're not going to be aware of much after death either – we will be swept along by the river of karma until the next set of parents fishes us out (i.e. we enter the next womb). Sogyal Rimpoche puts it very clearly:

> For what happens at the moment of death is that the ordinary mind and its delusions die and in that gap the boundless sky-like nature of the mind is uncovered. The essential nature of the mind is the background to the whole of life and death . . . The teachings make it clear that if all we know of mind is the aspect of mind that dissolves when we die, we will be left with no idea of what continues, no knowledge of the new dimension of the deeper reality of the nature of mind. So it is essential

[2] *Swami Rama, Sacred Journey: Living Purposefully & Dying Graciously,* Full Circle, Delhi, India, 2001, p. 113

for us to familiarize ourselves with the nature of mind while we are still alive.[3]

Tattwa shuddhi: purifying the elements

Why are all these practices involving the tattwas occupying a book on death and evolution? Because the tattwas are the building blocks of the physical body, and their subtle counterparts, the karmendriyas and the jnanendriyas help us to evolve when they are used as intended, and cause degradation when they are misused. Witnessing their interaction and practising to achieve self-control and positive self-expression destroys the false belief that the body, whether gross or subtle, is who we are. This realization helps us become aware of and develop that part of us that survives death, so it also ends the fear of death. Swami Satyananda says:

> At the time of death, when the body is placed on the funeral pyre, the five tattwas go back to their original source: space to space, air to air, fire to fire, water to water and earth to earth. The whole cosmos is composed of these five elements, so the individual elements become universal when they return to their source after death . . . and the soul or *jivatma* moves out in the form of vibration. The soul survives death and is reborn again and again. After the soul moves out of the body, it does not incarnate for some time. During the period in-between incarnations, the disembodied soul is called spirit. It is made up of fine elements, fine and powerful vibrations. After some time, according to the law of karma, the soul is born again in a body, and then it is called an embodied spirit.

Tattwa shuddhi, in the Bihar Yoga or Satyananda Yoga system, is a guided meditation which simply bypasses intellectual blocks; it doesn't engage in intellectualism.

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[3] Sogyal Rimpoche, The *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Rupa & Co, New Delhi, India, 10th impression, p. 12

Because it recognizes the basic natural building blocks of our body and nature: earth, water, fire, air and space, it feels homely. Because it recognizes these as the basic building blocks of our planet and the galaxies, it makes us realize we are connected. And because it teaches a simple use of insight, willpower and ritual to improve ourselves, it is very, very useful.

The technique of tattwa shuddhi presented by Swami Satyasangananda, continuing the tradition of her guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati follows. She mentions he distilled it from various sources, including the *Srimad Devi Bhagavatam*. Some readers may be familiar with the practice, but will nevertheless find it useful to skim this summary so they can compare it with what follows.[4]

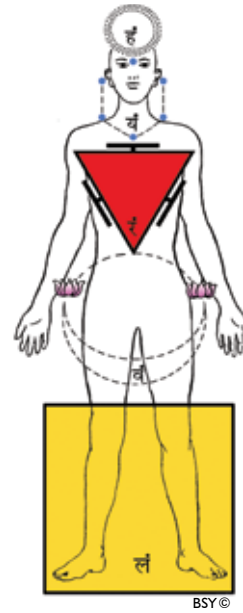
TECHNIQUE

Stage 1: One begins by stilling the body and mind and paying respects to the form of your guru. From mooladhara chakra, the kundalini shakti is raised through sushumna nadi to sahasrara chakra. The mantra *Hamso* is synchronized with the outgoing and ingoing breath between sahasrara to mooladhara. With each breath one feels united with Brahman (supreme consciousness).

Stage 2: The five tattwa yantras are then placed on the physical body through visualization of yantra and repetition of the appropriate mantra. First the square yantra of *prithvi tattwa*, the earth element, covering the feet to knees. Then the white crescent moon reflected in a circle of water – the yantra of *apas tattwa*, the water element, governing the knees to navel. Third, in the region between the navel and the heart, a bright red inverted triangle, the yantra of *agni tattwa*, the fire element. Fourth, in the region between the heart and the eyebrow centre, six grey-blue gaseous dots forming a hexagonal shape are visualized, which is the

[4] *op cit*., Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati, *Tattwa Shuddhi*, pp. 115–118

yantra of *vayu tattwa*, the air element. Fifth, in the region between the eyebrow centre and the crown of the head, is the yantra of *akasha tattwa*, the ether element – a sphere of total void, *shoonya*. It is black and may be filled with multi-coloured dots.



Stage 3: The awareness is then taken back down to the prithvi yantra. One visualizes its form becoming liquid and dissolving into apas, apas into agni, agni into vayu, and vayu into akasha. Then akasha dissolves into *ahamkara*, the ego, its cause. Ahamkara dissolves into *mahat tattwa*, the great principle, and mahat tattwa dissolves into *prakriti*, the energy causing manifestation. Prakriti dissolves into the supreme self, *purusha*. One considers oneself united with this purusha, the highest knowledge, pure and absolute.

Stage 4: Awareness is then taken down to the left side of the abdomen and there one visualizes *Papa Purusha*, the sinful man, the gross or demonic side of our own personality. Full of anger and fear, in one hand he holds an axe and in the other a shield. His whole form is grotesque.

He is transformed through your intention, your life breath and the use of mantra. *Yam,* the bija mantra of anahata purifies him. *Ram*, the bija mantra of manipura chakra and fire, *agni tattwa*, burns him down to pure ashes. *Vam,* the bija mantra of swadhistana chakra and water, *apas*, causes the ashes to form a ball mixed with nectar from the moon. *Lam*, the bija mantra of mooladhara chakra and the earth element, *prithvi tattwa*, transforms this little ball into a golden egg of potential. Repeating *Ham,* the bija mantra of vishuddhi chakra and space, *akasha*, you visualize the golden egg growing and glowing until it fills your entire

body, and you become the golden egg itself. You feel as if you are reborn.

Stage 5: From the golden egg, emerges *Purusha*, the supreme self, then prakriti, then mahat tattwa, then ahamkara. One recreates the elements in the reverse order. As the self takes a form we enter space and descend back to earth, *prithvi,* aided by the bija mantras as before.

Stage 6: When all the elements are reconstructed, one repeats the mantra *Soham* in sushumna, separating the *jivatma*, the individual soul, from *paramatma*, the cosmic soul. One becomes aware of the jivatma where it resides in the heart region of humankind. The *kundalini shakti*, the evolutionary energy in human beings, which you had raised to sahasrara, returns to mooladhara via sushumna, piercing each chakra as it descends.

Stage 7: Thus far the practice has enacted admitting our inner failings and passions that block evolution, and strengthened the sankalpa to purify oneself. Now it concludes by recognizing the inner strengths that we need to face the challenges of life. In chidakasha, one sees *Prana Shakti*, the vital life force. Her body is the colour of the rising sun. She has three eyes symbolizing the ability to see outwards and inwards. Her six arms are displaying the powers she wishes to give us. In her first hand she holds a trident; in the second, a bow made from sugarcane; in the third, a noose; in the fourth, a goad; in the fifth, five arrows; and in the sixth, a skull dripping with blood. To accept her gifts we say, "May she grant us happiness."

Tantric source

Another of the original sources of tattwa shuddhi is the *Mahanirvana Tantra*. Swami Satyananda restructured the practice so that many more people are able to cope with its effects on their psyche. The practice is now accessible to people all around the world as he removed references to various symbols and deities that were understandable to the Indian culture but not to people from other cultures. He also

reduced the demanding pranayama in the original practice and simplified the mantras. The similarities and differences can be seen in this excerpt from *Mahanirvana Tantra* (sutras 5:93–104):

> He should then proceed to perform the purification of the elements of the body. (This is the Bhoota Shuddhi rite.) The excellent disciple should place his hands in his lap with the palms upwards, and fixing his mind on the Muladhara Chakra let him rouse the Kundalini by uttering the Bija "Hung". Having so roused Her, let him lead Her with Prithvi by means of the Hangsa/Hamsa Mantra to the Svadhisthana Chakra, and let him there dissolve each one of the elements of the body by means of other such elements.
>
> Then let him dissolve Prithvi together with odour as also the organ of smell, into water. Dissolve water and taste, as also the sense of taste itself (tongue), into Fire. Dissolve Fire and vision and form, and the sense of sight itself (eyes), into air.
>
> Let air and touch (everything that can be touched), as also the sense of touch itself, be dissolved into ether (Vyoma i.e. the void in which ether is). Dissolve ether and sound into the conscious Self (aham or ahamkara from which the elements so far described originate) and the Self into Mahat, Mahat itself into Prakriti, and Prakriti Herself into Brahman.
>
> Let the wise one, having thus dissolved (the 24) tattwas, then think of an angry black man in the left side of the cavity of his abdomen of the size of his thumb, with red beard and eyes, holding a sword and a shield, with his head ever held low, the very image of all sins.
>
> Then the foremost of disciples should, thinking of the purple Vayu Bija (i.e. Yang/Yam colour described as smoky, dark red, grey & black – the colour of fire seen through smoke) as on his left nostril, inhale through that nostril 16 times. By this let him dry the sinful body.

Next, meditating on the red Bija on Agni (Rang/Ram) as being situated in the navel the body with all its sinful inclinations should be burnt up by the fire born of the Bija, as also by 64 Kumbhakas (64 repetitions of Ram).

Then, thinking of the white Varuna Vija (Vang/Vam) in his forehead, let him bathe (the body which has been burnt) with the nectar-like water dripping from the Varuna Bija by 32 exhalations.

Thus having bathed the whole body from feet to head, let him consider that a Deva body has come into being.)

Then, thinking of the yellow Bija of the Earth as situated in the Mooladhara circle, let him strengthen his body by that Bija and by a steadfast and winkless gaze (divya drishti).

Placing his hand on his heart and uttering the mantra Ang, Hreeng, Krong, Hangsah, Sohang, (So'ham or the unity of the individual and Supreme Soul) let him infuse into his body the life of the Devi (Literally 'Place the vital air of the Devi into his body') One attains a divine body.[5]

Samskara implants



The tattwa shuddhi of the Bihar Yoga or Satyananda Yoga system only really mentions two deities: *Papa Purusha*, the embodiment of all our sins or negative tendencies, and *Prana Shakti*, the positive and nurturing power. Everyone can recognize these two forces in their life: the divine Mother and the nasty but powerful little negative me inside. In tattwa shuddhi, Papa Purusha represents the angry, terrified and sinful aspects of ourselves: those aspects that we can never improve unless we admit to having

[5] Arthur Avalon, *Tantra of the Great Liberation (Mahanirvana Tantra): A Translation from the Sanskrit with Introduction and Commentary*, Dover Publications Inc, New York, USA, 1972, pp. 74 ff.

them in the first place. Similarly, Prana Shakti relates to our transcendental, nurturing aspect. We have to work to improve our conditioning – but then as the source of our nature, and our projections is purified, everything we perceive and experience, now and in the future, will reflect that.



In relation to the preparations for death and the after-life experiences, this part of the practice helps us to recognize the visions of the Peaceful and the Wrathful Deities during the Chonyid Bardo as being essentially within us. In deep states of consciousness, dream, and after death states, aspects of our consciousness and the cosmic consciousness also present themselves in visual form, which is known as *darshan*.

The power of visualization is utilized in this practice to change our present life and our future character and circumstances. We can, and do, program our own 'reality' within the matrix of Maya. In *Secrets of Creative Visualization*, it is made clear that deep relaxation and visualization plants images of required changes and situations deep in the consciousness:

> Your beliefs are the key. Not only have they shaped your life so far, they will continue to do so.[6]

In Swami Sivananda's commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* he makes it clear that this need not be an unconscious process, we can restructure our own nature, life and destiny through our daily life.

> You yourself are the author of your own destiny. You yourself are responsible for your thoughts, character, feelings, actions and experiences. You planted certain worldly desires and samskaras in your subconscious mind and allowed them to germinate and grow. If you

[6] Cooper, Phillip, *Secrets of Creative Visualization*, Samuel Weiser Inc., York Beach, Maine, USA, 1999, p. 15

had planted spiritual aspiration, the desire for liberation and spiritual samskaras, you would reap the harvest of immortality and immortal bliss. As you sow, so shall you reap.[7]

So we should think carefully about what our beliefs actually are in relation to the world and our life, but especially towards God and the spiritual guide or guru, and our own state of evolution. We must see our surprising negative aspects, and allow ourselves to know the real Self. The premise is: by changing deep inner beliefs and samskaras about yourself and your guides, you can change the future.

This is a very relevant point in tattwa shuddhi because two other deities or divine forces remain in the background of the practice. Who are they? The *guru*, the giver of light and dispeller of darkness, whom we thank at the beginning for guiding us to this practice. And *kundalini shakti*, the evolutionary energy, that we symbolically raise to sahasrara and unite with Supreme consciousness at the start of every practice, and bring back to the ground level of our physical existence at the end. Together they ensure a refinement of perspective in our lives. Each time we sit for tattwa shuddhi, we review ourselves in the presence of the guru who guides us on the long evolutionary journey. The tattwa shuddhi practice is an enactment of the circle of life and death, and familiarizes us with the understanding that there are more dimensions in the universe affecting us than we can perceive from the limited body-mind vehicle we are inhabiting at present.

Esoteric interpretation of tattwa shuddhi

In the practice of tattwa shuddhi, the angry figure of Papa Purusha is transformed through concentration and the use of the mantra, *Yam*, the mantra of air, anahata chakra and

[7] Swami Sivananda, *The Bhagavad Gita*, Divine Life Society, Tehri-Garhwal, Uttar Pradesh, Himalaya, India, 10th ed., 1995, p. 182

the heart. Significantly, the heart mantra transforms the dark side of our nature, but still one is burned to ashes. Why? Because we die, even if we have lived a good life. This signifies that the purification of samskaras and our own basic nature in this one life is not the end of the journey. There's only so much that we can achieve in one life. The end of life still comes, the body is dissolved; the next birth, body and life are formed from the samskaras still stored in the chitta, but we are reborn with the benefits of our efforts.

We can feel reborn in this life itself and, when tattwa shuddhi is practised as a regular sadhana it creates *samskaras*, deep impressions in the consciousness and understanding, that transform the experience at the end of life. One knows that, when the body disintegrates, the essence of one's life is the spirit, reborn with a renewed chance to live in constant contact with the higher self.

Cultural samskaras

In the context of the Sanatana dharma, cremation is the general rule when one dies. In other cultures, this reference to death and transformation in the practice of tattwa shuddhi may not be immediately understood. Because other cultures may prefer burying the body or other methods according to terrain, we miss the cue that this sadhana helps with positive transformation during life and also at the end of life.

Similarly, in the *Bardo Thodol*, although the knowledge of the tattwas, which permeates the teachings, is helpful, when the after-death awareness of the tattwas is bound up tightly with different deities, it can be a block for people from different cultures. They may dismiss the whole teaching because they cannot visualize or relate to the Tibetan deities referred to in the text. One must remember that the path is being explained for the people of Tibet, through the images embedded in their psyche, in a way that would resonate deeply within them. It is better to follow your own *ishta devata*, the image of God that you love and relate to naturally.

> It is not necessary to suppose that all the dead in the Intermediate State experience the same phenomena, any more than all the living do in the human world, or in dreams. The *Bardo Thodal* is merely typical and suggestive of all after-death experiences . . . As a man is taught, so he believes. Thoughts being things, they may be planted like seeds in the mind of a child and completely dominate his mental content . . .
>
> Accordingly, for a Buddhist of some other School, as for a Hindu, or a Moslem or a Christian, the *Bardo* experiences would be appropriately different: the Buddhist's or the Hindu's thought-forms, as in dream state, would give rise to corresponding visions of the deities of the Buddhist or Hindu pantheon; a Moslem's to visions of the Moslem Paradise; a Christian's to visions of the Christian Heaven, or an American Indian's to visions of the Happy Hunting Ground . . . Rationally considered, each person's after-death experiences, as the *Bardo Thodol* teachings implies, are entirely dependent upon his or her own mental content.[8]

The *Bhagavad Gita* makes the point even more succinctly, and takes it a step further (8:6):

> Whosoever at the end leaves the body thinking of any being, to that being only does he go, O son of Kunti, because of his constant thought of that being.

Mahanirvana Tantra

We can see tattwa shuddhi as a classical practice of tantra. The *Mahanirvana Tantra* describes the Bhoota Shuddhi rite as a ritual to purify the elements of the body-mind as a preliminary to worshipping Devi. In his introduction, Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon) explains:

8 Evans-Wentz, W.Y., ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*, according to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering, pp. 33–34

> By this ritual a mental process of involution takes place whereby the body is in thought resolved into the source from whence it has come. Earth is associated with the sense of smell, water with taste, fire with sight, air with touch, and ether with sound. *Kundalini* is roused, and led to the *swadhisthana chakra*. The 'earth' element is dissolved by that of 'water', as 'water' is by 'fire', 'fire' by 'air', and 'air' by 'ether'. This is absorbed by a higher emanation, and that by a higher, and so on till the Source of all is reached. Having dissolved each gross element *(maha-bhuta),* together with the subtle element *(tan-matra)* from which it proceeds, and the connected organ of sense *(indriya)* by another, the worshipper absorbs the last element, 'ether', with the *tan-matra* sound into self-hood *(ahangkara),* the latter into *Mahat*, and that, again, into *Prakriti*, thus retracing the steps of evolution. Then, in accordance with the monistic teaching of the Vedanta, *Prakriti* is Herself thought of as the Brahman, of which She is the energy, and with which, therefore, She is already one. Thinking then of the black *Purusha* which is the image of all sin, the body is purified by *mantra* accompanied by *kumbhaka* and *rechaka*, and the *sadhaka* meditates upon the new celestial *(deva)* body, which has thus been made.[9]

One may notice that not all these elements are included in the tattwa shuddhi practice as presented by Swami Satya-sangananda, but we will find that this is because of the need for systematic teaching. Not all aspects of a sadhana should be presented at once, rather some elements, whether techniques or conceptual understandings, or self-restraints, need to become embodied as part of the personality before other steps can be incorporated in a real way – as opposed to being 'performed' as intellectual exercises.

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[9] Arthur Avalon, *Tantra of the Great Liberation (Mahanirvana Tantra) : A Translation from the Sanskrit with Introduction and Commentary*, Dover Publications Inc, New York, USA, 1972, p. cvi

BUDDHIST TONGLEN MEDITATION

The practice of Tonglen is part of the Buddhist 'giving and receiving' preparation for death. It is fundamentally a practice in compassion. Again such a practice can be taken up now so that it becomes part of one's samskaras, positively transforming one's inner nature, and then it naturally helps during the crucial moments of death. The practice of Tonglen can be a bit confronting as in it, you volunteer to take on another's suffering. The first stage, which one can use as a preparation for strengthening one's own spirituality is not so difficult. Its preparatory components are:[10]

1. *Loving kindness (unsealing the spring)*: visualize someone from your childhood who really loved you and remember vividly an act of their kindness, and also your gratitude and love in response. Extend that love to your friends and to all beings.
2. *Compassion (considering yourself the same as others)*: see others with the same goals, needs etc., as yourself – and open up to them.
3. *Compassion (exchanging yourself for others)*: when someone is suffering, put yourself in their shoes. What would you most want? What treatment would you most desire? Let go of the graspings of your own ego in that situation.
4. *Using a friend to generate compassion*: if a stranger is suffering, image a dear friend is suffering like them and see what your natural response would be. This helps you to allow yourself to act accordingly in life also.

Sogyal Rimpoche explains that this last step will not harm your friend – they will gain great merit by helping to arouse compassion. Also you can mentally dedicate the merit of your ensuing help to your friend.

[10] *op cit.*, Sogyal Rimpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, pp. 193 ff.



The idea is that one takes the opportunities life presents to meditate on compassion. Just as Swami Sivananda recommends to always follow impulses of generosity so we can become established in atmabhava, here also we are advised: whenever you feel compassion, don't shrug it off. Meditate on it and enhance it. The yogic view would be to express it in action, as karma yoga or seva whenever these life situations arise. Sogyal Rimpoche claims that if we do such Tonglen practices, eventually one realizes that the only true way to express compassion is to develop bodhichitta and become enlightened.

Bye bye samsara.

The Tonglen practice

In the next stage of the practice, one begins by invoking and resting in the nature of the mind: seeing all things as empty and dreamlike except bodhichitta. Then:

1. *Environmental Tonglen*: feel the mood or atmosphere of the mind. Breathe in and absorb any darkness or uneasiness, breath out giving calmness, clarity and joy, and thus purify the environment.
2. *Self Tonglen*: divide yourself in two parts: one part is hurt and angry, one is loving. Breathe in and let your

loving nature completely accept all the hurt, one's suffering and negativity – in response, one's heart opens in a compassionate embrace. Breathe out and feel the loving part sending all love and compassion to the hurt.

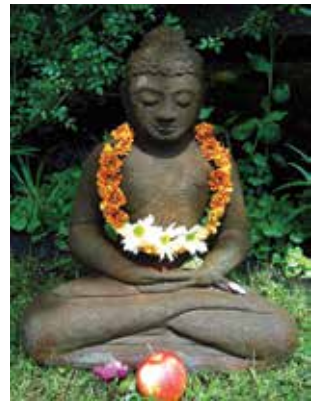
3. *Tonglen in a living situation*: vividly remember a situation where you acted badly. As you breathe in, acknowledge it was wrong and without justification, and ask for forgiveness. As you breathe out, send forgiveness and healing (this may give courage to ask forgiveness also).
4. *Tonglen for others*: imagine someone very close to you is suffering. Breathe in, taking in all their suffering and pain. Breathe out sending healing and love. Extend the practice by doing the same for people you don't know or dislike. Extend it to all beings.

Sogyal Rimpoche emphasizes that before being able to help someone dying, and in order to overcome our own fears and sufferings connected with dying, it is necessary to build our own emotional and mental resilience. It's necessary also to tap into the deeper sides of our own nature that survive death, the vijnanamaya and anandamaya koshas. The meditations on our own true nature, as well as the meditations on death, aim to do this. The main Tonglen practice is outlined as follows:[11]

1. Sit quietly and use any of the previous practices to bring you into a state of compassion. Remember your guru or the form of God you prefer, and ask for guidance in the practice.
2. See in front of you, a person you care for who is suffering. Imagine the details of their suffering and distress and see it as a great mass of hot grimy black smoke. Let your heart open in compassion towards the person.

[11] *ibid*., Sogyal Rimpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, pp. 209–210

3. As you breathe in, visualize this mass of black smoke dissolves into the core of your own self-grasping in your heart. There it destroys completely all your self-cherishing and thus purifies you of your negative karma. Feel that your self-cherishing has been destroyed revealing your enlightened self.



4. As you breathe out, send a brilliant cooling light of peace, joy and happiness to your friend who is in pain, and see it destroying all their negative karma.
5. Feel a firm conviction that this purification is really happening like an outpouring of grace, and continue steadily with the practice.

The idea is that you begin with one friend and, as you yourself become more and more purified and stronger in spirit, the practice can be gradually extended for others and eventually to all living beings.

MANTRA AND REMEMBRANCE

Techniques for the moments of death in the *Bhagavad Gita*

The tattwa shuddhi and Tonglen practices take some time and a sattwic disposition to really catch hold. Just remembering that form of divinity which attracts you is easier at the time of death, as death strips away non-essentials. Remembering the form of divinity that you love is the meditation practice specifically given in the *Bhagavad Gita* for the time of death (8:2 and 8:5–7):

> Arjuna asked: Who and how is Adhiyajna here in this body, O Destroyer of Madhu (Krishna)? And how are you to be known at the time of death by the self-controlled?

Sri Krishna says: Whoever, leaving the body, goes forth remembering Me alone, at the time of death he attains My being, there is no doubt about this.

Whosoever at the end leaves the body thinking of any being, to that being only does he go, O son of Kunti, because of his constant thought of that being.

Therefore, at all times remember Me only and fight. With mind and intellect fixed in Me, you will doubtless come to Me alone.

Aum

Practising chanting a mantra that appeals to you naturally, such as the Mahamrityunjaya mantra, or the Lord's Prayer, will tune one into the divine as you understand it. The *Bhagavad Gita* gives a specific meditation practice focusing on the mantra *Aum*.

The mantra *Aum* is given as the mantra which will take one across the lokas safely (8:10, 12–16):

At the time of death, with unshaken mind, endowed with devotion, by the power of yoga, fixing the whole life-breath in the middle of the two eyebrows, he reaches that resplendent Supreme Purusha.

Having closed all the gates, confined the mind in the heart, and fixed the life-breath in the head, engaged in the practice of concentration.



Uttering the one-syllabled *Aum* – the Brahman – and remembering Me, he who departs, leaving the body, attains to the Supreme goal.

I am easily attainable by that ever-steadfast yogi who constantly and daily remembers Me, not thinking of anything else, O Partha.

Having attained Me these great souls do not again take birth (here) which is the place of pain and is non-eternal; they have reached the highest perfection.

All the worlds, including the world of Brahma are subject to return again. O Arjuna. But he who reaches Me, O son of Kunti, has no rebirth.



Again and again the scriptures keep returning to this simple practice of mantra – chanting a mantra that attracts you and draws you into the witnessing state. We must remember that most people slip into an unconscious state as they die, but at the same time they are sometimes extremely alert and simply in another dimension of consciousness which is not dependent on the body. So you can chant for them.

Mrityunjaya mantra

Living life without fear is something people have sought throughout the ages. It is sometimes thought to be a basic right of humanity. Yogic philosophy, on the other hand, regards fear as part of the inbuilt nature of humankind. It is regarded as one of the basic instincts that one has to struggle to understand, manage, and ultimately overcome.

Swami Niranjanananda explains the last imprint of fear in one's life is the fear of dying, of losing everything – the fear of losing one's associations, connections, attachments, the fear of not existing. The fear of dying and death is deeply rooted in the mind of everyone but there are many techniques that one can practise which enhance one's life and can help one through death, and can help the family members cope with their grieving process as well. He spoke on the Mahamrityunjaya mantra in this context when he was asked:

Can we practise the Mahamrityunjaya mantra outside the ashram?

Swami Satyananda started the tradition of chanting the Mahamrityunjaya mantra every Saturday here in Ganga Darshan. It is an old practice from the vedic times. Performing a fire ceremony while chanting the mantra connects you to the divine through nature, and it has been the tradition of the vedic culture and also the ashram culture to practise the Mahamrityunjaya mantra with havan one day a week.

Swami Satyananda selected Saturday (the day of Saturn) according to the Indian *tithis*, calendar. The effects of Saturn on human life are rigorous. They are not specifically malefic or benevolent; rather they are intense, and due to the intensity of Saturn, many times the mind loses its clarity, its powers of knowledge, wisdom, observation and creativity, and people feel restricted. People feel that they are unable to grow mentally, emotionally, spiritually and socially. The Mahamrityunjaya mantra is the mantra of Shiva. It invokes the benevolent and transformative powers into life, to restore balance in the form of health, peace and contentment.

Swami Satyananda chose to chant this mantra with the sankalpa of total wellbeing for the individual who is practising it, and also a sankalpa of wellbeing for those who write asking for some divine intervention to sort out, to manage and to overcome their own limitations, problems and difficulties. At first this tradition was started only in Ganga Darshan, however in the course of time other ashrams and centres around the world, including yoga teachers in their homes, also started to conduct Mahamrityunjaya havan every Saturday. If you do it, very good, and you should also encourage your friends to do it at their homes on Saturdays.

In this tradition *Aum trayambakam yajaamahe sugandhim pushtivardhanam urvaarukam-iva bandhanaat mrityor-mukshiya maamritat* is called the 'Mahamrityunjaya'



mantra, 'the mantra giving great victory over death'. This is the simple form . . . It has been found to rectify all the defects and imbalances in one's mind, emotions, behaviours and illnesses; and therefore, in the yogic traditions from the Shiva tantras, the Mahamrityunjaya mantra is the most powerful one.

Many different events in relation to the Mahamrityunjaya mantra have been witnessed. One example is that people at the time of death naturally want to chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra. It has been found that after chanting the person is able to leave the body, to release the soul gracefully and happily. Also, it has been found that one can stop death by chanting the Mahamrityunjaya mantra. These are a few brief glimpses into the powers and effects of the Mahamrityunjaya mantra.

Gayatri mantra

Each tantra has its own words of power. The Shaiva tantras use the Mahamrityunjaya mantra, whereas the Vaishnava groups and the Vaishnava tantras use the Gayatri mantra: *Aum bhoor-bhurvah swahah tatsaviturvarenyam bhargo devasya dheemahi dhiyo yo nah prachodayaat.* In this manner, other tantras and other systems also have their preferred mantras; however, for spiritual sadhakas to have access to higher levels of consciousness the Mahamrityunjaya mantra is the most appropriate one. It allows one to explore the consciousness with a greater power of conviction, strength, motivation and inspiration. It also helps to cut through the bondage of the karmas. You can experiment on yourself to find out how far that is true.[12]

In the tradition being described here, when the Mahamrityunjaya mantra is chanted on a regular basis, every Saturday, the *sankalpa*, intention, is 'for the health and well-being of anyone around the world who wishes so, and for peace of the departed soul'. The mantra can be chanted at other times also according to need, and the benefits of the mantra can be dedicated to a particular person who is in need. Particularly at times of crisis, for example, if you are sitting with someone who is dying, or if you are unable to be with someone you know is dying, a particular mantra may emerge strongly from the depths of your mind. It may be the Gayatri manta or 'Hail Mary, full of grace . . .' the words of a hymn or a kirtan, all these are acceptable.

However, this chanting of mantras is not only for people who are dying or suffering from some calamity. If you want to experiment, practise the mantras regularly in the three mantra sadhana and notice the effect.

[12] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, Satsang at Ganga Darshan, Munger, Bihar, India, December 2008

The three mantra sadhana

Swami Niranjanananda has introduced a sadhana of chanting three mantras each day as soon as one wakes up in the morning – before even starting to think – when the consciousness is fresh and clear. (You can hear these mantras chanted online at satyamyogaprasad.net.) The mantras act as a *kavacham*, a protective armour. The mind is imbued with positivity that protects and guides us throughout the day. The first mantra is the Mahamrityunjaya mantra. Make the *sankalpa*, the resolve, for healing energy, power, immunity and strength, and then repeat the mantra 11 times either mentally or out loud. The second mantra, the Gayatri, is also repeated 11 times, its sankalpas being for wisdom, inner clarity, intuitive knowledge and learning whatever is necessary in life.

32 names of Durga

The third mantra calls on the female aspect of God, which some people just naturally turn to for help in times of great distress. In the Hindu tradition, she is symbolized in many different forms. In this particular sadhana, the mantra gives 32 names, or descriptions of Maa Durga who destroys negative forces, helps us to learn difficult lessons, sheds light on the difficult path and uplifts those who are suffering.

Aum Durgaa durgaartishaminee durgapadvinivaarini.
Durgamachchhedinee durgasaadhinee durganaashinee.
Durgatoddhaarinee durganihantree durgamaapahaa.
Durgamajnaanadaa durga daitya-loka-davaanalaa.
Durgamaa durgamaalokaa durgamaatmaswaroopinee.
Durgamaargapradaa durgamavidyaa durgamaashritaa.
Durgama-jnaana-samsthaanaa durgama-dhyaana-bhaasinee.
Durgamohaa durgamagaa durgamaarthaswaroopinee
Durgamaasurasamhantree durgamaayudhadharinee.
Durgamaangee durgamataa durgamyaa durgameshwaree.
Durgabheemaa durgabhaamaa durgabhaa durgadaarinee.

It is a long mantra and is only repeated three times, the sankalpa is for overcoming distress in life, uplifting those who are suffering, and experiencing peace and harmony.

If these mantras are practised each day, they become known by heart, and then they are especially strengthening and beneficial. They help us each day in life, build up a firm basis of positive samskaras that can change our destiny, and can help us also at the time of death when the conscious mind drops away.

In the Sanatana dharma, the mantra is *Aum* or the *Mahamrityunjaya mantra*, in the Buddhist tradition, the *Bardo Thodal* is read into the ear of the person as they die. In the Christian tradition the last rites and prayers become one with one's consciousness. One of the simplest traditions is to sing hymns or kirtans during the last days or hours, bringing the name of God into the environment, and into the ears and heart of the one preparing to travel on, and those gathered to pay their respects and say farewell.

Even if a person appears to be in a coma, one can continue speaking to them with love, and bring to their perception the sound of a mantra and the form of God that they love. The prayer or mantra, and the divine figure or guru that we identify with, guides us towards the light.



14

Care for the Dying

As a teenager, during the school holidays, I began working in a nursing home as a nurse's aide. The close connection between life and death, and breathing and not breathing, became very clear. This, I realize now, was a great blessing – and it meant that when I met yoga, and learned the systematic practices linking *prana*, the life force, and the breath, I felt immediately at home. Later, I continued working in hospitals on an occasional basis for another eight years or so, specializing in night shifts. It was in these circumstances that I first started gathering my own perspective on death.

Keeping company with death

> The matron didn't like people to die alone. She felt it was clear that when someone was dying, they should have someone with them. The process of dying could sometimes take weeks or days, or sometimes just a few hours. A lot of the nurses didn't like to sit with people as they moved slowly towards death, and some of the old folk didn't appear to have any relatives. I thought it was an honour though, and would always agree to sit there even though it meant doing nothing for a long time other than listening to their breath, maybe sometimes taking their hand, assisting the nurses to move them, or give medicines, etc.

In the 1960s in Australia, there was not a lot of theoretical or systematic training about helping people to die peacefully, still, that matron was right. Having somebody there who is not too caught up in their own grief or fear of the dying process, who is free of any other responsibilities other than attending to you, and is therefore able to be peaceful themselves, is a definite help.

I remember one old lady who was propped up high on pillows so she could take her loud raspy breaths. She had been dying for a couple of days, 'Too frightened to let go' said the Sister. When I went to sit with her I had to agree: though she was seemingly unconscious, the fear and tension were unmistakable. After a while I took her hand and said, 'Look, it's okay, He sees even the little sparrow fall from its nest.' Her breathing stopped, it was like there was a big question mark. I repeated the phrase which had come to me, a bit frightened, actually, that she was going to die right then and there, but the breathing started again, more quietly, much more peacefully, with long gaps. Her face and shoulders and whole being relaxed. She had heard the message. I was delighted. She kept on breathing while I sat there but she died on the next shift, and they told me she died peacefully.

Sitting with people while they died, I realized that if one is afraid of death, the whole death process is correspondingly harder. For those without fear, it seemed sometimes to be a sweet experience – judging from the serenity on their faces afterwards and the aura of peacefulness that emanated from them. In either case, I never doubted that they were happy to have me there as a silent participant, even though there was not much I could physically do most of the time. Unless there was some sort of trauma involved, the patients were often unconscious, or slipping in and out of consciousness, but I sensed their appreciation. The trained nurses

continued to look after the medicines and drips, and to change the patient's posture, but they came and went. I just sat there and listened to them breathing, and breathing, until eventually they stopped. Later, I realized that I had unwittingly benefited enormously from the experience of sitting with those people. I often felt comforted afterwards in times of fear or loneliness or sorrow by their presence and blessings – that's the only way I can describe it.

This chapter is where we look at practical things that we can do when someone is 'actively dying'. How to comfort them and help them overcome the fear of death, how to help the family, and how to conduct one's self when sitting with people during their last days and breaths.

So, to begin with, we have to face and make the attempt to overcome the fear of death, in ourselves, in the person who is dying, and in their friends and family.

EASIER SAID THAN DONE, MY DEAR – I DON'T WALK AROUND WITH A SCYTHE JUST FOR FUN YOU KNOW. I AM SCARY.

Well, yes of course – but really you're just doing your duty aren't you – you know reaping the harvest that we've sown and grown in this life, and that we'll eat in the next. I mean, you're not personally cruel. In some ways, you're not even really real – you're just a portal that we step through in our journey of evolution.



NO, NO, I'M QUITE REAL – REALER THAN YOU ANYWAY . . .

Tattwas as signposts

There are signposts along the way also, so that one can recognize what is actually happening, and understand the process. These are not generally known, but are quite simple. They also relate to the tattwa shuddhi practice that we have discussed earlier. A very useful piece of knowledge is that in people dying naturally over a period of time, rather than instantaneously, one notices a progression through the tattwas.

I MENTIONED THAT BEFORE.

Yes, and it's in the scriptures too. The *Bardo Thodal* refers to the three chief symptoms of death, and takes it for granted that the reader officiating will know, name and explain them as they occur. They are:

1. A bodily sensation of pressure, 'earth sinking into water';
2. A bodily sensation of clammy coldness as though the body were being immersed in water, which gradually merges into that of feverish heat, 'water sinking into fire';
3. A feeling as though the body were being blown into atoms, 'fire sinking into air'.

Each symptom is accompanied by visible external changes in the body, such as loss of control over facial muscles, loss of hearing, loss of sight, the breath coming in gasps just before the loss of consciousness.[1]

If one is aware of such signposts as a carer or relative present at someone's death, then one can be a bit more prepared. It becomes easier to accept the reality of the situation and take the necessary practical steps – even if that just means calling for assistance. Swami Omgyanam was willing to share her experiences as related in the last chapter, because she felt it

[1] Evans-Wentz, W.Y., ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*, according to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering, Oxford University Press, London, UK, 3rd edition 1957 (1st 1927) pp. 93–94

would be so helpful for people to recognize the significance of the signs she saw, and she was sure her mother would have wanted to help people to understand too.

Recognizing such signs would also mean one would know when to begin reciting previously agreed prayers or mantras, affirmations or scriptures. Otherwise, it is easy to deny or even miss what is actually happening right up to the final departure. When we actually go through the process of dying ourselves, if we have someone who can guide us about the nature of the experiences, it is a reassurance that we are not alone, that the path is known. Also, if we have practised awareness of the elements and participated in their symbolic destruction and reconstruction, using each cycle to go deeper into ourselves, and symbolically purify ourselves for a new birth, that is training for us to remain peaceful and aware at the time of death.

It is important to remember the teachings we have received, and to follow their guidelines. Otherwise, instead of helping the traveller to be calm and centred, remain aware and enter a meditative state, we may hang on to them emotionally. If we have not received any such teachings, but are suddenly thrust into a situation (like in a car accident or a pandemic) of either one's own immanent death or of suddenly being the one there with someone who is dying, then the efforts you have made for self-improvement, and the understanding that you have attained will help you through. Call on your own calm and loving nature by remembering your *ishta*, the one you love.

Abhinivesha – fear of death

Still, we just don't like to look at death too closely, and why is that? *Abhinivesha*, the fear of the unknown, and more particularly the fear of death, is what stops us from learning about death's pivotal role in our evolution. It seems only one who has acknowledged abhinivesha, at least to some extent, can begin to understand the structure of life and death and get a grasp on who we really are. Swami Sivananda says:

> Everyone desires to die a peaceful death with the mind fixed on God. When the memory fails, the sacred sentences of the scriptures will remind one of the real nature. When the mind of the dying person is gradually turned away from the network of worldly matters and centred on the image of the Lord, his glories, lilas and teachings, favourable conditions are created for the passing of his life-breath. The mind peacefully alights on the thought of God, and when real discrimination and dispassion dawn in him at the time of death, it will provide him the solace which the soul strives for.[2]

Whatever scriptures the person believed in during life will help guide one through death. Just as the *Bardo Thodal* helps the Tibetan to focus on the divine powers that they relate to best, for a Christian, scriptures and hymns that help one focus on Jesus Christ as the Saviour should be read or sung, for a worshipper of Sri Rama, the stories about him should be read or chanted, and so forth.

The need for a healthy approach to death . . .

Ha Ha Ha

Come on, this is serious stuff. It's a social problem too. Even the doctors say so.

One of the pioneers of the new wave of understanding dealing with death was Elisabeth Kubler Ross MD. In her book *On Death and Dying*, first published in 1973. She says:

> If a whole nation, a whole society suffers from such a fear and denial of death, it has to use defences which can only be destructive. Wars, riots, and increasing numbers of murders and other crimes may be indicators of our decreasing ability to face death with acceptance and

[2] Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga, Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, p. 41

dignity. Perhaps we have to come back to the individual human being and start from scratch, to attempt to conceive our own death and learn to face this tragic but inevitable happening with less irrationality and fear.

What role has religion played in these changing times? In the old days more people seemed to believe in God unquestionably; they believed in a hereafter which was to relieve people of their suffering and their pain. There was a reward in heaven, and if we had suffered much here on earth we would be rewarded after death depending on the courage and grace, patience and dignity with which we had carried our burden.[3]

Living and dying without fear is something we wish to attain, and yet at the time of death, people often become despondent about the things they have not done, or regret things they have done, lose self-confidence and begin to fear punishment – if not for sins, then for inadequacy. One helpful custom is preserved to this day in Sri Lanka. There, the Buddhist Sinhalese tradition, passed down in families, is that one should write a diary about the good and positive things one does. It is called a *Pin Potha*, a Merit Book. It becomes a record of positivity – it includes the sadhanas we have maintained, acts of service or generosity, pilgrimages that we have undertaken, and so forth. As one is dying, and at the time of death, someone reads this *Pin Potha* out loud. It means that while you are dying, you are reminded of the good that you did in life so you can remain positive and confident.

This seems an excellent idea. The basic thing which really works is being aware of the good. When someone is dying, and during the days when they are close to death, one can mention how much appreciation and admiration one has for things that they have done, and share positive memories about their life. When this happens, at times, the

[3] Elisabeth Kubler-Ross MD, *On Death and Dying*, Tavistock Publications, London, UK, 1981, p. 13

relief is palpable. For example, one can tell one's father or mother how you really appreciate how they sacrificed so much for your wellbeing. Express whatever it is that you do now appreciate but probably never thought to say. Explain that it's only now that you have some maturity that you realize how hard it is to raise children. Tell them how you love them, how they did well. Whenever you say this, with honest emotion, you will probably notice that, even though the person may seem unconscious, a peace descends on their features and on their breath as they are reminded of the good things they have done. Even if they are not 'spiritual' or 'religious' people, able to turn to their guru or an image of God for comfort and solace, their last thoughts can be endued with happiness and love for goodness itself.

Chanting mantras for the dying

There is not just one mantra that can help; for different people, different mantras can be helpful, and also different mantras can be helpful for the same person at different times. Swami Shaktimudra has been spending time with people who are aware that they are approaching their death for some years. One of her colleagues, Sannyasi Yogamaya had a brilliant mind and graduated with the university medal for her PhD. She was engaged in introducing yoga into the prisons in Australia and was conducting research into the benefits. Swami Shaktimudra writes:

> One day her hand went numb, her leg and speech were affected in the next couple of days. This was followed by severe seizures by the end of the week. The diagnosis was terminal brain cancer. She had between 8 and 14 months to live, with treatment. She had one operation and then another to try and reduce the seizures and went through chemotherapy, radiotherapy and rehabilitation, which enabled her to stand again. Her speech and the right side remained badly affected, but she had incredible determination to get back on her feet.

The treatment allowed time for Yogamaya and her family to come to terms with what was happening. Over a few days she managed to convey to her father that her mind was gone, and her intellect was not working, but her consciousness was clear. Mahamrityunjaya mantra was playing continually and Durga Ma was a source of great inspiration for her. One day when her husband was in despair he had a vision of Durga Ma.

A few short months later she died at home surrounded by her loving husband and children. I drove 1,200 kms in one day to sit with her on the day she died. Calling on Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda to guide her journey, at the end we received the message that everything was irrelevant except for the chanting of the mantra *Aum* out loud.

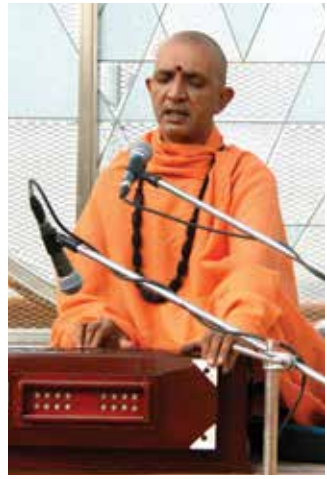
Yogamaya was unconscious and had a fever and was a bit distressed, but with the *Aum* chanting everything calmed right down and she relaxed. She died peacefully after her friends and family had spent time with her saying goodbye. All throughout, she received amazing support and love from her family.

It may not be possible for everyone to die at home, however much their family loves them. To keep up continuous care, sometimes trained nurses and medical specialists and hospital facilities are simply necessary. But then the environment in the ward can be enhanced as much as possible. A few beautiful familiar things can be brought in, essential oils can change the clinical smell, and mantras are portable little power packs for enhancing the inner space.

The last thoughts

Chanting mantras helps to free the mind from its entanglements with the senses and allows one to achieve a higher level of focus. That is why one practises mantra chanting in yoga, why one repeats catechisms in Christianity, and is one of the reasons why they are so helpful at the times of

death. One of the simplest ways to include the power of mantra is to sing *kirtans*, songs that repeat the name of God. Whatever Name is sung or remembered, it strengthens the connection, and gives a direction to the last thoughts and feelings. Particularly if mantras have become a natural expression of the character – as when japa becomes ajapa japa – they form one's thought and attitude, and so can help form one's last thoughts positively.



The *Bhagavad Gita*, part of the very ancient Indian historical record known as the *Mahabharata*, is not alone in believing that the last thoughts one has in life are crucial to one's future state. The centuries old *Bardo Thodal* is chanted before and after death in Tibet because it uplifts the thoughts. Even Hamlet, in Shakespearean England, knew of the importance of the last thoughts in forming one's future destiny. Many cultures reveal the insight that the thought at the moment of death is crucial to the journey through death and the ensuing experiences in after-death lokas and rebirth. So how can one help the most positive thoughts to surface in the person who is dying?

Helpful things to do when death is close

One can radiate one's own faith in the essential immortality of the person dying, not just mouthing platitudes but quietly expressing one's own conviction that we will meet again. One can encourage the person dying to chant mantras, especially the mantra *Aum* or the Mahamrityunjaya mantra, or chant it for them, or if they wish, have a recording playing softly in their room. Kirtans are basically mantras chanted to music with rhythm and joy, even playing recordings of mantras like this electronically can really help – if this is acceptable.

And, yes, one must listen to what is desired by the person, what is causing pain or anxiety, and make those issues one's own priority in care. The importance of talking about death is one of the things advocated by Dr Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. As a doctor, she was particularly concerned about people dying in hospitals, but whether people are at home or in an institution as they die, her suggestions are very valuable. She says:

> It might be helpful if more people would talk about death and dying as an intrinsic part of life just as they do not hesitate to mention when someone is expecting a new baby. If this were done more often, we would not have to ask ourselves whether we ought to bring this topic up with a patient, or if we should wait for the last admission . . . We have seen several patients who were depressed and morbidly uncommunicative until we spoke with them about the terminal stage of their illness. Their spirits were lightened, they began to eat again, and a few of them were discharged once more, much to the surprise of their families and medical staff.[4]

Sometimes, of course, we may be in denial of what is happening ourselves, and it is the one dying who is being compassionate in not spelling out for us what we need to face up to. It's only after their demise, that the irreversibility of death really hits us and we realize there were so many more things to say. But actually, even after the person has died, one can still say them, from the heart, and one can still appreciate and thank the person for the courage and love they revealed as they died.

Death comes into our lives again and again, if we realize a way to help people in this situation, that's very good. If we only realize afterwards how we could have been more helpful, that's still part of maturing: we can implement that

[4] *ibid*., Elisabeth Kubler-Ross MD., *On Death and Dying*, p. 125

lesson they taught us as a way to honour them. When my own mother died I was completely inept, but still, I learned from her that one can never love too much, and am still trying to implement that lesson.

JUST LISTEN, THE LISTENING IS IMPORTANT, AND SPEAK WITH LOVE. YOU DON'T HAVE TO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS.

You may not feel that your presence has much value, but the dying person just may not want to die alone. They may have the need to be able to speak to someone, to discuss their impending death. After all, it's the most important thing happening to them. You may have no answers, but the thing is – it's natural to feel isolated and bereft of care if there is no opportunity offered to talk openly – hang in there quietly. You will be blessed by the experience, something will change inside. And don't be afraid. Swami Satyananda says:

> When a person realizes that one continues to live in spirit, even after the death of the body, there need be no fear of death. When one sees death as a process of changing into a new role, a new life, a new opportunity, a new karma, a new model of body free from its present afflictions, one becomes free of fear. Death is only a transition, leaving this house to go to a bigger or smaller house.

Being able to pass on this perspective on life and death – not through lectures or sermons but through osmosis, because you yourself have developed an awareness of what is going on, and who you really are – is, therefore, one of the most helpful things you can do to help the dying. If you know you have not yet developed this, just do your best, the seva itself is a strengthening experience. In close relationships, it is quite often seen that one partner dies fairly soon after the other. There would be many different reasons for this, but one factor would be that the survivor's evaluation of life and death changes. Seeing death and dying as an intrinsic part of life is exactly what the scriptures do. It is exactly what we

need to do to prepare ourselves to live well and die well, and it comes through empathy and experience, not knowledge.

Maintaining the right perspective is essential

Swami Satyananda Saraswati has similar observations, and says the suffering of the family is passed on to the person dying. They worry about how the members of the family will cope without them. He recommends a solution to help the dying.

> One must have a realistic philosophy regarding sickness and death. The person who is to die will die. Is it necessary to be sorry when a person is dying? Think about it. The dying person is suffering and unhappy, but if others around him also become unhappy, who is going to create happiness? If someone is dying, others should not become unhappy. They should be happy and come to tell the dying person jokes and stories and make him smile.
>
> Separation is the law of life. Whenever one has a friend, lover or enemy, one is going to be separated from them. Nature has created a process of balance in creation. This law of separation is easy to understand, particularly in the case of a terminally ill or old person. If one doesn't want the dying person to go, even though he has to, it creates a problem for him. He knows his dear one does not want to be separated from him, but he does not know how to avoid it. Even after death he cannot be in peace, as there is a feeling in the depths of his mind that the near one is suffering on account of him. However, the departing person goes with peace when he knows that his loved one bids him farewell with all happiness.
>
> One must have the correct philosophy, therefore, in regard to the dying person for his further evolution.[5]

[5] *op cit*., Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga, Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, pp. 41–42

One issue that Dr Kubler-Ross felt very strongly about was the superiority of the old fashioned way of dying – at home if possible. She advocates people dying at home rather than in hospital, not only because it benefits the person actively dying at that time, but because it helps everyone in the family – both with adjusting to the current situation and, with their attitude to death.

> Why do I describe such 'old-fashioned' customs? I think they are an indication of our acceptance of a fatal outcome, and they help the dying patient as well as his family to accept the loss of a loved one.[6]

Dying at home

People used to die in their own homes all the time, now, in the West it is relatively rare. Partly this is because a person may need more intensive or more constant care than the small nuclear families can provide for the aged or the very sick. There may also be cases where unresolved and unforgiven family issues are more painful than the empty space of hospital death, but, as we have seen, the knowledge that death is approaching does help us drop trivia. If everyone knows the situation, and has worked to at least some extent on their own internal enemies of greed and fear, etc., one can grow a lot under the auspices of death. However, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross says that when she began her work, hospital situations did not always help one face the truth of one's mortality.

> We had long and controversial discussions about whether patients should be told the truth – a question that rarely arises when the dying person is tended by the family physician, who has known him from delivery to death and who understands the weaknesses and strengths of each member of the family.[7]

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[6] *op cit*., Elisabeth Kubler-Ross MD, *On Death and Dying*, p. 5

[7] *ibid*., pp. 7–8



In this chapter on care for the dying, the importance of availing oneself of the appropriate medical care is not discussed, because it varies so much from person to person, situation to situation. However, it seems wise to think about how much medical attention you want, and to make your feelings on the matter clear to yourself, to the family, and to the doctor, medical staff and hospital. And if you are a carer for someone dying, you can try to implement their preferences; it gives them moral support even if circumstances cannot be changed.

Requirements for a peaceful death

The needs of the inner person, the real you who is inhabiting the *annamaya kosha*, the physical body, is what we are looking at. Sogyal Rimpoche gives a short list of requirements for the carer to help someone achieve a peaceful death, summarized here in italics.[8]

1. *Show them unconditional love*.
2. *Tell the truth* (about dying so they can be honest too).
3. *Let them reveal their fears about dying* (you have to acknowledge your own first).
4. *Help clear unfinished business*: distributing property etc.; clearing misunderstandings and practising self-forgiveness. In this book, Chapter 17 includes meditations given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati on forgiving others and forgiving oneself.

[8] Sogyal Rimpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Rupa & Co, New Delhi, India, 1993, (10th impression 1996) pp. 175 ff

5. *Say goodbye*: The person dying has to give up attachments, but also, if you are attached and cling to the person you cannot sincerely let them go. Part of giving someone permission to die may often need to include reassuring them that you will be all right after their departure; this can give immense relief. Sogyal Rimpoche even gives a way that you can stay cheerful and give the dying a peaceful send-off: imagine the person is on a great ocean liner about to embark on a wonderful, important and necessary journey. How would that person want to remember your face as you wave goodbye? Not full of gloom and despair, but loving, steady, and emanating strong assurance that all will be well in this continuing journey.
6. *Work towards a peaceful death*: Create as beautiful an environment as possible where they are, whether the room is at home or a hospital room. Request to play recordings of music or mantras the person likes. Discuss with the hospital staff the person's wishes regarding medical treatment and interactions. This can include their wish for a calm and peaceful death, and not to be disturbed as they die by invasive techniques. Although the person may appear unconscious, the study of NDEs shows they can be very much more aware than usual.

Even if you cannot be with the one you love physically, be with them in spirit.

What sadhanas can be done to make us more aware of what is really happening as the time of death approaches, and at the time of death? In various satsangs, Swami Satyananda gives practical points on sadhanas that are profoundly useful in life, and at the time of death also.

1. One can be taught the way to experience peace of mind because the thoughts in the last stages of life decide one's future destiny. One can be exposed to spiritual ideas by reading from the scriptures, like *Ramacharitamanasa*.

2. One can practise *vairagya*, non-attachment to family, possessions and the like, this reduces the feeling of pain associated with death which is in itself not painful.
3. One can learn how to separate the body from the mind, and the mind from the self, using the sankalpas in yoga nidra to establish oneself as the drashta of the whole inner and outer universe.
4. One can realize that this life has been one link in a long chain forged from karma, and that more births will continue inevitably as cause and effect play out.
5. One can turn to the divine in whatever form one knows, and chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra or the *Aum* mantra, or the mantra according to your own tradition and nature.



Trained to accompany souls

One day I casually mentioned in the English correspondence office in the ashram in Munger that the current deadline was not so important – no one was going to die if it wasn't met. Sannyasi Dharmaratna looked at me pensively and said, "Yes, that sort of perspective puts things in place, doesn't it?" We started talking and found out that we both had

spent time with dying people – and when I learned that she had been trained in this from childhood, I asked for her to contribute some of her childhood experiences to this book. She responded:

> My grandmother was an Amerindian of the Mochica in Peru. She was acknowledged as a great siddha from birth by the healers there. She married a Portuguese man with five children and had eight more with him. When he became blind she had to care for 13 children and him. She began to work with doctors helping children who were extremely sick and bringing them back from death's door.
>
> She used to take me with her when she worked. I was a very hyperactive child and my parents were happy for me to go. I used to take my dolls, and whatever she did with her little patients, I would do with my dolls. Later, I could see spirits going through the door to death, sometimes children and sometimes adults. After some time, I began to go out of my body, take them by the hand through the door and the tunnel to the beautiful light. I would tell them not to be afraid. I just knew this should be done; it wasn't something I had been taught.
>
> Such experiences were natural to me as a child. I started learning Sivananda Yoga when I was 14 years old and in the first class, while lying in makarasana, I noticed the aura surrounding the girl next to me. When I mentioned this to the teacher, she started giving me special classes and introducing me to the chakras and so forth. Such abilities helped me to see the river or the bridge or the tunnel through which people have to pass when they pass on. Sometimes it's a river, sometimes a bridge, sometimes a tunnel – I don't know why – before they get through to the light on the other side.
>
> Because of such experiences I was always searching for ways to help people and heal people, and took many courses teaching such skills. I married a French

man and in 1976 we went to France and I had a strong vision of assembled important monks, later I realized it was the Dalai Lama and other lamas. My husband and I began working with the United Nations amongst refugees from Honduras, Guatemala and other places where death was rampant. I again began having visions of people dying and asking me for help. I was now 28 years old and I realized this was a special experience and consciously decided to learn how to help them. I found some Amerindian masters who said I was a *passeur d'âmes* – one who conducts souls through death.

The masters consider the Indians to be one people throughout the land, from up near Canada right down to Argentina. The masters can be male or female. They have very elevated consciousness like the guru here in India. I received training from them in many places: Peru, Guatemala, USA and Canada. I especially received training in many rituals and techniques from a master from the Cherokee tribe. She was the one who encouraged me in the practice of yoga and also told me I must go to Europe and would come back later. In Europe I decided to get a degree in natural healing and thus met many doctors and other friends who were interested in such things. With their encouragement I also contacted Tibetan masters who could give me training as a passeur d'âmes.

I received training in a Tibetan monastery in France along with doctors and lamas and met the Dalai Lama. I also began working with several hospitals, especially where people were dying from cancer or with people who were very afraid of death. One of the organizations was called *JAMALV – Jusqu'à la mort accompagner la vie* – accompanying the living till death. This suited me because from childhood, and throughout my life I would have visions of people dying and asking for my help.

Vijnanamaya kosha

I decided to ask for more details of the training she had received. She would not say much of the Amerindian tradition as it is secret sacred knowledge, but gave many details of other training. After listening to more biographical information, I understood that inherited psychic ability makes one especially suited to this calling and realized that this book might be useful to yoga practitioners in particular. People probably have a little psychic awareness to begin with to become seriously interested in yoga. Also, the yoga practices are geared to increase one's awareness of *vijnanamaya kosha*, the dimension of our intuitive and psychic perception, so eventually out-of-body experiences increase. The second interview began:

> After learning from the Amerindian tradition, I returned to France and stayed at a Tibetan monastery under the charge of a French lama of the Khagyu tradition. This is the same tradition as the Dalai Lama, and this centre arranged for the Dalai Lama to come to France and share the teachings. I attended a one month course on caring for the dying along with about twenty others. To be accepted into the course one was first interviewed by a psychologist to establish whether one was a suitable candidate. If this was successful one was interviewed by a psychiatrist to check that one was sufficiently balanced to undergo the course. The twenty-one students were from very diverse backgrounds including doctors, para-medicals, healers, but all of us were involved in helping people.
>
> We were split up into small groups of four or five people. Each group was given a separate bungalow at the beautiful mountain retreat to stay in. My group consisted of the very high level executive and owner of a large enterprise, a medical doctor and a physiotherapist besides myself. We were to interact and get to know each other – and it started out with just superficial chat.

On the first day of the course we met various doctors and other professionals who spoke about how people with different sicknesses died. One doctor was very helpful as she dealt with understanding body, face and eye language. Often the person you are sitting with cannot speak, or even if they can speak, the body language or eyes contradict their words, when they say, 'I feel well', for example. So she taught how to communicate with people no longer able to speak, and how to communicate and comfort without words. Other medical doctors taught us how to recognize the symptoms that reveal a person is actually dying, which is very helpful.

Like this the days continued and it was quite intense. One night I started crying. The other members of my group heard a little girl crying, sobbing uncontrollably, and one by one came to my room. Eventually I realized I was reliving the experience of my father's death when I was nine years old. He had been fishing with his partners and became lost at sea – just disappearing from the boat on 7th June night. I was the eldest child in the family, we had a baby three months old, my mother broke down completely so the responsibility fell on me and I didn't cry at all at that time, and had never cried since till this night in France.

An auntie had come to stay the night with us, but she was stunned and just sat motionless, watching us and thinking, 'What will all these poor children do? What will they do?' I could hear her thoughts clearly; she was another worry for me. Also I kept having visions of my father's last moments as he tried to keep afloat, but I didn't tell anyone as I knew they would not believe me. I felt guilty too, I think many children and even adults feel guilty when people they love die – I wonder why?

Why do the living blame themselves?

When Dr Elisabeth Kubler-Ross came on the scene, she became the spokeswoman for a large group of people in the West who realized that in this 'modern' age we need help to understand the significance of death and how to handle it. One of the interesting things that she speaks of is how people usually blame themselves in some way for the dying of those they love – and because this cannot be acknowledged – children and adults suffer from the wrong attitudes about the whole procedure. She explains that the unconscious cannot distinguish between a wish and what really happens:

> The child who angrily wishes his mother to drop dead for not having gratified his needs will be traumatized greatly by her actual death – even if this event is not linked closely in time with his destructive wishes. He will always take part or all of the blame for the loss of his mother. He will always say to himself – rarely to others – "I did it, I am responsible, I was bad, therefore Mommy left me." The grief, shame and guilt are not very far removed from feelings of anger and rage. The process of grief always includes some feelings of anger.[9]

She is speaking here specifically about children, but her observation holds true for all of us to some degree. If someone we love is suffering, and we think, 'Better that they go', that is not a reason for self-blame. Rather one should be able to acknowledge that thought or emotion or conclusion, and use it positively. Quite possibly the person dying is going through the same thing – and feeling guilty that they want to go, even knowing the grief it will cause the people they love. Dr Elisabeth Kubler-Ross again speaks of the importance of the whole family having a sufficiently mature attitude to death:

[9] *op cit.*, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross MD, *On Death and Dying*, pp. 3–4

> How difficult it is for patients to face impending and anticipated death when the family is not ready to 'let go' and implicitly or explicitly prevents them from separating themselves from the involvements here on earth.[10]

Sometimes people must be given permission to die – along with heartfelt reassurance that they have done well, and that we will meet again and, together, keep on trying to learn whatever it is that we have to learn. Similarly, the survivors have to be given permission to live, and to live happily, with the extra wisdom and depth that comes from experience of death.

Psychic training

Sannyasi Dharmaratna continued describing how her training included the psychic or intuitive aspects of the process of helping someone to die.

> Usually during the course, the mornings were allocated for talking and theory, the afternoons for practical sessions. On the second and third days the students met with various spiritual leaders: a Catholic priest, a person from the Muslim tradition, one from Tibet and so forth. They explained the approach of their spiritual tradition to death and also the rituals they used. There was a general discussion about how the rituals seem to be missing from western consciousness in all aspects of life now, and in death also.
>
> The Catholic priest said that he felt these traditions had been preserved in family traditions and could be found even today. However, these days most people did not want to see or know about death at all. He said often doctors and priests were asked by family members to contact them after the death had taken place as they could not stand to see their loved one dying. Actually,

[10] *ibid*., Elisabeth Kubler-Ross MD., *On Death and Dying*, p. 151

this is not a healthy attitude. At the time of death, having someone you love or a family member present is most helpful. Having anyone present is good as long as that person has an open heart – all the speakers agreed on this most important point of having an open heart when you sit with someone who is dying.

The Tibetan was the most practical speaker because he shared exact knowledge of the process of dying such as describing the prana vayus and how they leave the body one by one. During the afternoons we saw autopsies and videos of anatomy etc. It was very interesting as it was related also to the explanation of the different vayus that exist in the living body and how they leave.

We also learned that if the ajna chakra is open, one can see a light surrounding the person as the time of death approaches. It starts surrounding the feet. Everybody has this light in the feet, even depraved people. Without touching the person, one can make passes with the hands as though urging the light up through the body towards the head and sahasrara chakra. Often this will help the light to move. At times you can feel the light stopping and not moving, but if you keep making the passes it will often start to move again. At this time the experience of the helper is amazing. You feel strongly internally that this is in the service of God. It makes you feel that for once in your life you are one with God, it is indescribable.

When the light gets to the heart, the anahata region, if family members are present, or other close people, they should hold the hand of the person dying and say, 'We love you', 'I forgive you', 'If you see so-and-so, give them this message' anything like this to show the love you feel and to comfort and reassure the person going through this experience of dying. Working like this, as the passes are made, it helps the person to heal different experiences that they had even as a child.

Doubts

Although I respected Sannyasi Dharmaratna, I did not want this book to be full of flowery psychic stories. By this time in the narrative I was feeling a bit overwhelmed. Not everyone can see lights and auras, etc. However, I was studying the Adi Shankaracharya, who founded the Dashnami tradition of sannyasa, and knew he was not a flowery person. He was steeped in the scriptures, a siddha and a profound philosopher. While wondering about the usefulness of Sannyasi Dharmaratna's narrative, I chanced upon this comment by him:

Departure of one who knows the qualified Brahman

> 17. (When the soul of the man who has realized the qualified Brahman is about to depart), there occurs an illumination of the top of the heart. Having the door illumined by that light, the soul, under the favour of Him who resides in the heart, departs through the hundred and first nerve, owing to the efficacy of the knowledge and the appropriateness of the constant thought about the course which is a part of that knowledge.[11]

'The hundred and first nerve' is *sushumna nadi* – the central energy flow which conducts the *kundalini,* or spiritual evolutionary energy, and is related to transcendental awareness according to the yogis and Tibetan Buddhists. So the psychic perceptions of energy are not just 'flowery' they are mentioned by other respected traditions also. If we perceive things that we do not normally perceive, or that others in our immediate circle do not see, finding a tradition that accepts such perspectives and can teach us how to work with them, surely means those perceptions are validated.

[11] Swami Gambhirananda, (translation), *The Brahma Sutra Bhashya of Shri Shankaracharya*, Advaita Ashram, Mayavati, Pithoragarh, Himalayas, India, 2nd ed. 1987, p. 864 (IV:ii:17), Topic 9

Practical points

Nevertheless, I explained to Sannyasi Dharmaratna the difficulty people might have relating to psychic auras and experiences, and asked for more practical hints that would help anyone struggling to be of use while caring for someone who is dying. She responded as follows.

> I worked with different organizations and combined teachings from different sources and accompanied many people as they were leaving here. I found that it is very important to be focused in viveka and vairagya. In this way you keep yourself out of the suffering that death is creating in the sick person and their near family. It is extremely important to prepare yourself carefully before you arrive for this work. You can't just breeze in casually. You have to be very healthy, cheerful and sattwic so that you can insist with your whole being that the death is not sad; it is a change of consciousness.
>
> You have to remain centred and well balanced. It is essential to 'ground' yourself by always eating only good sattwic food. To keep the health together and the inner cleanliness, it is very helpful to do shankaprakshalana twice a year and laghoo every month. In Peru we practise very similar deep cleansing practices using herbs before going through initiation rituals. Doing this as taught by Swami Satyananda in his books, learning the techniques in an ashram environment, makes this easy and straightforward.
>
> You should always remain calm, discreet and respectful, healthy and joyful, in order to take charge of the environment. Your clothing should be light, loose and discreet, you may have to hold or move the person. It is best to have light pastel colours, no jewels and no make-up. Your movements should be silent and slow as if you were a shadow of yourself. Rituals and mantras can be taught, for example Swami Niranjanananda and the Dalai Lama highly recommend the Mahamrityunjaya

mantra. Often families have their own rituals and you just have to remind them, or they can 'invent' their own rituals for example lighting a candle, praying – and they should take into account the children also.

Rosemary oil is excellent for purifying. You can put it on the Marma points, or on the inside of the forearms. We use it in our Amerindian countries to wash the plates and implements of the masters: it is a strong disinfectant. Niauli, the essence of orange, is also good. The essential oils of mandarins and of lavender are very good for reducing stress. Family members, including children, are often under a lot of stress and it works to calm them immediately. Bach flowers and especially 'Rescue Remedy' is very effective. It is okay to laugh, it is okay to hold hands and touch each other. You can give light massage also. Often the body is too worn or sensitive for a whole body massage but gentle massage of the hands or feet helps in painful stress and sickness, even of the face if they give permission. It is a way of giving comfort, so they feel, 'Someone is with me – I am not alone.'

A close friend of mine asked me to come and be with her and her son. He was only 36 but he was dying. He had come home to be with her and the family, but she felt helpless and they didn't know what to do. It is very important in this work to come with time – not to have any other appointments, so you can be completely present and do what has to be done. My friend had one simple practical problem, for example. Her son needed help to go to the toilet and to bathe, etc. She just couldn't do it. They hired a nurse to help, but he only came in the mornings and her son often needed help later in the day and during the night. So I was able to help her with this, and I stayed there a lot of the time so I could help him. You have to teach the family or the close ones what to do.

Sometimes, when you go to a house, you have to take charge of the whole family because often they feel

lost and feel unsure what to do with this person who is in pain and dying in their midst. In their confusion and unhappiness, they stay distant and watch from the edges, and the person feels abandoned and alone.

On the day this young man actually died, the family called me. When I arrived he was in the process of dying. The family must have been able to sense it but again were unsure so no one was up close with him, they were just watching. I could see the light at his feet as soon as I entered, but they couldn't see it. So I explained that it meant his spirit was getting ready to go and we should help him move upwards to the heart, and showed them how to do the passes. I told them just to try and even if they couldn't see it they would feel the energy moving, and so would he. They came forward and tried one by one and the light moved up to anahata. Then I told them it was time to give him their last messages of love and support for his journey. At that time also, one person lightly stroked his hand, another lightly pressed his feet, his mother, who he loved so dearly, stood by his head and placed her hands there. Just the people he loves should do this, it has to be very intuitive. So he died very well and peacefully.

Focus on the needs of the dying person

One very important fact to consider is that the person is ALIVE until the very last moment. Focus on the needs of the dying person. If possible avoid weeping in front of him or her and focus on them, not the other people around. You need to be able to listen well and to comprehend what people are communicating. This becomes very helpful in cases when the sick person is unable to talk or write, then just be genuine and listen and respond with an open heart. And that brings us to the whole issue of how involved the family should be with the process of dying, and how to care for the family.

15

The Ongoing Journey

This chapter is about how to help the family and friends that are left behind when somebody dies. Also, how to engage ourselves fully in the opportunity to evolve that comes when one is struggling to manage one's self, because someone very dear to us has died. For then, not only do we feel bereft, we are also humbled enough to let go of what is important in life. We can drop the labels, become humble about who we really are, and learn about reality. It reminds us that the process of life and death is part of the ongoing journey of the soul.

From the perspective of the returning soul – the one still caught in the circle of life and death – we also look at some of the rituals that continue to care for the person who has died. Such rituals have been done since ancient times to help the souls of the departed, and the souls of the living, in their continuing journey.

The second topic or perspective regards *moksha*, liberation from the circle of life and death, as our real aim. Here, the guru's role in death and the way the relationship with a spiritual teacher or spiritual lineage can transform the experience of death is crucial. Rather than perceiving death as a frightening and painful end of life during which we are helpless and/or largely unconscious, death becomes a transition point in the continuing journey of the evolution of consciousness. The scriptures assure us that with the help of

the guru, one can break free from the circle of life and death: drop off like the ripe cucumber from the vine.

BUT ONE HAS TO BE RIPE.

Care of the family

Taking care of the people who are left alone when someone they love or depend on dies, is another aspect of caring for the deceased. It is a *seva*, a service, you can do for them, and for the deceased too, for many scriptures say the inconsolable grief of their loved ones hurts the deceased like nothing else does.

Be a friend: Sometimes, when a person dies, the family can go into a state of shock, although not everyone will be equally affected at any one time. It is helpful to see that the family keeps on eating. Maybe no one feels like eating, much less cooking, but if you turn up with some food already cooked and leave it with them, they will probably eat. It is a practical way of showing your sympathy. Similarly, if there are lawns to be mowed, or shopping to be done, maybe one can step in and help.

Listen: People who are grieving may not want to listen to your philosophy, may be feeling angry and betrayed by the world in general. It's a good chance to practise remaining centred, listening to whatever is said and understanding why it is said. If there are small children who are usually taken to school, bigger children who are escorted to their different appointments and you are entrusted with some sort of a task like that, it is an opportunity to listen to them also, and to ensure they do not blame themselves for the changed atmosphere at home, and for a member of the family disappearing.

Consider the children: Whether the person dies in a hospital or at home, very often there are young children around, maybe even children of the dying person, and we must realize that the children, too, are participating in this experience and may be deeply affected. I remember

wondering what was happening when my grandparents died and how, although I felt scared by the gloomy room, I was very glad to be finally taken up to see them rather than just looking at the sad and blank faces as people went up and down the stairs to their room. It's important that we give children the opportunity to say goodbye, as well as considering what they may need and want, but may not be able to express.

To some extent, children need information on what is happening. They need to know what is happening, what is expected to happen, and how their own situation may be affected by what is happening (especially if one of their parents is dying). They will be affected not only by their own emotional response, but also by possibly very strong emotional responses from the people around them. We can say, "We won't be able to see Grandad's body after he dies, but in our heart we can talk with him, we will still love him and he will still love us." This will help emotional and spiritual needs, but we also need to consider their need for stability in normal life situations, and help the family to continue a stable daily routine for them.

Even if a member of the family becomes very ill, becomes incapacitated in some way, or goes through an NDE and is profoundly changed by the experience, it's good to communicate frankly with the children of the household. Children quickly absorb the emotions of their parents; and often assume responsibility for unexplained tensions and sorrows.

Rituals to help children

I asked Dharmaratna how she felt about explaining things to children when someone was dying. She said children must participate, and explained that children are aware and sensitive even though they don't understand 'intellectually' what is happening. It is important not to ignore them or exclude them from what is happening, thinking that this is protecting them. Don't pretend things are okay, because

they may, for example, think it is their fault. She maintained that young children under seven understand very well what the spirit is; it is only later, when they have been 'educated' that they have trouble with the idea. And, as Professor Stevenson's research has pointed out, some children have vivid recollections of other lives.

If you recognize that your child is going to have to cope with a death in the family, how can you help them prepare for the experience? Dharmaratna found:

> One way of helping children with death is to show them a ritual. For example, when a pet or a wild animal dies, children often get very upset. If you show proper concern and explain things it helps. For example, place the animal in a clean little box filled with dry grasses and ask the child to choose a flower and maybe put a little of the animal's food in there also or some 'treasure' like a special rock or ball or shell. They should tell the animal how much they loved it and enjoyed playing/walking/watching it. Cover the body and bury it near a tree and explain that the body will now go back to mother Earth while the spirit travels on. You can chant *Aum* or sing some song for the creature's journey.

Then, if death is happening in the family, you can ask the children, 'Do you understand what is happening?' For



example, they may ask, 'Why will no one look at me?' 'Why will no one play with me?' 'Why can't my friends come?' You can give simple explanations when necessary like 'Come and look at your granddad, now his spirit is going to leave his body because his body is too old and sick. You can tell him you love him and then he'll have a good journey.'

If your child is having their first experience with death, you can ask them 'Do you understand what has happened?' 'How are you feeling?' 'Do you have any questions?' 'Is there anything you want to happen?' and listen to what they say and how they understand things and try to help. For example, they may ask 'Where is my mummy/granddad/friend?' You can explain that the person has died and give simple explanations like 'Your granddad's finished with the old body he had, now his spirit has left his body. You can still love him though, and we can say a prayer for him, or sing a kirtan for him. We can chant the Mahamritunjaya mantra for him, and then he'll have a good journey.'

If a person is dying at home, and the children are allowed to stay at home, rather than being sent away to relatives, and are included in the discussions, allowed to express their fears and see the grief of others, it means they are not alone in grief and helplessness. It offers them the comfort of shared mourning and adjustment, and gradually helps build a perspective where death is seen to be part of life. Life and death can be seen as part of a larger journey from a young age, and both life and death take on a new significance where there is a lot less fear and a lot more strength. Death becomes an experience that helps one to grow and mature.

On a simple level, the chanting of mantras such as the Mahamrityunjaya mantra can be established as a remembrance ceremony, a ritual, in your own home. You may wish to light a candle, or perform a small fire ceremony and chant the mantra together as a family group every day for the first fortnight, and then continue once a week for the whole year. It takes time for our feelings to surface and resurface, but after a year, things seem to get better.

Allow people to grieve

The sort of help people in the family need changes over time – and often continues for a long long time. Inconsolable grief is said to hurt the departed; on the other hand, it's a natural and necessary process to mourn someone.

AND WE ALL LIKE TO BE MISSED.

Yes, we all like to be missed. One needn't feel guilty because we've been grieving and might have hurt the very one we love.

THAT'S RIGHT, GOOD MOURNING LEADS TO REALLY VALUING THE ONE WHOSE GONE, EMULATING THE GOODNESS IN THEM, AND BEING MORE HUMAN TO THOSE YOU'RE LEFT WITH.

So be staunchly supportive and accepting of the grief that needs to be expressed even if it seems to be lasting an excessively long time. If you yourself have not yet lost someone you love, the length of time involved in grieving can seem disproportionate. It may help to consider this account:

> For four months after Lyttle's death I was relatively numb, existing in a prolonged state of shock. Once in a while I was sad, but the full awareness and finality of the loss I had suffered had not yet hit me. When it did, the sensations of excruciating emotional pain and personal disintegration were so powerful that I felt sometimes that now I was dying. At other times, I feared that I was simply losing control of my life, going crazy with grief and disorientation. This painful process of mourning, and the fear that I might not be able to keep body and soul together, continued for many months.[1]

Because we are inevitably going to lose those we love, and inevitably going to die ourselves, we should take every opportunity to learn what is necessary. If the one and only

[1] Longaker, Christine, *Facing Death and Finding Hope: A Guide to the Emotional and Spiritual Care of the Dying*, Broadway Books, New York, USA, 2001, p. 11

sure thing about living is death – there must be something very significant in it for life itself, and for the evolution of our enduring consciousness, or spirit, or soul.

Matrix revisited

We have all embarked on the long journey, but for most of us, we're not in a hurry for it to end. We amble along, managing life as best we can: sometimes suffering and sometimes enjoying but basically wanting life itself to continue. Life may be full of suffering, but as existence itself is blissful at its essence, we want to continue, to play again, to continue the lila. We want to be reborn – and if the person dying before us also wants to be reborn and to enjoy the next life while striving to improve themselves a little, then they will be reassured to know that it's going to happen. Let them know that now the current body is finishing, but the consciousness keeps going, working on the next lot of samskaras that will form our next birth.

If we have already worked through the grosser samskaras and instincts and have developed sattwic qualities, our natural inclination, or *swabhava*, will be to learn the one-pointed balanced state of meditation known as *dhyana*. If we sincerely want to clear our consciousness, we can work on the systematic meditations given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati in Part 5 of this book.

Patanjali points out that people who have a store of meditation-samskaras from their past efforts and previous lives are able to dissolve, going deeper and deeper into the samadhi states of consciousness, and gaining more and more subtle control of energies. He also explains that some people are born able to experience the superconscious state known as *samadhi*. Their consciousness is evolved to the point where dream and sleep states (the subconscious and unconscious in most people) are open to them. Why is this so important in a book on death? Because it means they can die consciously and merge their awareness in the universal consciousness. The form of death known as *mahasamadhi,* the great samadhi,

marks an end to the journey as we know it. They don't have to take birth into the mortal sphere, so in that sense they remain immortal.

We mortals have to take birth, but we also don't have to fear death because rebirth is sure, just like death is sure for the living, and that is generally what we want. And in between lives, in that time we spend with you, we may not know how to navigate the lokas and bardo states like the rishis do, but still we'll get our just deserts.

YES CHILD, DEFINITELY. I'M VERY CAREFUL ABOUT THAT.

Mmm.

Most people want to live again, and fear death because they think it's the final full stop. And I suppose we do seem like children – though not so innocent – coming back time after time, wanting to play the same old game, slowly growing up. Whereas the siddhas and saints don't fear death because for them death means being with God, returning to higher planes of consciousness.

The wise ones who wrote the scriptures say eventually, deepening states of self-realization signal the end of being caught in the phenomenal world known as *samsara,* and from the whole *samsara chakra*, the wheel of life and death, on which we have revolved until now. That gives the experience of mahasamadhi, where one consciously leaves the body and merges with that inner light . . . but as far as I understand it, for people like us, we just die, leave space-time for a while, and then get born back in. The thing is, can we expand our consciousness into those bardo states, and bring that multi-dimensional awareness back with us? Can we become the drashta?

Take a step back: reviewing the sensory matrix

We have all been born into the world with a tendency for the senses to keep extroverted. This is useful for survival in the jungle, and in cities, but no help once you're actually dead.

When you no longer have a physical body worth talking of. We are also born with the tendency to believe our own perceptions, whether they are sensory or mental projections of our samskaras, are real – are the absolute truth. In the West, it wasn't really until LSD that people en masse learned that what you perceive and believe is just your trip in the world, and everyone's trip is different. As the *Bhagavad Gita* explains, the Absolute is not approachable by the senses or the mind.

So, when you find yourself experiencing the projected contents of your own mind as a tragedy . . .

Just because someone is dying – even if it is you.

. . . it's good to remember waking life is just one of the four states of consciousness described in *Mandukya Upanishad*. It's like a big dream, but longer. It's good to be able to remain a witness rather than continually being caught up in one's own projections. Employing *viveka,* the faculty which allows us to discriminate between what is real and eternal, and unreal and transitory; and *vairagya*, non-attachment to the unreal transitory life and attachment to the real and eternal essence or reality, helps us to become skilful in changing the channel of the mind to a positive view of what is happening.

My god what a sentence!

So you see, we should be happy when we come to a full stop. It gives us breathing space – or non-breathing space to be more precise.

If a sentence goes on too long, you begin to lose the meaning. Think of each life as the sentence the jury has handed down (or your own karma has deemed appropriate). At the end of it, you're free. Free as a bird!

And having learned the lessons of that life, the next life sentence can open another area of consciousness until you become the self-illumined drashta, and can always maintain awareness of the inner light.

The matrix rebooted

Raja yoga helps develop that part of consciousness, the witnessing consciousness known as the *drashta*, while you're alive. If one attains *sabeeja samadhi*, samadhi where there are still seed-impressions in the mind that need to be experienced, one probably has to come back – that is, be reborn. Nevertheless, many things in life then become possible because attaining samadhi at all means one can remain stable, balanced, and achieve one's resolves.

If one attains *nirbeeja samadhi*, where there are no longer seed impressions in the mind that demand to be experienced, then one doesn't have to come back. For such people the ongoing journey is not from life to life but something completely different. Why? In sabeeja samadhi there are still seeds in the consciousness; in nirbeeja samadhi, there is nothing left – no desires at all.[2] People who have attained nirbeeja samadhi are like Nachiketas, pure and unattached, desireless to the point where they are completely free from the samsara chakra, although it is said that even such high souls may choose to return for a divine mission. The rest of us have to come back, one way or another.

Patanjali explains sabeeja samadhi has two alternating stages of consciousness: *samprajnata samadhi*, samadhi with awareness (of the *pratyaya*, or the thing being focused on) and *asamprajnata samadhi*, samadhi where the progress of consciousness is beyond will. Each time one enters the asamprajnata samadhi state (1:18):

> It is preceded by a continued study of stopping the content of the mind. In it the mind remains in the form of traces.

One is propelled deeper into samadhi, or pulled back out, due only to the dynamism of the *samskaras*, the underlying seeds or traces and impressions in the consciousness. So,

[2] Swami Satyananda *Four Chapters on Freedom*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 1st ed 1976 (Patanjali 1:19 ff)

practically speaking, samadhi is only attained after lifetimes of preparation when the *chitta*, our storehouse of impressions, is full of samskaras leading deeper into cosmic consciousness rather that outwards to the phenomenal world.

If we have only just started putting our heads out of the evolutionary waters, realizing we have to make some efforts to evolve, samadhi states are a little far off. We can't even practise them; it's like practising to have blue eyes. So, if we can't even remember our dreams, and spend a good third of each 24 hours unconscious, our practical need is to practise *pratyahara*, composed of *indriya nigraha*, control of the senses, and *danti*, management of the mind.[3] These give us the ability to look within rather than only perceiving the external world. To be able to watch the influence of the senses, the thoughts, some of the conditioning acquired through the family and society we are raised in, and maybe even some of the samskaras we are born with, is possible through swadhyaya and pratyahara – especially if the guru, the catalyst presents the teachings. We can begin to realize how much we project onto the world, and how we experience the world according to our projections. This is very relevant training for life, for the process of dying and for the after-death states.

Then one can practise *dharana*, concentrating the mind on a particular point. As dharana is mastered, one enters the state of *dhyana*, maintaining awareness and concentration for longer periods. This enables one to gain deeper insights and make radical changes in oneself, which in turn influences the world and the whole environment.

The inner nature survives

You can see how any of these practices are very useful as training for dying and then navigating the lokas beyond death: one thereby receives training in those areas of

[3] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Yoga Chakra 4*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2017, pp. 12 ff

consciousness which are not dependent on the everyday body-mind – sensory-world matrix that is left behind. There are only some categories of people who can experience samadhi, because one has to have the right samskaras already in one's consciousness. Still, traditional spiritual practices help one to move systematically through the necessary stages of disconnecting from the matrix of phenomenal reality, so one can focus on, relate to, and enter another dimension, often called *Satya-loka*, the realm of truth.

In each stage of the meditative process, the obstructing traces of the mind are becoming finer and finer. The important point is that the conscious willpower also drops away as death approaches. It's the samskaras, the *swabhava*, the inner nature, that rules – and determines either the progress into deeper states of samadhi in life, or the progress through different lokas or bardos after death, until the Clear Light – the mahasamadhi dawns in the consciousness.

Transcendental knowledge has been experienced by people from different cultures, from ancient to modern times and it is preserved in the scriptures, as well as in our own inner consciousness. The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* advises that during the moments of death, the *Chikhai Bardo*, someone should repeat many times in the ear of the dying one:

> O Nobly born (so and so by name) the time has now come for you to seek the Path (in reality). Your breathing is about to cease. Your guru has set you face to face before the Clear Light; and you are about to experience it in its Reality in the Bardo state, wherein all things are like the void and cloudless sky, and the naked spotless intellect is like a transparent vacuum without circumference or centre. At this moment know yourself; and abide in that state.[4]

4 Evans-Wentz, W.Y., ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*, according to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering, Oxford University Press, London, UK, 3rd ed. 1957, p. 91

It is knowing oneself, not knowing the scriptures, which is necessary in the moments of death, but while we are living, we've got every day to read the scriptures and to practise their teachings so they do become part of our consciousness.

> The last impression in the mind becomes active at the time of death. The last connection of the mind with the world is important and, therefore, in India it is said that at the time of death the thought has to be positive. The thought has to be spiritual, either of God or something transcendental, not of gross material things. Therefore, there is an elaborate system of rituals in India at the time of death. When the dying person is lying on his deathbed, people start chanting the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana* and other chants. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the sound goes in and affects the psyche. It diverts the mind from the outer world to something more spiritual.
>
> The ritual chanting of mantras at the time of death has been so ingrained in the Indian culture that every family does it. This also brings a lot of peace to the people who are leaving, because at the time of death, the life which one has led opens up in front of one's eyes like an open book. If one becomes involved in analyzing one's life situations, circumstances and activities, precious time is lost. Therefore, the mind is geared towards meditation, prayer, mantra and God. If, in the life of the sadhaka, there is a close relationship with the guru, the guru appears to guide the dying person to reach the next stage.[5]

Rituals and death

Those who have won free from the samsara chakra do not need rituals to help them – but we can benefit from rituals honouring them because it connects us with their inspiration. Those who are going to return do benefit directly from

[5] Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga, Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, p. 35

rituals performed by us, according to the scriptures, and the people who mourn them are directly helped, as we can tell from experience. Different countries have different rituals to be followed after death, according to what is appropriate and hygienic in that region and climate.

Swami Niranjanananda acknowledges the importance of ritual and refers to the Hindu ceremonies as potential guidelines for those whose culture no longer maintains the spiritual traditions.

1. On the day of a person's death, their relatives shave their head.
2. Grieving is okay, but not loud wailing in the room where the person died.
3. For twelve days, strict discipline over food and sleeping is practised in the home.
4. On the 13th day, the *shraadha* ritual is performed. This includes *tarpan*, offering honey, rice and sesame seeds to the departed. Honey is for love, rice symbolizes gratitude, the seeds represent the samskaras that they have given to those left behind. A *havan*, fire ceremony, is often conducted, symbolically saying 'May you become the light'. The shraadha shows gratitude to the departed, recognizes their gifts and qualities, and helps to overcome attachments to those left behind.



5. In meditation the same process is followed. The thoughts and desires of people are like lassoes thrown around the neck of the spirit. In meditation, the image of the departed person is merged in fire so that the mental and emotional attachment is removed.
6. This process can take 13 days in the short form usually practised, or one year and 21 days in the long form.
7. The shraadha ceremony is listed as one of the *pancha maha-yajna*, the five duties of a householder. In the *Manu Smriti*, which is a highly respected code of conduct, it is called *pitri yajna*, sacrifice to the ancestors. It should be performed once a year, as a day of the pitris equals one year here.
8. Though the jiva undergoes rebirth eventually, the relatives here should continue doing the shraadha, because the pitris may stay in pitri loka (also known as Chandra loka or heaven) a very long time. There they are rewarded according to their karma, and the shraaddha helps. Even after rebirth, which is according to karma, the shraaddha helps in the next life.

It may not be possible or even appropriate to adopt all of this, but one can maintain some form of ritual that one feels is suitable, even if it is just burning a candle, placing a flower and saying a prayer. Also marking the end of the different cycles is helpful: a special ceremony at the end of the first fortnight, on that day each month for six months, on that day each year.

Doing some act of charity on behalf of the departed soul, can comfort both the living and the dead. Participating in such rituals on an annual basis can help us appreciate more and more deeply the relationship that we had, and support an ongoing positive connection. The knowledge that such rituals will continue in one's honour can also be a comfort to those who are dying.

THOSE WHO ARE KNOCKING AT MY DOOR – YES, THEY LIKE TO FEEL THAT THEY WILL BE REMEMBERED – IT'S THE WAILING AND THE PANIC THEY CAN'T BEAR.

The art of dying

In the Sanatana dharma, in the Indian tradition of yoga, in the Tibetan tradition of Buddhism, and in Christianity also, living and dying are regarded as complementary activities. In the esoteric traditions it is recognized that there is a significant amount of skill in both of these arts, and one can and should be trained in these skills. In the preface to the 2nd edition of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, we are told:

> The message is that the Art of Dying is quite as important as the Art of Living (or of Coming into Birth) of which it is the complement and the summation: that the future is dependent, perhaps entirely, upon a rightly controlled death, as the second part of this volume, setting forth the Art of Reincarnating, emphasizes.[6]

Regarding death as a spiritual experience and a chance to evolve has not only been restricted to the wise people of the East. In the West, priestly care of the dying is not just restricted to the last rites, but as society has become less religious, and medical science has 'advanced' prevalent attitudes have changed so that people have become 'clinically dead' rather than 'going to their just reward'. The preface to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* refers to the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* showing these (Mysteries) used to be taught in ancient Mediterranean countries.

> To those who had passed through the secret experiencing of pre-mortem death, right dying is initiation, conferring . . . the power to control consciously the process of death and regeneration. Throughout the Middle Ages, and during the Renaissance that followed, Europe still retained enough of the Mystery teachings concerning death to understand the paramount importance of knowing how to die . . . Various primitive Churches of Christendom, notably the Roman, Greek, Anglican,

[6] *op cit.*, Evans-Wentz, W.Y. ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane,* p. xiii

> Syrian, Armenian and Coptic . . . wisely incorporated into their rituals and observances, many principles of this pre-Christian Art of Dying. And today, in their efforts thus to aid the dying, these churches are in outstanding contrast, sociologically and culturally, to an Earth-limited medical science which has no word of guidance to the dying concerning the after-death state . . . the dying should not only face death calmly and heroically, but with an intellect rightly trained and rightly directed, mentally transcending, if need be, bodily suffering and infirmities, as they would be able to had they practised efficiently during their active lifetime the Art of Living.[7]

The pancha mahayajna

Such rituals are still practised today in India as a part of the culture which has been preserved unbroken from the vedic times. The *Garuda Purana* explains that as people approach death, not only may they be aware of different bodily sensations, but also they may begin to see into different dimensions. A devout Christian or a Krishna devotee may have a vision of Jesus Christ or of Lord Krishna and have a very peaceful departure. A person with fears and unresolved problems may see the *Yamadhutas*, the messengers of Lord Yama – and be terrified by them. Thus we can see that hearing uplifting scriptures and having faith in one's close connection to the guru or one's spiritual master is the most beneficial thing at this point.

It is considered by the orthodox to be extremely bad luck to keep a copy of the *Garuda Purana* in the house. It is read in the families after a death to help the departing soul as part of a sadhana which lasts 13 days and is dedicated to helping the departing soul on its journey. On the 13th day, a talk is given by the family guru to further explain the spiritual truths underlying life and death.

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[7] *ibid*., pp. xiv–xv

On a deeper level, this sadhana is actually just an aspect of a larger sadhana and perspective which extends into the life-style of civilized families in the form of the *pancha mahayajna*, the five great sacrifices. These are to be performed every day – and they transform one's life and the tenor of society.

1. *Bhuta yajna*: the feeding of animals and birds: this does not just apply to one's 'own' animals but can apply to the pigeons in a city, the foragers in a jungle where one stops for a meal while travelling, and so forth.
2. *Manushya yajna (atithi yajna)*: hospitality to people in general and especially to guests.
3. *Pitri yajna*: giving to the ancestors in a daily ceremony.
4. *Deva yajna*: a sacrifice to the great gods made by oblations to a fire.
5. *Brahma yajna*: teaching and reciting the Vedas.

In the context of this book we are talking most specifically of the pitri yajnas. The daily offerings to the ancestors of rice and raw banana is performed by the women of the household. As with the other yajnas, seeing such a ceremony performed daily would help children to build up a respect for the forefathers, and a firm belief in the continuation of the connection between the living and the dead.

After a death is experienced in the family, during the 13-day program dedicated to the departing spirit, the *karta*, the performer of the ritual, is a male, assisted by his wife. *Jala*, (water), *till* (sesame) and *pinda* (rice balls) along with *ghee* (clarified butter), *dahi* (yoghurt) and *madhu* (honey) are offered every day. These offerings are cooling because one has to pass over a fiery bridge which is as slender as a hair. On the 13th day it is the woman who unceremoniously delivers uncooked, unsalted food to encourage the pitri to speed off on the new journey. Particular offerings are specified to help the spirit develop the type of body that can assimilate the experiences of its new state.

The *Garuda Purana* specifies *dasha daana*, and the *pancha daana*, ten gifts plus a further five gifts, given to the priests



to help the soul in its journey. For example, if a cow is given, then at a particularly difficult stage of the soul's journey the spirit can catch hold of that cow and be pulled out from the bad karma. And, compassionately enough, for those too poor to donate a cow, the *daan*, gift or offering, of a dry coconut, given with faith can equally help to deal with the bad karma of the departed soul, so there is comfort for the families of the deceased, that they have done what they can.

The *Garuda Purana* enumerates the rites that are considered helpful to the dead and specifies the training necessary for the special class of priests who can help guide the soul after death. Performing these necessary duties, besides helping the departed soul, also removes that feeling of anguish, the feeling that something has been left undone, that people often experience after a death in the family. Similarly, performing the other four sacrifices enumerated in the pancha mahayajnas enriches one's life, purifies the heart and establishes helpful samskaras for us transmigratory creatures.

Rituals: death takes longer than we think

Myers noted, from his research, that it is natural for most people to stay in the gravitational field of the life that has just ended for some time after their death. The spirits of departed souls tend to contact people they hold dear or have had very close association with on some level. Dr Moody noted that those people who had NDEs, and reported out-of-body experiences, generally recounted what was happening to their family members, whether they were close by or quite far away. So it is not only priests who should pray for the departing souls. When the spirit sees the family, to which it is attached, saying prayers, chanting mantras and performing rituals, it helps remind the deceased of the reality that they should pay attention to now. The respect and love shown through prayer, chanting and ritual are part of giving the soul permission to depart. From the point of view of the living, such rites comfort the family and help turn their minds from sorrow, grief and regret to a broader state of understanding and acceptance. This helps the family members to let go, and also helps the deceased to move on in their journey.

In the context of helping the deceased, the extended ceremonies practised in Tibet mean the lamas have ample time to repeat the chants again and again. Lamas chant the appropriate texts in relays from the *Bardo Thodal*, to help the deceased during 49 days. So there is support during the process of death and the moments of death and for a considerable time afterwards. In Indian families, the priests and families similarly perform rites for several weeks. Even after this, the pitris are given daily offerings of rice, raw banana, and respect in the daily pitra yajna. Swami Sivananda says:

> The disembodied spirits remain earth-bound for some time after death and expect help from their relatives and friends. Prayers, kirtan, *shraadhas*, or rites for the departed soul, charitable acts and good thoughts help to release the departed souls from their earthbound condition, so that they can rise higher and enter the

world of the *pitris*, departed ancestors, in order to enjoy the fruits of their good deeds. Prayers for the dead have formed an integral part of all religious rites. Prayers act on the principle of a radio broadcast and transmit positive thought waves. Prayer and kirtan transmit a mighty force, which helps the departed souls on their passage through the intermediate state towards heaven . . .

Immediately after death the departed souls remain in a state of swoon or unconsciousness. They cannot feel that they are detached from their previous, gross material bodies. Prayers, kirtan and good thoughts from relatives and friends give real solace to them. They create a potent vibration which helps to awaken them from their stupefied condition of mind, and brings them back from the veiled state of consciousness. The departed souls then begin to realize that they are no longer in their gross material bodies, and they endeavour to cross the borderland, a narrow river of ether (space) which is known as Vaitrani by the Hindus, Chinavat bridge by the Parsis and Sirat by the Muslims.

The weeping, loud mourning and uncontrolled grief of their relatives gives them pain and drags them down from the astral planes. This may seriously retard their progress to the heaven-world and cause serious injury to them. When they are sinking peacefully and are ready to have a glorious awakening in heaven, they are roused into vivid remembrance of the mundane life . . .

Relatives and friends therefore should do kirtan and prayers for the peace of the departed souls, only then can they really help and comfort them. If ten or twelve persons sit together and do kirtan and prayer, it will definitely be more powerful and effective. Collective prayer and kirtan exercise a tremendous influence on the journey of the departed souls.[8]

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[8] *op cit*., Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga, Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, pp. 46–47

Maintaining memory of the dead by ritual celebrations is an ancient, time-tested way of helping integrate death into life. Even people who have not thought of themselves as spiritual can undertake prayers and rituals to help the departed.

YES, BUT THAT'S COMPLETELY UP TO YOU PEOPLE: YOU KNOW I TREAT EVERYONE ABSOLUTELY EQUALLY – NO FAVOURITES, NO SPECIAL DEALS.

So even ordinary people can come forward and help in this way, can't they?

NATURALLY, AND AT ANY TIME RIGHT UP TO MOVING INTO THE NEXT WOMB – EVEN BEYOND THAT ACTUALLY, THOUGH THAT'S BEYOND MY JURISDICTION – BUT THE LINK HAS TO BE THERE, NATURAL AND STRONG.

The lokas – different planes of consciousness

Swami Satyananda explains about the lokas and their relationship to different states of consciousness.[9]

1. *Bhuh loka*: the earthly plane where consciousness is divided in three: waking, dreaming and sleeping. Here one learns through experience, makes mistakes, but has the opportunity to work to attain perfection. After death most people go to bhuvah or swah loka, and then due to karma return to bhuh loka. Some who have elevated their consciousness by spiritual practice go to maha loka. Some even higher. Swami Satyananda comments, "The first three lokas are very ordinary planes. Most people travel within these and then come back."
2. *Bhuvah loka*: also called the astral loka, it relates to the dream state which we all experience but mostly ignore or forget.
3. *Swah loka*: relates to the state of sleep.

[9] *op cit*., Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga, Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, pp. 54 ff

The first three lokas therefore relate to the three dimensions of consciousness which we also traverse while alive. Swami Satyananda explains that after death one still moves between these three states of consciousness – but without a body. Swah loka may also be called *chandra loka,* the lunar dimension, or *pitri loka,* the dimension of our ancestors, for our forefathers may live there for thousands of years. It is a phenomenal universe. The pitris are bound by karma but they have the bodies of gods. Swah loka is also sometimes called *swarga loka,* heaven. When the chitta is purified, it becomes luminous and bondage to one's mortal nature ends.

4. *Maha loka*: free of nearly all karma, from here one can return to the earthly plane (reincarnate) if one has the sankalpa to do so – but maybe once every few thousand years.
5. *Janah loka*: where rishis and munis live.
6. *Tapah loka*: where tapasvis live.
7. *Satya loka*: also called *Brahma loka* and *Parabrahman*, or *Hiranyagarbha*; corresponds to *nirvikalpa samadhi*, knowing 'I am Shiva, I am all'. The land of reality, free of all karma, free from rebirth.

The last four lokas are non-chitta. Swami Satyananda mentions, "A yogi must wait in maha loka, janah loka or tapah loka for at least a few thousand years. They don't worry about the time as it is a very relative factor." A person with sattwic qualities, such as a saint, a yogi, or a bhakta, will go to the four higher lokas which are more or less subtle in nature. They are free from empirical karma but have spiritual karma according to choice until they have exhausted their good karma. Then one has to return to bhuh loka for liberation in life, *jivanmukta* and final liberation from the body, *videhamukti*.

What do we know about the regions after death?

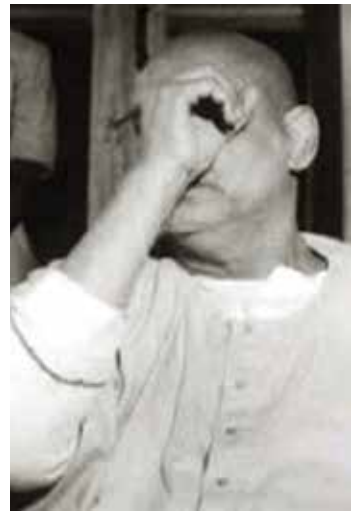
Speaking for the average person – not much. However, there are some who have returned with memories of after-death states. There must be some planning going on up there because the return of certain souls, for specific missions, is foretold. When the Dalai Lama goes, he leaves specific instructions about where and when he will return so he can be found again. Adi Guru Shankaracharya specifically speaks of liberated souls returning to fulfil a spiritual mission. In the *Srimad Bhagavat Purana* there is the verse (11.5.39–40):

> *Kvachitkavachinmahaaraj dravideshu cha bhoorishah*
> *Tamraparnee nadee yatra kritamaalaa payasvinee*
> *Kaaveree cha mahaapunyaa prateechee cha mahanadee*
> *Ye pibanti jalam taasaam manujaa manujeshwara*
> *Praayo bhaktaa bhagavati vasudeve'malaashayaah.*

Which prophesies, 'In Kali Yuga, in South India, near sacred rivers like Tamraparni, Kaveri, etc., will be born great devotees of Krishna.' Swami Sivananda was born in that area, and is generally recognized by his disciples in the Dashnami tradition to be referred to here. So, according to the scriptures and time-honoured traditions, we do have people who can speak with authority on the different lokas one encounters after death. We tend to think of these lokas geographically – as different planets, or 'places', but Swami Sivananda makes it clear that these lokas correspond to different planes of consciousness.

> If you keep different kinds of lights in a room such as kerosene oil light, mustard oil light, petromax, candle light, electric light; the various lights interpenetrate in the room. Even so, the lokas interpenetrate. Each plane has its own matter of an appropriate degree of destiny, which interpenetrates the matter of the plane next below it . . . When you pass from one plane to another you do not move in space. You simply change your consciousness. You change your focus of consciousness. You can have dif-

ferent sorts of vision through the telescope or microscope by using lenses of different degrees of potency or power. You have got different vehicles within yourself which correspond to different planes and which can function in different planes . . .



Heaven is a plane of enjoyment only. It is a place to reap the fruits of one's good karmas done in the earth-plane. One cannot do fresh karmas there. He cannot attain moksha or the final emancipation from there. He will have to come down to this earth again for trying for salvation.[10]

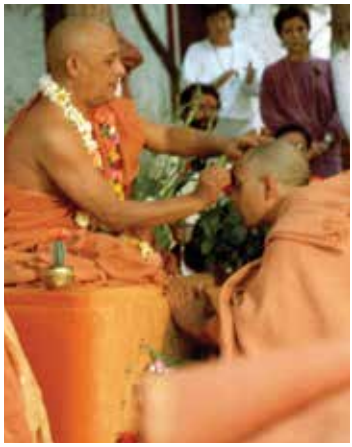
Until Satya loka we are all living and dying and living again, whirling on the endless cycle of the samsara chakra, no matter how long it takes. Living and dying are in fact inseparable states, the bridge between them is consciousness, to navigate them we need the guru – the inner light, who dispels darkness so we can see our own inner self.

The role of initiation in life and death

Swami Satyananda wrote this from his ashram in Munger to a close disciple, on 14th March 1961:

> After initiation, it becomes your sacred duty to live solely for this sacred cause. The significance of diksha is of considerable importance in the life of any sadhaka. When the jiva is first born on the human plane, it goes rapidly down the incline to a life full of worldly activities, even as water flows down an incline. So, when it leaves the

[10] Swami Sivananda, *What becomes of the soul after death?* The divine Life Society & Yoga Forest Academy Press, Rishikesh, India, 1946, pp. 71–72



higher regions and descends to the earthly planes of existence in various phases of life, it envelops itself with the coverings of ignorance. After experiencing happiness and misery in countless births, it now longs to retire from the world of the senses and is inspired to go along the spiritual path.

As I have indicated to you, the phases of man's birth are many. The first phase of birth takes place as soon as he emerges from his mother's womb. The second occurs when he acquires knowledge of the self, by hearing or learning about it from others. The next phase comes about when he takes instructions from a true guru and begins his sojourn towards full self-realization. The import of diksha is thus not trite. Realize this fact and intensify your sadhana. Human life is the only life where a man is given freedom of action. Therefore, do not waste time but start on your journey. Carry with you luggage in the form of the blessings and instructions of the guru.[11]

Swami Satyananda is not merely repeating conventional phrases here, or repeating stories about different lokas that he has heard about, he was not the sort of person who spoke of his own siddhis and accomplishments, or boasted of his esoteric knowledge. In these letters he was speaking to a person with considerable spiritual experience and psychic potential. Therefore he is referring to topics he would sidestep when speaking to an untrained audience.

[11] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Taming the Kundalini*, Bihar School of Yoga 1967, Yoga Publications Trust, 1982, Munger, Bihar, India, pp. 10–11

Karma and destiny

Some people die suddenly without warning. Alternatively, there may be premonitions of death even for one who dies through accident. Swami Satyananda recounted the story of a man who had been told by an astrologer that he would die on a certain day from snakebite. He decided to ensure he stayed in the city that day, so there was absolutely no chance of him coming across a snake. He was at an intersection, sitting on his motorbike, waiting for the lights to change, when an eagle flying overhead dropped a snake on him – and he died.

GOTCHA!

Exactly.

Apart from instances like those, people usually die more slowly, from illnesses or injuries, or from age. So one has time to prepare oneself, and can take notice of the reminders given as death approaches. We can also resolve to train ourselves to be aware as we pass through the gates of death. Swami Niranjanananda has given such guidance in the meditations which form the conclusion to this book – Part 5: Meditations under the guidance of Swami Niranjanananda. They help to purify, strengthen and stabilize our inner personality and our awareness of it. Our thoughts become lighter and more positive, and our awareness becomes subtler, allowing us to grasp otherwise imperceptible dimensions,

We are told of the great significance of the last thoughts and the actual moments after death in shaping the future destiny, but Swami Sivananda reminds us to keep things in perspective.

> You create your destiny, your character, your future through your thoughts and deeds. There is no end of your experiences here and hereafter. You will continue to live and come back and be born again on this earth.

> Try to attain perfection and reach that state where there is no more birth, no more death, and no more disease, sorrow, tribulation or suffering. Meditate on the eternal Atman, your innermost Self. Do not identify yourself with this perishable body, a combination of the five elements. Realize the Self and be free. Through knowledge of the Imperishable obtain perfect peace, eternal bliss, everlasting joy and immortality.[12]

But is it really righteousness if we're behaving well just to get to a better life after this life? If we don't have a lot of faith and don't know the way to overcome our own fears and cravings, is it enough just to make an effort to become more aware and respectful?

I think it's best to have no speculation. Just relax and go with the flow. If you're in the realm of karma, that's a strong current: no resistance possible. If you're in the whirlpool of desire, that's going to suck you right into its centre. As soon as you die you'll be pulled to the appropriate loka and next womb like iron to a magnet. And as soon as you take birth again, the senses and the conditioning create your experience. No worries.

On the other hand, if you've overcome your basic ignorance which keeps you attached to temporary pleasures instead of eternal goodness – lets face it – you're not going to want to go back to worldly life once you've left it.

What would there be for you in the mortal world? Unless of course you want to return out of compassion, or you're on some special mission. Like the sat gurus, they still keep coming and going writing guidelines, giving teachings.

Well, philosophically we know we're all going to die one day, but it just doesn't seem relevant till someone we love – or we ourselves – get the death sentence. Even then, many people feel that death is just a void and think 'science' has proved

[12] *op cit*., Swami Sivananda, *What becomes of the soul after death?* p. 77

that. The optimistic ones feel that at least implies an end to sufferings. But considering what both the ancient traditions, and those people who claim knowledge of after-death say, it seems we have no choice but to live and die in a continuing cycle. Life isn't easy, and neither is death, but we need to know how to improve our behaviour and attitudes so we can live and die well. Life then becomes a sadhana where we keep learning how to do better next time. So, rather than just stumbling along in the dark, we really should earnestly consult one who knows the way.

THE DISPELLER OF DARKNESS.

The Guru?

TASMAI GURUVAI NAMAH.

Improving ourselves to help others

We have to educate ourselves and build up our own faith before we can transmit that to others. How can we comfort somebody approaching death if we ourselves are frightened? Those people who have been recognized as avataras, partial avataras, and as reincarnations of an advanced soul teach, from the perspective of remembering many lives, that this present life is extremely important. The practice of yoga or any spiritual discipline gives increasing awareness of our true nature as the innermost consciousness, temporarily housed in a mortal body-mind. This results in an increase of self-control and restraint in the face of the distractions of the senses. It helps us to maintain balance during the tragedies and attractions of life and, eventually, elevates our own deep samskaras – the samskaras that sent us into this particular life and sill send us into the next phase.

Once we have control of ourselves to that extent, we can respond with viveka and vairagya, rather than just reacting according to our conditioning and the dictates of the *shat vairi*, our six inner enemies: anger, fear, arrogance, jealousy, lust and delusion, then we become free in this life. Rather

than reacting automatically according to the programming of the lower brain to ensure survival, we can become self-programming units. If we have a guru who can help keep us pointed in the right direction, we can even become self-deprogramming units and clear out all the samskaras that block our evolution and keep us bound to constant rebirth.

Which brings us back to that interesting question: What do we want? Do we want rebirth or *moksha*, freedom from the samsara chakra? Are we ready to drop the *ahamkara*, which limits our awareness of existence to a particular form, and makes rebirth necessary? Swami Sivananda says:

> Birth and death are two illusory scenes in the drama of this world: really no one is born, no one dies. No one comes, no one goes. It is Maya's jugglery; it is play of the mind; Brahman alone exists. There is birth for the body alone, five elements combine to form the body; the Atman is birthless and deathless. Death is casting off the physical sheath, it is like deep sleep, birth is like waking from sleep; be not afraid of death, O Ram! Life is continuous. The flower may fade but the fragrance floats. The body may disintegrate, but the immortal fragrance of the soul always will remain. Learn to discriminate the real from the unreal; Think always of the Infinite That is birthless and deathless. Transcend maya and moha. Go beyond the three gunas. Give up attachment for the body. Free yourself from birth and death and merge in the Immortal Essence.[13]

Meeting the guru, and then following the path of the guru, is itself an ongoing journey requiring discipline and faith, but it is essential in transforming the personality, the lifestyle, and eventually the whole consciousness and energy of the aspirant. It's not necessarily a person that we have to meet before we can embark on this part of the journey. It may be a deep connection with an enlightened being who is

[13] *ibid*., pp. 8 ff

not presently on the planet, like the Buddha, Jesus Christ the Saviour, or the prophet Mohammed. But they are no longer in a body so how to communicate? The guru may be a mountain or even a bee, if we are as enlightened as Ramana Maharshi or Dattatreya, and able to learn from them. But most of us aren't that bright. It's better if we can find a guru who is living now and is kind and compassionate enough to give relevant practices to help us purify our consciousness in this cycle of evolution, so that we can eventually achieve *moksha*, liberation.



Identify with the immortal Self

Myers collected evidence about dimensions of consciousness extending beyond death from psychics in the 1900s, and presented it as a new revelation to his western audience. Such knowledge has been recognized as the basic truth in the process of spiritual evolution, and has been experienced by seers and mystics throughout the ages.

Swami Satyananda gives instructions for developing one's identification of oneself as the witness. It is the witnessing self, the *drashta*, that remains when the body and mind drop. He gives guidance through meditative and samadhi states and also urges us to identify with that essential part of ourselves which survives death: the infinite sky-like nature, the soul, the *atman*.

> Divine spirits possess our bodies and at the same time they descend into the bodies of balanced, sensitive, dedicated souls as partial incarnations. They can come as incarnations or they possess bodies and express themselves through inspiration. When one is thus being inspired and continues his sadhana, they manifest themselves as expressions in art, or in some other way

their power descends into us . . . There is no doubt that these beings descend into our world but we have to go within, where we can maintain continuous contact with them.

Once again, I make it clear to you that you will have to maintain absolute consciousness and it will be my duty to take you from this finite world to the infinite world. And remember too, that it is your most sacred duty to be ready to move towards that region of absolute consciousness. And when you and I both work for this with perseverance, it is sure to come about. You have begun to turn away from the external life and are becoming introvert. When this introversion becomes fixed, then you have to go deeper still. Introversion should be steady and natural. I will definitely complete my task but you should also have such a faith. Assuming that I am not even aware of that path or your aim, I shall search it out. But I know the full way.[14]

Guru: the dispeller of darkness

That was Sri Swamiji speaking in 1961, shortly after he had invoked the spirit of the person we know of as Swami Niranjanananda to come and take birth and continue the mission of uplifting the consciousness of humankind. By giving access to the systematic techniques of yoga for those willing to make the effort to improve themselves, and arranging the presence of Swami Niranjanananda, who is ready to explain the system when we are qualified to understand it, Swami Satyananda became the bridge. He amply demonstrated how to live well and how to die well. He says:

At the time of death there are two types of people. One type becomes totally unconscious . . . According to the gravity and quality of karma, nature moves the seed from the old body and puts it into the mother's womb

[14] *op cit*., Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Taming the Kundalini*, letter from Munger, on June 30th, 1961: pp. 39–41

at the proper time. Here one has no choice and has to be born according to karma in the womb of a mother, whom one may like or not. There is a cosmic force that keeps the records of individual karma and the birth is decided according to these.

The second kind of soul maintains inner awareness at the time of death. These are the yogis and one should be like them. At the time of death, they leave the body with full awareness. They are not sorry; they do not lament or cry. They don't feel sad about the things they are leaving behind: mansion, cottage, horse, bullock cart, motorcycle, television. They just leave with total awareness. Since these people are aware, they can decide where to go. Nature does compel them to a certain extent, but they have control over the laws of nature also, since they are aware. They choose their parents, which family they will be born into and for what reason.[15]



The guru's role in life and death

A mother who is well prepared and understands what is happening and what is necessary – maybe instructed by a skilful midwife – can successfully give birth by herself without the fears and anaesthetics that can accompany birth. Similarly, a well prepared person can face death alone with hope and dignity, and break free. One who has a skilful midwife actually present can manage even in difficult circumstances – and the new baby will be properly looked after in the critical hours after birth. Similarly, people who

[15] *op cit*., Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga, Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, pp. 116–117

have evolved some understanding about death's role in our overall evolution can help us through the process of dying, and even aid in pointing us in the right direction for rebirth.

However, it is the guru who can really help us through death, help us cross the bridge, and continue travelling through the new dimensions of our consciousness. And especially, it is the guru who is indispensable for those who do not want rebirth, nor long life in heavenly realms – those who only want moksha. The yogic perspective on death is so interesting because, in the light of death we can see the true nature of the guru, the one who teaches about *sat*, reality.

The sat guru is not interested in our daily life, or their own daily life, other than as a means for evolution. The guru can see the karma of the disciple and can give guidance in the light of that thread of karma during this life, during the moments of death, during the after-life, and during the process of being reborn. The *Mundakopanishad* says (3:2:1–2):

> The wise, free from worldly desires, should worship such a man, a knower of Brahman, the supporter of the whole universe and the all-radiant, for then they will transcend the cycle of rebirth.
>
> Those who are full of desires and dwell on them continually are born here and there so that those desires might be satisfied. Those realized ones, however, abandon all desires, even in this life only.[16]

The guru comes with a mission that transcends life and death from a dimension beyond the whole life and death cycle. Determined disciples travel with the guru from life to life, even if they have to leave some heavenly loka, like the special souls who beamed down to accompany Sri Rama as monkeys. In heaven disciples can experience pleasures resulting from good karma for long periods of time – a sort

[16] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Nine Principal Upanishads*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2004 (1st ed 1975) p. 82

of relative immortality – but they cannot clear the sticky karma with pleasures. The best thing is to embrace goodness even though it means forgoing such enjoyments. It means accepting the discipline of the sat guru, and recognizing one's real nature, transcending the need for rebirth.

Mahasamadhi

Those who have evolved to a state where they are no longer bound by karma to return do not need the help of others in life or death. They are the givers. Rituals have their place even so, for the benefit of those they leave behind. At the Bihar School of Yoga, Swami Niranjanananda started the tradition of Guru Bhakti Yoga – on the 5th and 6th of every month, commemorating his guru's *mahasamadhi*, merger with Shiva consciousness. The satsangs given at these times often contemplate death as a part of spiritual sadhana.



We have concluded the Rudra Abhisheka which is the tradition of our ashrams. It is to be conducted on every 5th of the month, for on this day our guru, Sri Swami Satyananda, attained mahasamadhi. From the yogic perspective samadhi is not death. It is an awakening into a new dimension of consciousness.

There are two conditions: death and samadhi. People go through death and the body dies, the mind loses its awareness and there is no recollection, there is no memory. Where we go, what we do, where we are, nothing is known. The presence of consciousness in life and the absence of consciousness after life is known as death. Samadhi is the opposite. It is the presence of consciousness in life and the presence of consciousness after life, both, without the presence of the physical body. That is how samadhi is seen in yoga since ancient times, after all in both cases, whether it be death or samadhi, the soul departs the body.

According to the scriptures, when the soul departs it leaves behind the body and senses, and carries with it the higher mind and the memories. When the soul is reincarnated again it comes with the impressions of the last life, with the samskaras and karma of the past life, with the evolution of the past life. That is one understanding of death.

The other understanding of death is that through our own efforts and sadhana we can purify our gross mind and link this gross mind with the transcendental mind. This link is that of awareness, this bridge is of awareness, what is known in yoga as the *drashta bhava*, the ability to witness . . .

This is similar to the experience of samadhi at a bigger level, for the bridge which we make of awareness between the gross mind and the transcendental mind becomes the vehicle in which our spirit goes from this dimension to the higher dimension with total awareness and functionality. It is not confined to the body and the

senses, rather the soul becomes universal and the *shakti*, the energy, becomes universal.

There are many mythological stories in relation to Shiva which indicate what happens in transcendental awareness . . . Everything is described – the expression, behaviour, understanding, the realities of life. Nothing is just a story. Every story contains a hidden teaching indicating the nature of that *Shiva tattwa*, that element of Shiva in our lives.

That is the nature that yogis or spiritual aspirants try to attain, for once that nature is attained you are connected with the cosmic shakti. In the life of yogis we have seen this to be an event that invariably happens to those following the spiritual path with conviction, belief and faith. Their example is an inspiration for all spiritual aspirants: in our lives the possibility to create a bridge between the gross and the transcendental does exist.

We have to make that bridge, and for that one has to make the effort, for to make a bridge is not simple. If you want to make a bridge to cross a river you have to do a lot of piling for the pillars. You cannot separate the waters, wet the ground and then put the pillar in. You have to wait and work with the elements to make your pillars strong. Once the pillars are placed then the horizontal road is laid in bits and pieces, placed frame by frame from pillar to pillar to pillar.

This is the reality of life too. We don't know what this life contains, what samskaras and karmas are there, but if there is an awareness that, 'I have to make the bridge' then even in the deepest water, without having to separate the water and search for dry ground, we can pile and put our pillars and make the bridge. That is the effort and the sadhana of the spiritual aspirant . . .

To create the bridge between the gross and the transcendental there has to be a deeper understanding of the aim of life and the idiosyncrasies of the life in which

we live. There has to be a deeper understanding of how we can deal with those limitations and idiosyncrasies with clarity, conviction and a clear direction to put the pillars, lay the road, and have a bridge between the gross and the transcendental.

In the life of my guru, Sri Swami Satyananda, I see this continuous effort to make the bridge. And he was successful. He did not leave his body in hospital, or surrounded by his disciples with tubes coming out of his body like everyone else. He left his body in meditation, with the chanting of the mantra, consciously invoking death, raising his pranas, and just leaving the body – just as you would leave a room and close the door.

He left his body in a meditative state. Would you call that method of leaving the body death? We call it the attainment of samadhi or Shiva consciousness. It is to this moment that we dedicate our aradhana of Rudra Abhisheka, as a reminder that a bridge has to be built between the gross and the transcendental. It is not an impossible feat. It can be done provided we are committed, serious and sincere.[17]

The ritual abhishekas on the 5th and 6th of every month commemorating Sri Swamiji's attainment of mahasamadhi are held in style and are open to the general public. A far more private ritual is the keeping of Sri Swamiji's room as it was when he left Munger.

Swami Dharmashakti, Swami Niranjanananda's mother, and amongst the very first of Swami Satyananda's disciples, was always firm in the knowledge that the link between guru and disciple transcends life and death. Swami Satyananda had promised her that he would appear at the time of her death and personally guide her through the lokas. She was therefore able to calmly reassure people that she was not

17 Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, Satsang at Ganga Darshan, Munger, India, 5th January, 2015



going anywhere when they worried about her health prior to her death. She was also able to inform them when she knew she was about to leave her body – with an inner delight, that her beloved Gurudev was coming. She had accepted and prepared for her death, and left her body peacefully.

The next day, it was found that in Sri Swamiji's room, the bed was disturbed, the pillow indented, the coverlet thrown aside – as though someone had been resting there and had suddenly got up. For true disciples, the sat guru, is present throughout the journey from life to life. The relationship is of soul to soul.

For everyone – returning home

The gurus are teaching us how to become healthy, how to achieve mental peace, how to become human beings and live a full and good life. They are also reminding us that we are not confined to the body-mind. They therefore give techniques and inspiration to develop the subtler aspects of

ourselves: the vijnanamaya kosha, the anandamaya kosha, the *drashta*, the indweller. For those who have prepared themselves, death is an initiation into the wider scope of one's self and of the universe. And for those who have evolved sufficiently through the repeated cycles of living and dying, death is the raindrop plunging into the ocean. Swami Satyananda says:

> One has only come here as a visitor. One is a resident of a different world and that is where one has to return. This is not just believed, it is known. The seed of man does not belong to this earth; the seed of man belongs to a greater plane. From there, due to his karma, or his error, or for some other purpose, or due to God's will, he has somehow descended to this earthly plane where birth and death is the regular law of life.
>
> Life is an experiment, and Nature is performing it. She moulds, fashions, refashions, breaks and joins the jiva through various methods in various lives. Life, this world, is a school where one studies and learns so many lessons, provided one is keen and alert. There is nothing permanent here where one can rest, here one has to search for immortality – whereas immortality is one's inherent nature. One's soul is eternal and one should rest there.
>
> This world is not the real home of the *jivatma*, the individual soul. This world does not belong to anyone; it is an alien land and is not one's permanent abode. In this temporary world one has to work hard. Hard work purifies the soul, and the inner light begins to unfold itself. After completing one's visit in this foreign land, one has to return to one's original home. That home is the abode of God.[18]

[18] *op cit*., Swami Sivananda Saraswati & Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga, Karma Yoga Book 3: Samsara*, pp. 142–143

Part 5
Meditations
Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

16

Clearing the Impressions

Swami Niranjanananda has explained that civilizations rest on different foundations. Today's rests on technology and information – if technology suddenly breaks down, this civilization will end. Today we seek information through Google – whereas the vedic civilization used *swadhyaya*, self-enquiry, and was based on one's attitude, *bhavana*, and self-control, *sanyam*. Everything was dependent on having the right attitude, and the right attitude rested on *sat*, meaning truth or reality – or even existence. In one's lifestyle this translates into having *sat vichara*, right enquiry leading to right expression, *sat karma*, right action, and *sat vyavahara*, right behavior or conduct.

The thing is, technology doesn't help you once you're dead, but attitude is of paramount importance throughout the process of dying and also in the intermediary states preceding rebirth. Being able to maintain conscious awareness of previously unconscious states, and having sufficient sanyam to be able to direct that awareness towards the light and the more positive aspects of your conscious field is a great achievement in life. It is even more necessary when one is preparing to die.

The vedic culture based its teachings on life and death on the understanding that the universe has manifest and unmanifest aspects. This perspective was based on the experience of *rishis*, seers, who not only retained memories of

past lives – such people are referred to only as *jati smaranas* – but also understood how to voyage skillfully from life to life through the different dimensions of consciousness. Perhaps that is why the teachings on how to live and die are known as the *Sanatana dharma*, the everlasting dharma.

In that tradition, paramahamsa sannyasins perform sadhanas devoted to discriminating between reality and unreality. It is therefore very fortunate that Swami Niranjanananda, who has performed the vedic Panchagni sadhana for paramahamsas, which gives knowledge of the cycle of life and death, has given the following meditations for dying.

To explore, you can practise one meditation each day in sequence. Basically he has given four broad categories of meditations that we can work with. Each has a specific intention. To go deeper, they can be practised for three months each in the last year of one's life. And as we never really know when that year is, we can start straight away, and enjoy their healing and enlightening effects right now. After all, if the consciousness of humankind is uplifted we can work to heal the whole planet and all her children, but alongside this task we must heal ourselves.



Introduction to clearing the impressions

In Sanskrit there is the word *smriti*, which we can translate as 'memory', but actually it is subtler than that, maybe 'impressions' would be a better translation in this context. How do you release, let go of smritis, which are restrictive and blocking your evolution? And how do you create a new set of smritis?

In the vedic culture *Ram naam satya hai*, calling on the name of God, is the final smriti, implanted so deeply that it comes spontaneously to mind at the time of death. The final thought, the last thought of your life is so important because it becomes the seed cause of liberation or bondage – because that is what materializes. From that seed in the consciousness, liberation or your whole new life takes birth.

This means that what you remember, what is retained in the smriti, is very important throughout life, but especially so as we approach death. The meditation is presented first as a static practice, which gives a firm stance or perspective, and then as a dynamic attitude, which can guide the day's activities.

Here we begin peeling the onion, defusing early memories which formed deep unconscious impressions, and understanding how their consequences shaped our lives. To do this we use prana nigraha and pratipaksha bhavana, clearing *tamas*, darkness and inertia, from the ground of consciousness, ready for the seeds of *sattwa*, positivity, light and wisdom.

Prana nigraha and pratipaksha bhavana

In the pratyahara practices we are familiar with, such as yoga nidra and antar mouna, we mainly practise *indriya nigraha*, control of the senses. First we practise awareness of a particular sense, then disassociate from that sense. Eventually we investigate how to 'turn on' and 'turn off' that sense, remaining the witness throughout.

In these meditations to clear the impressions, you practise *prana nigraha*, control of the energy. You begin by practising

how to withdraw the energy from a memory. As you practise in *chidakasha*, the mental space, notice if a memory that has been stored for the last forty years is still full of energy, vivid and colourful in your mental screen. If so, to reduce the energy and binding power of it, remove the colour, let it fade into sepia tones or shades of grey, and like an old print, let it fade away. This can be followed with the awareness in *hridayakasha*, the heart space, where you relive the associated emotions, and then feel them balance out from a more mature perspective. First being aware of the quantity and quality of the energy bound up in that particular memory then, with the attitude of a witness, reducing the colouring of that memory, and freeing yourself from its grasp.

To start your practice, you can begin systematically, asking yourself what early impressions formed your choice of your path in life in regards to:

- Choice of education
- Wife/husband
- Profession
- Successes
- Fears
- Self-image and status in society
- Spiritual outlook.

You can spend several practice sessions on one point if necessary. During this process, key incidents or relationships or people may spring to mind spontaneously, or there may be some particular impression or memory that you decide you need to deal with. Investigate in order to understand their impact, but be sure to proceed with the practices of prana nigraha and *pratipaksha bhavana*, invoking the opposite attitude, clearing the hold those impressions have had on you.

In the first of the following practice sessions 'the beginning', where you adopt a steady comfortable position and become introverted, and 'the end', where you extrovert yourself back into the daily world, are included. From then on, the practice sessions just go to the heart of the matter – it is up to you to introvert and extrovert yourself as needed.

PRACTICE SESSIONS

1. Early memories

Lie down comfortably, or sit in your chosen meditation posture with the back and neck straight, eyes and mouth gently closed. Check your position and the coverings on your body so that you will be able to remain as comfortable and still as possible throughout the practice.

Let yourself relax. Begin listening to the sounds that you can hear, close by and far away, bringing in the attitude of a witness, not disturbed by any sound, moving from sound to sound.

Let the body relax, feeling into the sensations in different parts of the body, and relaxing the different parts as you move your awareness from part to part.

Become aware of the breath, breathe in deeply and then let go of tensions with the exhalation, using the breath to deepen the relaxation process.

If any mantra comes to mind as you draw closer to the breath, like your own guru mantra, or the natural *So Ham* of the breath, you can repeat that mantra mentally for some time, letting the mind relax further.

Take your mind back to the time of your youth and ask yourself what impressions formed your choice of your path in life.

If a specific incident comes into focus as you ruminate on why you chose a particular course of study, for example, a charismatic person you met as a child and modelled yourself on, or a particular situation that affected you deeply, allow yourself to observe that as a witness.

As though you are watching a movie, let events unfold in the mind's eye – and gradually allow that technicolor production to fade into muted tones or become like old black and white photos, as you withdraw the *prana*, the energy, from that deep impression, and simply view it and its consequences neutrally.

If memories do not come to mind, and you feel that you have lost your memory or are blocked in some way, don't worry. Remain open and watchful, remember the *drashta*, the inner witness is always there within us, whether we are aware of it or not.

Just watch whatever comes to mind, thought or feeling, or any other impression.

Sometimes there are just vague feelings, let them come and go, but notice when a memory that has been stored for years is still vivid and colourful, gripping your mind, energy and emotions.

If you wish to focus on that memory do so for some time, extending your awareness into it. Then remember your aim and begin to use prana nigraha to defuse it, removing the energy, the colour, let the memory fade into sepia tones or shades of grey, and like an old print, just fade away.

In the process of this prana pratyahara, or *prana nigraha*, first be aware of the quantity and quality of the energy bound up in that particular memory, and then release it, like allowing a bird to fly free from your hands.



After some time, be aware of yourself just witnessing. Drop your involvement. Be aware that you are freeing yourself from the compulsions set up by that smriti. Allow yourself to feel respect for your own experiences in life and their teachings, but let negative emotions or restrictive commitments drop away and feel yourself released and open to new possibilities.

Continue with this practice for some time.

When you are ready to externalize, once more become aware of sounds. Witness the sense of sound and the other senses connecting you to the external world.

Again become aware of the breath, feeling the renewal of energy with each inhalation and letting go with each exhalation. Become aware of the body, and the contact between the body and the floor.

Become aware of the present moment and the situation around you. the surroundings, the time and space.

Spend time externalizing yourself. Be aware that you have been clearing impressions in the mind, and feel now an inner clarity and peacefulness that you can retain as you continue with the day.

When you are ready gently open your eyes.

2. Meditations on the shadripu, six inner enemies

Included in the category of clearing the smritti, is clearing the deep impressions, the *vrittis* which are like whirlpools in the psyche. The *shadripu*, the six internal enemies are *lobha, matsarya, krodha, kama, mada,* and *moha*: greed, jealousy, anger, passion, arrogance and delusion.

In this sequence of meditations, we have to recognize these deep impressions as the source of negative traits hidden in ourselves, so that we can begin to release their hold. Unless we realize that we have fostered these qualities as 'friends' within us we can't disconnect from them. In this process, we will also find a way to manage the four instincts, *maithuna,* the sexual instinct, *bhaya,* the fear instinct, *ahara*, the instinct to satisfy ourselves, and *nidra*, the urge to sleep.

For each of the six enemies, we first strive to see how it has manifested in our lives, rather than denying its existence in ourselves. Then we reduce the prana associated with that particular enemy by practising prana nigraha with the attitude of a witness. Only then can we fruitfully begin *pratipaksha bhavana*, bringing to mind and living the opposite quality from our selfish, self-survival-and-promotion-instincts; otherwise our tamasic and rajasic qualities or

samskaras make the shadripu look like our friends. And it takes time to undo negative habits and their neuronal networks and upgrade ourselves through pratipaksha bhavana.

For example, in the next meditation, on overcoming greed, we need to be able to acknowledge our own greediness. *Lobha*, greed, is not just wanting more, but being obsessed with getting more. External things may trigger lobha but the source is an inner glitch, a vritti which is like a whirlpool, sucking everything in.

Be aware of the triggers that make you so greedy for more that you ignore propriety and are prepared to do the wrong thing. If a specific trigger comes into focus, allow yourself to observe that trigger as a witness, but realize that the trigger is not the problem – it is the whirlpool of neediness behind it which needs to be addressed by creating awareness of its opposite – contentment or generosity.

- If greed for food comes to mind, meditate on that. Allow associated impressions, visions, thoughts and feelings to arise. Recognize them and let them go.
- Was it greed for praise and affection? Meditate on that.
- Was it money and power?
- Was it success and recognition?

Other areas may open up for your inspection. Look at them, and when you really decide you want to drop that obsession, use prana nigraha. As a witness, begin work to change the samskara, such effort can even change the *swabhava*, the inner nature. Focusing on the positive quality which you summon through pratipaksha bhavana, such as generosity, you can then move into the second stage of prana nigraha, infusing energy into that positive quality. Place it in your heart and nurture it with your resolve, increasing the sattwic energy in our relationships and attitudes – letting ourselves draw closer to the light.

No matter how long you keep the curly tail of a dog straight in a pipe, when you release it, the curl will return. No matter how long you live in an ashram, or practise self-control in the world, deep negative samskaras can remain

if they are not recognized, defused and rewired. They do not disappear just by ignoring them or covering them, they have to be defused by prana nigraha, carefully removed and replaced with their positive counterparts through repeated practice in your life.

Only then we can move into peace.

i) Meditation for clearing greed

Get ready to begin.

Become aware of the breath, breathe in deeply and then let go of tensions with the exhalation, using the breath to deepen the relaxation process.

Be aware of how you are feeling, and awaken the attitude of a seeker after truth, one who craves to know the truth about a situation, and about one's self, even if the insights may not be pleasant.

Lobha, greed, can take many forms. Greed is not just restricted to food, but if greed for food is predominant, or something you have realized you need to clear, begin by meditating on that.

Be aware of the senses involved. Be aware of the mental state. Be aware of how you were feeling as you indulged your greed. Why does one particular food or food in general trigger that response? What is it in yourself that feels it needs the food so badly? Does it relate to some childhood memory? Is it just a delight in the senses – the tongue? Is it that you feel empty and need to pack yourself? Distance yourself from the compulsion of greed by witnessing it and practising prana nigraha.

One can be greedy for attention. Remember the last time you shamelessly pushed others aside to demand attention or respect or rewards of some kind. Children do this innocently with their mothers, but recognize how you have done this as an adult also: manipulated situations, or claimed credit for other people's work and efforts so that you could procure someone's attention or respect.

Remember the feeling along with the energy, remember how you were breathing, what you were thinking, what you were saying and doing to get more of what you wanted. Admit it to yourself. And by so doing, distance yourself a little from that compulsion: be the witness.

Be aware of what it is that makes you so greedy for more that you ignore propriety and are prepared to do the wrong thing. If a specific trigger comes into focus, allow yourself to observe that trigger as a witness and also recognize the inner whirlpool of neediness.

As though you are watching a movie, watch the process of greed in your life. Take your mind back to the last time you were not just greedy, but overcome by lobha and focus on the intensity of lobha and the intrinsic quality of lobha, and begin to search for the opposite quality.

Let events unfold in the mind's eye – and, when you have had enough, gradually allow that technicolor production to fade into muted tones, and black and white images as you withdraw the *prana*, the energy, from the clutches of greed. View your own greed and its consequences on yourself and others neutrally.

Feel yourself freed from the compulsions set up by greed.





Let the emotions of needing more and demanding more, and even of guilt or remorse at your own greediness, drop away and feel yourself released from the bondage to greed, and open to new possibilities.
As the energies bound by that old obsession are released, search your heart for the pratipaksha bhavana, the opposite emotion and samksara that can be planted in the new clear space.
Visualize yourself in one of the situations you have reviewed, seeing yourself as you are now – no longer so needy, no longer obsessed. See yourself able to respond more freely and openly, able to give rather than needing to take.
Allow nothing to hold you back now.
Become aware of the delights of giving. Let your energy flow into that new space, being aware of your own potential to be loving and creative. Let a resolve that comes naturally to you now take root – a sattwic resolve that will lead to understanding and expansion and lightness throughoutlife and even at the hour of your physical death. Even in this life it is like a new birth, a new beginning that you can express in thought, word and deed.

Externalize the senses yet remain aware of yourself as the inner witness now freed from the bonds of lobha, greed. Feel yourself content, satisfied, and ready to start giving.

ii) Meditation for clearing jealousy or envy

Let yourself relax.

Be aware of how you are feeling, and awaken the attitude of a seeker after truth, you want to know the truth about yourself, and are not distracted by comparisons with others.

Take your mind back to the last time you felt jealous, not just competitive or envious, but overcome by jealousy, *matsarya*. Remember the circumstances that provoked it, but then, rather than using the circumstances to justify the jealousy, focus on the quality of that emotion of jealousy.

Remember thoughts and even decisions that were triggered at that time. As a witness, see clearly how your view of a person or situation was soured by matsarya, and the repercussions on yourself, and others involved. Be aware of how your decisions and even path in life were influenced by the strong emotions roused by jealousy.

Be aware of the triggers for jealousy: there may be sexual jealousy and possessiveness, or envy of a person's popularity, prestige or possessions. Jealousy can take many forms, notice if the emotion of jealousy that you have experienced is restricted to one type of cause, situation or person, or whether it reoccurs in different scenarios.

Remember the sensations you experience related to jealousy, physically, mentally, emotionally. During times of extreme jealousy, how was your energy, your sleep pattern? Remember the thoughts and which emotions kept recurring. What were you thinking, what were you saying and doing repetitively as a result of that jealousy? Dwell on the results of jealousy on your life.

Allow yourself to observe it all as a witness. Note accompanying emotions such as anger, despair, wanting to bring others down – and let them fall away one by one as you review them, really see them, and let them go.

As you reflect on different types of jealousy you may have experienced, select one that you really wish to be freed of

now. Begin to practise prana nigraha, being aware of all the energy invested in that emotion, and reducing it. As though you are watching a movie, let events unfold in the mind's eye – and gradually allow that technicolor production or the stark black and white images to fade into muted tones as you withdraw the prana, the energy, from the clutches of jealousy.

Go to the source. As you view your own jealousy and its consequences on yourself and others neutrally, be aware of what emotions or needs propelled you towards jealousy and feel yourself distanced from them.

As a witness, consider what alternative emotions or actions you could have in such a situation and realize you were sucked into the *vritti*, the whirlpool, of matsarya, an inner enemy that enslaves your energy to past events.

Beginning pratipaksh bhavana, drop feelings of guilt or remorse or self-justification about your own jealousy. Look at yourself and be committed to standing on your own two feet. Be aware you are not a victim of others but have your own karma to live through. Feel whole in yourself, feel released from the constrictions of jealousy, and open to new possibilities.

Visualize yourself wishing well to those you were jealous of. Realize, 'Nothing is mine – even this body and mind are given to me for this life only. Let me be freed of attachment, possessiveness and animosity to others. Let me be free. Let me be content with what comes naturally to me, and with who I am, and let me learn to improve myself, to grow stronger and lighter in myself.'

Repeat this process as necessary with different people or situations – seeing past the trigger and distancing yourself from the inner compulsion of matsarya, replacing it with sattwic energy through visualization and resolves that you can implement in your attitudes and life.

Spend time externalizing yourself.

Become aware of the present moment and the situation

around you and be ready to face life without judgements, freed from the weakening power of matsarya, and able to respond positively and confidently in all circumstances.

iii) Meditation for clearing anger

Let yourself relax. Become aware of the breath, breathe in deeply and then let go of tensions with the exhalation, using the breath to deepen the relaxation process.

Be aware of how you are feeling, and awaken the attitude of a seeker after truth, you are ready to accept the truth about yourself, and ready to change.

If you want to understand why a particular person or situation triggers great anger, as though you are watching a movie, let events unfold in the mind's eye and analyze what it is that makes you so angry, as a witness of yourself. If a specific trigger comes into focus, allow yourself to observe that trigger as a witness. Was it the tone of voice? Was it the injustice? Was it the onlookers? Was it the insult?

Take your mind back to the last time you were not just angry, but overcome by anger. Let yourself relive the circumstances that provoked it, but then, rather than using the circumstances to justify the anger, focus on the actual intensity of that anger exploding inside yourself.

Recognize the intrinsic quality of *krodha*, anger, as you have felt it in yourself. Remember the feeling and the energy, remember how you were breathing, what you were saying and thinking – and gradually allow that technicolor production to fade into muted tones. Remain the witness as you withdraw the prana, the energy, from the deep whirlpool of anger and view it and its consequences neutrally.

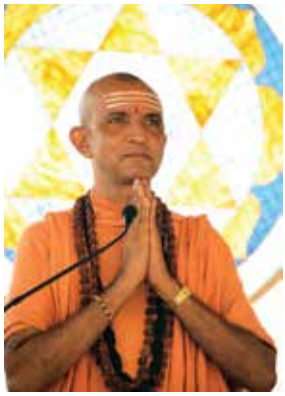
Realize the triggers are external, but krodha is an internal cyclone of destructive energy inside yourself. Realizing clearly that krodha is your own inner enemy, and causes you pain and suffering, helps to free you from the compulsions set up by anger. Let the emotions of rage, guilt, remorse or self-justification at your own reactions,

drop away and feel yourself released from the bondage to anger, and open to new possibilities.

Visualize yourself facing that irritating or enraging person or situation again, but as you are now – able to stand back and witness, wary and aware of krodha as an explosive force in your own consciousness. Be resolute in your resolve to change positively. Breathe in and out deeply, freeing yourself from feelings of helplessness or rage or hatred. Bring forward your own discrimination.

Sometimes anger is sattwic – righteous anger in a just cause, but mostly it is tamasic and rajasic, so at the time of anger it is difficult to focus on the *pratipaksha bhavana*, the opposite positive emotion, such as patience, humility, or forgiveness and understanding. Reflect for some time on what positive direction can be given to all the energy trapped in the anger and visualize yourself acting it out, and moving toward a feeling of deep inner peace.

Feel inside yourself whether you are committed to that change – and if so, use the tools of prana nigraha and pratipaksha bhavana. Drop the anger and feel all that energy and emotion waiting to be redirected. Resolve to keep practising however long it takes. Don't despair when you lose your temper, practise patience and humility.



Visualize yourself acting out the new direction in your life practically. Symbolically you can see the light spreading from within, feeling the peacefulness and understanding spread each time you slowly breathe out.

Externalize yourself in the usual manner, being aware of the senses, breath, body, yet remain aware of yourself as the inner witness now freed from the bonds of anger, ready to learn more and move on, and say to yourself mentally, *Aum*.

iv) Meditation for clearing passion, desire or lust

Kama, can mean desire, intense desire or passion. According to our natures, different types of kama become predominant. It is often translated as lust which most often suggests obsession with sexual cravings. According to our nature and the situation, kama may associate with lobha, greed; when frustrated kama may call on krodha and matsarya to justify its excesses.

Kama is not bad in itself but it indicates that we are pretty much obsessed by that thing: our energies, thoughts, emotions, self-concept, aspirations, etc. are caught by whatever we lust for – and so we are caught on the wheel of attachment. Because of the vritti of kama, strong desire, we return again and again to the same scenario in this life, and even life after life, until we can clear that obsession from the depths of our personality.

Let yourself relax.

Be aware of how you are feeling, and awaken the attitude of a seeker after truth – you are ready to see yourself clearly, and crave to know the truth about yourself and what you really want.

Take your mind back to a time you felt sexual lust, not just sensory attraction but a time you were overcome by lust. Remember the circumstances that provoked it, but then, rather than using the circumstances to justify lust, or enjoying or condemning lust, focus on the overpowering quality of lust, in yourself, or in others.

Remember the compelling quality of lust – when thoughts and even decisions, resolutions, rules and traditions were completely ignored. As a witness, see clearly how your view of a person or situation was circumscribed at that time, and the repercussions on yourself, and others involved.

Dwell on the results of obsessive desire on your life.

Kama can take many forms. Notice if you have little experience of sexual lust, but can recognize in yourself a

lust for power, or a continual and obsessive attraction for the pleasures of life in any form.

The whirlpool of kama, excessive or obsessive desire, has different triggers. When you realize yet another type of passion coming into view from your impressions, don't reject it. Seeing your own weaknesses and passions is a positive achievement; what you can see you can deal with. Unseen and unacknowledged weaknesses and passions are the ones which bring us down: witness everything. See the same whirlpool of kama inside yourself acting through various triggers.

Begin to practise prana nigraha: stand back a little mentally and disassociate yourself from the urge of kama. Allow yourself to observe your obsessions and, rather than identifying with them, look at them curiously, as an unaffected witness. Then, gradually withdraw the *prana*, the energy, from the picture. View your own passion and its consequences on yourself and others neutrally.

Feel yourself freed from the compulsion of needing to satiate that passion, and also from guilt called up by your excesses or lack of control. Let desires drop away as accretions of needs and conditioning separate from your real nature.

Begin pratipaksha bhavana, remember the feeling of inner poise and fulfillment when you are serene and self-controlled.

Feel yourself draw free from the whirlpool of kama which has bound you to desires and passions. Be aware of yourself as the clear-seeing witness, able to practise *sanyam*, self-restraint. Experience wholeness and contentment within.

Become aware of the present moment and the situation around you. Externalize the senses yet remain aware of yourself as the inner witness free from the bonds of desires and passions, and able to rest in a feeling of completeness and wholeness.

iv) Meditation for clearing arrogance

Let yourself relax

Be aware of how you are feeling, and awaken the attitude of a seeker after truth, one who realizes there is a lot to learn.

You don't know all the answers, or even all the questions, and need to embark on a voyage of self-discovery.

Take your mind back to the last time you were accused of being arrogant, or you accused someone else of being arrogant. Experience it vividly.

Whether you now feel the accusation was correct or not, bow your head mentally and realize that you can learn from that situation.

Be aware of how many times one assumes oneself to be correct, assumes one's own needs should be acknowledged.

Scrutinize the litany of the effects of arrogance.

Remember how anger bubbles up when your own importance is dismissed, or when people fail to respect your aim in life, purity of intentions, or integrity. Look at the other person again and see the interaction again from their viewpoint.

Begin practising prana nigraha by first reliving circumstances that revealed to you your arrogance at some point in the past, or when you suffered from someone else's arrogance. Be aware of the physical, emotional and mental experiences you were going through: your posture – did that reflect arrogance? The tone of voice or your words – did they reflect arrogance? Your energy field – was that self-arrogating?

See vividly how much *prana*, energy, was invested in arrogance. Then step back and become the witness. Practise prana nigraha and withdraw your identification from that situation, along with the energy invested there. And rather than congratulating yourself on seeing *mada*, arrogance, in yourself at that point of time, be aware of it, as a consistent factor that shapes day after day of your life with the attitude 'I am the doer. Look, this also can be done by me!'

Remember that whenever you claim the fruit of the action, you receive the fruit, and from the fruit comes the new seed, and you are bound, life after life.
Continue to practise prana nigraha, withdrawing your energy from the attachment to 'me' and 'I' and 'mine' and 'I do'.
See arrogance as a quality which limits your own viewpoints, and your understanding of other viewpoints. Begin to practise *pratipaksha bhavana*, summoning the opposite quality with which you can manage arrogance, such as respect and humility.
Remember the feeling of waking up from a dream, and let go of feelings of superiority connected with outer roles and identifications. Be aware, 'I am not this body, I am not this mind, I am not the doer'. Feel the body and personality as part of the external world and view it and its doings neutrally.
Feel yourself freed from the compulsions of *mada*, arrogance, and its delusion of separateness from others. Let the drama of external life drop away and feel yourself released from its bondage, and open to new possibilities. Be aware of a feeling of inner union as your practice of pratipaksha bhavana deepens and you connect more deeply with the inner spirit, the *atma*, within everyone. Visualize yourself performing some necessary duty or service humbly. Resolve to perform necessary duties that remain, without your old ambition and arrogance.

Become aware of the present moment and the situation around you. Externalize yet remain aware of yourself as the inner witness now freed from the bonds of arrogance and isolation. Be aware of, visualize or remember a small bright light. Repeat to yourself the mantra *Aum* three times, and feel the vibrations of *Aum* radiating like the light of a small bright flame.

vi) Meditation for clearing delusion

Let yourself relax.

Be aware of how you are feeling, and awaken the attitude of a seeker after truth – you crave to know the truth and are willing to admit mistakes, and want to be free from such delusions in future.

In stage one of this practice, take your mind back to a time when you realized that you had been completely mistaken, deluded. It may have been sensory delusion, where you heard wrongly for example, and a series of events cascaded from that.

It may have been gross, like a drunken or chemical delusion. It may have been a subtler form of delusion, about motivation, for example – your own or someone else's motivation.

It may have been delusion where you wrongly evaluated someone's personality, or the importance of a situation.

We all have breakthroughs: moments of sudden understanding. If a specific incident comes into focus, allow yourself to observe that incident as a witness. It may have been perceptual: a rope you perceived as a snake, or a failure of discrimination: believing in unfounded gossip. As though you are watching a movie, let the events unfold in the mind's eye – of how you were deluded and how you resolved that.

Be aware that everyone projects experiences and prejudices and takes them for reality. Be aware of yourself as the witness of the external world.

Gradually allow that technicolor production to fade into muted tones, and black and white images as you withdraw the *prana*, the energy, from the attachment to the external world and view it neutrally.

Begin practising pratipaksha bhavana – bring the quality of *viveka*, discrimination, to mind. Visualize yourself employing this quality. Ponder on this, and resolve to

practise right thinking, right speaking and right action in this life itself.

When this happens naturally, you will progress to stage two of this practice. Let yourself relive the circumstances that revealed to you the extent of your delusion, but then, rather than focusing on those circumstances, or congratulating yourself on seeing through the delusion, be aware of delusion itself, and how *moha*, delusion, can shape day after day and this can continue life after life.

Realize you were not just deluded about incidents in your life, but about the purpose of life itself.

Acknowledge that sometimes, the superficial conditionings of how you should live in society, according to its norms, completely drown your understanding of your aim in life and your own deeper nature.

Remember the feeling of waking up from a dream, and realize that this life is like a longer dream, where you can learn to remain aware of, and act upon, inner values rather that outer roles and identifications.

How do you know what is a dream and what is reality? What is the pratipaksha bhavana, the opposite of delusion regarding the purpose of life? It may be *paraviveka*, supreme discrimination, where you are constantly attracted to Truth.

Feel yourself freed from the compulsions of *moha*, delusion. Let the drama of external life drop away and feel yourself released from its bondage, and open to new possibilities.

Become aware of the external world yet remain aware of yourself as the inner witness now freed from the darkness of delusion and ready to move on. *Aum*.

Lifestyle

Practising these meditation techniques to look inside and actively spend time clearing the past impressions is a big step. The meditations on the inner enemies of a human being deepen this process.

Throughout the day or night, whenever you find yourself reacting to a situation or person or memory or preoccupation by rote, be aware of it. Exercise *sanyam*, self-restraint, and rather than reacting, respond to what is actually happening on a moment to moment basis without projecting your own impressions, preconceived notions. Be aware of the impression, habitual response or instinct that just kicked in. Drop that limitation.

Become the active drashta – the witness who walks in the world, not just sits in meditation.

Try to look at the situation with the eyes of a child, unconditioned by past experience, even though that may make you more vulnerable. And call on *satyam*, your understanding of the real truth and meaning in life. Form the basis of your response to any situation in the external world on your own positive resolves.

After practising this first sequence of meditations, for some time, about three months, progress to the meditations on overcoming fear.



17

Overcoming Fear

Swami Niranjanananda, in a satsang at Ganga Darshan, was asked how one can overcome fear.[1] He said it's a big question because fear is in everyone as part of their basic make-up. Fear, *bhaya*, is one of the four basic instincts, the others being *maithuna*, the sex instinct, *ahara*, the search for satisfaction, and *nidra*, sleep, the need to disconnect, internalize and recharge.

Also, there are many types of fear and there is a separate method for managing each one. "For example," he said, smiling, "if you are afraid of a piece of rope lying on the ground at night, mistaking it to be a snake, the remedy for that type of fear is always to carry a torch." Everyone laughed, but actually the answer is symbolic, and very relevant to the topic of this book. So many people go through great fear in the process of dying because they don't turn on the torchlight – the spiritual understanding of death.

As death approaches there are many fears that can swim up in the consciousness. There may be physical problems such as pain, or the body systems breaking down, we might fear losing health and vitality, self-control, emotional stability or any semblance of independence. There may be fears for the family, or the work that we have devoted our lives to.

[1] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, Audio recording of satsang in Ganga Darshan, Munger, Bihar, India, 19th May 2019, 7 am

There may be grave self-doubt, religious fears – on every level fears may come. These are to be observed.

Introduction to overcoming fear

There may be fears of punishment after death for our failings, or for a particular mistake that we have made. We may die feeling that we deserve to be punished. And that is not good: because as we think so we become. The opening meditations of this section are therefore concerned with forgiveness: forgive ourselves and others.

In the following meditations there are two distinct stages. First come the practice sessions, where you sit to learn the technique as a *drashta*, a witness of your own make-up. Then comes the stage of being an active drashta, where you adopt *sanyam*, balanced self-restraint, and consciously apply the insights in your daily interactions, in your lifestyle. In this way you are working to transform the ingoing samskaras that form your *swabhava*, inner nature. It is a high aim, but you can soon feel the difference, the unleashing of your own energy, creativity and happiness as you practise forgiveness of yourself and others.



1. Meditation on forgiving others

Let yourself relax: let your body relax, let yourself relax mentally and become aware of your thoughts, be aware of your feelings and your emotional state, be aware of your present mood. Be aware of what topics keep resurging in the mind. If there are whirlpools or strong currents of thoughts or feelings, observe them as a clear witness.

As you prepare to look at events or people you feel have hurt or wronged you, or others, become aware of the breath. Breathe in deeply and let go of tensions with the exhalation, using the breath to deepen the relaxation process and to help you let go.

Resolve to look into your life with the attitude of a witness, a benevolent witness, not wanting to judge or harm others but to heal wounds and let go of hurts you have been carrying for a long time.

Be aware of yourself wanting to improve your own life and being ready to drop resentments, fears and other blocks towards others. Know that you do not want to be bound by old wounds or scars or disillusionment.

Make a resolve like, "I will look into my life and, when I need to forgive others, I will forgive them, letting go of the hurts and condemnations I have been harboring, and freeing my energy for creativity and contentment." Repeat it to yourself three times, knowing that you are ready to take this step forwards.

You may have decided to work on a particular situation or relationship, but if an incident or a person comes spontaneously to mind now, recognize it. Know that you are the witness, the drashta, and that you have decided to clear the impressions that have been binding you. Notice if there is a tendency to push the situation or person away, or not look at it/him/her, and wilfully return your attention to what has presented itself for forgiveness.

At different times, different scenes surface: let yourself visualize the faces, the places, hear the tone of voice, smell the smells, feel the emotions. Remember your feelings and reactions to this person or that situation and how this affected your life. Trace how this has affected you in subtle ways, far beyond the initial trigger.
If you are forgiving a person, it helps to see that person face to face in your mind, being aware of what is driving them. See their external situation and their internal situation. Not projecting, just seeing.
Then begin to practise prana nigraha as necessary, being aware of and reducing raw energy and emotions, maintaining the attitude of a witness as the power of those events and influences fades.
Resolve that you are ready to be free of their influence now. Let it go. Let it go from the heart, and plant there the positive qualities you want to germinate in yourself instead of restrictive qualities planted at that time. Practise pratipaksha bhavana, summoning the qualities which are the allies of forgiveness – such as understanding, contentment and self-confidence.
Feel the quality of forgiveness as a strength in itself: it helps remove the hurt that the person or situation has caused you. When you say, even mentally, "I forgive you" it lets go of the hurt inside yourself and it is good for the heart.
Feel the hurt and other emotions being released and swirling away, leaving you washed and clean and new, free from boundaries and bondage. Be aware of any new feelings, thoughts, responses or selfless inspirations for action that spontaneously appear and resolve to go ahead.
Give yourself permission for random acts of kindness.
Don't let anything stop you now.

Externalize the senses yet remain aware of yourself as the inner witness, allowing your personality to be freed from

anger, revenge and hurt, able to forgive and move on to a new life.



Withdraw the consciousness back into everyday life.

Be aware of your body, the breath, the sounds around you.

See a *jyoti*, a steady light in the heart center.

Repeat to yourself the mantra *Aum* three times, and feel the vibrations of *Aum* radiating like the glow of a small bright flame of light.

2. Meditation on forgiving oneself

Let your whole self relax.

Become aware of your thoughts and feelings. Be aware of what topics keep resurging in the mind, be aware of your habitual attitude towards yourself.

If a particular person or situation comes to mind and sparks feelings of guilt, first let yourself witness that clearly.

Watch the coming and going of related thoughts, emotions and memories in the mind.

If there are whirlpools or strong currents of thoughts or feelings, observe them as a clear witness.

At the same time, be aware of the background attitude and emotional state.

Resolve to look into your life with the attitude of a benevolent witness, knowing that if you want to really be aware of yourself, you have to be able to accept yourself.

If a particular event keeps coming where you need to forgive yourself, let it come. Experience it vividly, and then with the practice of prana nigraha, let the force of that energy reduce and become manageable, no longer blocking or hijacking your inner peace.

Many situations come about in life, and many relationships. Dispense with any judgemental attitude towards yourself or others, as you investigate feelings of unease about yourself. If you feel comfortable in yourself experience that clearly, but if you realize you are holding unease, a sense of inadequacy, guilt or remorse, notice it and face that.

Continue to look into your life with the attitude of a witness and, when you need to forgive yourself, do so just as you have been forgiving others, letting go of the blame, self-doubt and self-criticism you have been harboring towards yourself.

Accept what you did, or didn't do, what you said, what you thought. But understand why.

If you realize you made a mistake, know you do not have to act that way again. Practise pratipaksha bhavana, identifying the inner strengths you need, the qualities that you now value and esteem and want to cultivate in your own psyche.

Know that disillusionment with yourself is a waste of time, and begin work to clear the load from your heart. To start reprogramming yourself, visualize yourself making reparations for any fault that you can admit to yourself now.

Visualize yourself in a similar situation again – but this time being able to behave better, to be better, to be stronger and less needy. Free your energy from self-doubt and self-criticism and reconnect with your inner creativity and contentment.

Knowing that you are ready to take this step forwards, decide what new samskaras you need to plant in your own psyche: kindness, self-restraint, enthusiasm, endurance, patience, gentleness, generosity. To begin with choose one quality and search for an oppurtunity to express it today itself.

Feel the inner self expand. Feel an opening and softening of the heart, let a feeling of magnanimity – even towards

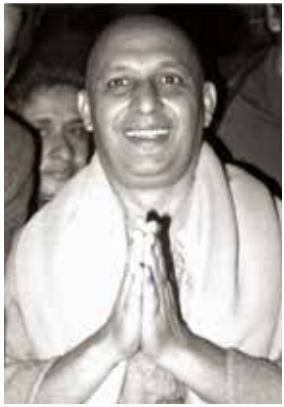
your own self – develop within, and prepare to express that also in your daily life.
Feel despair, guilt, remorse and other emotions being released and swirling away, leaving you washed clean, free from self-imposed boundaries and bondage.
Feel the quality of forgiveness and let go of the hurt inside yourself. Forgive yourself, just as you have forgiven others, and feel that essential oneness of the spirit becoming again the centre of your awareness.
Slowly, become ready to return from this internalized state of awareness.
Be aware that in *hridayakasha*, the heart space, there is a steady and eternal beautiful, small flame of light, the *akhanda jyoti*, representing your own inner spirit. Feel the breath moving inside the physical body and be aware of the body as the house of your spirit in this life.
Gently move your focus back into everyday life prepared to live your new understanding.

Externalize.

Lifestyle

The forgiveness meditations help release your own energy and sensitivity and enable you to be more at peace, more expressive, stronger and more sure in your own self. When you forgive someone, the other person may also benefit, and your relationship with them may improve, but you, definitely, are released from hurt and any feeling of grime that has been creased into the fiber of your being.

The intention is not to judge – whether you or someone else was wronged, or whether you see things differently now may be interesting, but that is not the point – the intention now is to forgive. You have realized that harboring these events with all their attachments has bound you for a long time, and now the question is how to really let that suffering and bondage go. Don't allow mistakes to bind you to samsara. Don't let anything hold you back.



Just as you might relax a limb or muscle of the body, just as you might drop a recurring worry and turn your mind to more cheerful thoughts, drop the blame and the hurt and feel forgiveness for yourself and others. Bring it to the point where you can greet the person or situation steadily, in your mind or in the external world, and pay them a respectful *namaskara*, greeting, with no pretense. This will help you see whether or not you still feel any hint of unease or fear within. Be alert and witness what comes up as you give the namaskara – if there is lingering enmity, hurt, or some longing for revenge, forgive yourself for that. Free yourself from the entrails of hurt and feel yourself clear and strong.

Sometimes the mind repeatedly revisits people or situations that you had not forgiven, or where you had not forgiven yourself. Sometimes you find the same pattern repeating in your external life again and again, Previously, you may have feared or avoided coming face to face with it all again, or longed for an opportunity for revenge; now look at it in the light of your own new fearlessness and peace, and let your understanding grow.

Just forgiving someone mentally gives you release, but if you have the chance, express it externally also. Working with head, heart and hands reprograms the mind, and develops real compassion, where you act to help others. This will manifest spontaneously in your new life, free from judgements, guilt, blame, and their restrictions.

Employing the strengths you have drawn from understanding difficult circumstances, you may find there is something you can do to express forgiveness, whether it is of others or yourself. Let your new self-acceptance permeate your awareness with a sense of contentment, inner peace and fearlessness, allow spontaneity and creativity in your expressions.

3. Meditation on fears that come and go

Fear is an instinct. It was programmed into us to help with survival on this planet. However, in modern times many of the ancients triggers of fear are extinct or far distant, like tigers or famine, and have been replaced by non-survival-essential fears, like being deprived of the power to instantly communicate through our smartphone. In this technology-based civilization, people are not able to be alone, they fear disconnection. Even on a short journey so many messages, phone calls and emails are made and received.

As we grow up, different fears come into play, so during the different stages of life, the *ashramas*, different fears are appropriate because they urge us to take appropriate measures: fear of the dark, fear of failing exams, fear of battle, fear of childbirth, fear of being redundant, fear of dying. At different times of our life we need to be able to overcome fear. We should learn when the fear is helpful and when it is not, and be able to drop the fear instinct and relax when necessary.

Let your whole self relax.

As you use the breath to help relax, let the breath lengthen, feel calmness coming in as you breathe in, and relax as you breathe out. Saying to yourself, "relax" with each exhalation and with each inhalation.

Resolve to look into your life with the attitude of a benevolent witness, and let yourself view the fears that come to mind as a witness.

At different times of our life we have faced different fears. Be the witness, and see what techniques and inner qualities helped you manage that fear. You may have taken practical steps, gone for counselling, talked with friends, compartmentalized your life, learned yogic breathing techniques and how to relax the stored tensions in different parts of the body-mind. You may have called on cheerfulness, serenity, stoicism, endurance or faith because pratipaksha bhavana is a natural process, and that is what we are focusing on now.

Remember the first time you can remember being afraid as a child – and how you dealt with that situation, and how you see it now. If it still comes as a bright visualization or experience, investigate the way you breathed, the feelings, the quality of fear. If necessary, defuse it using prana nigraha, withdrawing the energy from the fear. Then be aware of how you summoned a new attitude or perspective to manage the situation.

Repeat the process with fears faced by a teenager. One may fear not being attractive, not being connected, not being popular with a technological network of friends, fears for the planet. Repeat the process with fears you may have faced as a householder, fears for your family.

As one grows older there is fear of illness, fear of the future, fear of the unknown. It is time to notice that often we have been so dependent on the external networks of the world that no time was spent practising being alone and looking within.

Fears are normal, however, to cope with our fears, we have to allow ourselves to see them. Be aware that different fears come and go, but you, the witnessing conscious, remain.

When you are preparing for death, various things may come up such as fear of pain, fear of hospitals, fear of great expense, fear of leaving situations unresolved. Be the witness, not denying but observing your own fears.

Make a resolve to see what fears can be alleviated by investigation, or by simple actions. Look into your present situation and work out what practical steps you yourself can take.

Realize you can speak with people and give clear instructions about what you would like to happen. Hope for the best and plan for the worst – mentally make a Will & Testament, and resolve to make a legal one also. What would you like to leave for the people you love?

When travelling, we drop attachments to people and things that we love so we can journey on without mountains of luggage. Start preparations.

When a fear comes to mind, look at it clearly, use prana nigraha so that fear can no longer clutch at you, and then pratipaksha bhavana to summon a positive quality as your ally

Be aware of generosity of spirit and giving as a pratipaksha bhavana to fear. Visualize yourself giving something to each person you want to give to. Allow yourself to be compassionate, and see yourself and others becoming freer and lighter with each gift.

Whatever the external situation, reconnect with your inner contentment, courage and endurance of spirit. Break through into a new understanding.

Remember, there is always someone to help you. It may be you need someone to help with practical problems, but also, look within, and call for that one. It may be a someone you know, or a saint, a hero, or your guru, someone who faced their life with courage and compassion. They can help you internally.

Know that you are planting new samskaras in your own psyche: kindness, fearlessness, endurance, patience, tenderness and compassion.

Be aware of the steady, eternal, beautiful, flame of light, the *akhanda jyoti*, the inner spirit in yourself and others.

Slowly, become ready to return from this internalized state of awareness and move your focus back into everyday life, ready to live in the light of your new understandings.

Externalize.

Lifestyle

There is a game that one can play with children, particularly children who need to build up their self-confidence. The children stand in a circle. One begins. He or she pats her chest and says their name and adds "and I am BRAVE" and again she pats her chest, demonstrating her bravery. Then the next child does the same thing. Or they could add a description of themselves with any quality they want or need



to develop. “Brave like a lion!” This means that for the rest of the day – that’s what they are and they can live it!

This doesn’t need to be overly guided – children are often very perceptive about themselves and situations.

We can play the same game – and then go through the day with that quality firmly implanted – our friend and support for the day. This is a form of pratipaksha bhavana, we can play the role with our fears and other qualities that we want to clear out, or balance, and gradually come to terms with things our experiences in life have taught us. As we do this we will be able to relish the extra energy and clarity that comes as we think, act, speak and relate with our surroundings, until we realize that we are all the one atma and, rather than being fascinated by the waves, we turn our attention to the ocean.

4. Yoga nidra

In mythology, Lord Vishnu, who preserves and maintains the whole manifest universe, rests on a beautiful lotus flower in the middle of the ocean, in the deep relaxation of yoga nidra. The lotus flower symbolizes spiritual development, the ocean is the ocean of consciousness – *sat-chit-ananda*, truth, consciousness and bliss, or *satyam-shivam-sundaram*, the self-existing truth, cosmic consciousness and beauty.



In order to become more aware, one has to relax. The more deeply one is able to relax, the clearer, deeper and more extensive the awareness can become, illumining not only the surface consciousness, but also depths that were previously subconscious and unconscious. The practice of *yoga nidra*, the yogic sleep, can be practised in all its stages. Fear is a big word, but relaxation is an art that can overcome fear in small stages, allowing the body, mind and spirit to come to balance and find peace.

The practice of yoga nidra can be done daily, even more than once a day. If practising by yourself, keep it simple. Include initial relaxation, sankalpa, body rotation, opposites, and a few visualizations, then again sankalpa and externalize.

Recording by masters, such as Swami Satyananda or Swami Niranjanananda are especially helpful because they understand the whole process of maintaining the awareness at different levels of consciousness, and the deep relaxation coming from that understanding is transmitted by the voice, phrasing, timing etc. The same recording can be used again and again for years; repetition makes sankalpas go deeper. (Yoga nidra practices are available online in a range of languages, for various levels of experience, at satyamyogaprasad.net.)

Two types of sankalpas are recommended. First, the sankalpa to develop *pratipaksha bhavana*, the ability to always see the positive and creative aspect of any situation, this helps you to be confident and happy. When that has manifested, the next is to develop in yourself the ability to experience the inner *atma*, the inner self which witnesses the whole – the manifest and unmanifest universe.

5. Meditation on the fear of death, *abhinivesha*

In Sanskrit there is the word *abhinivesha*, which is often translated as 'fear of death'; actually it is subtler and more extensive than that, including fear in general, and particularly fear of the unknown.

In the traditional yogic understanding, there are five *kleshas*, causes of pain and suffering in life. They are: *avidya*, lack of real knowledge, *asmita*, identification with a separate 'I' identity, *raga*, attraction towards what pleases us, *dwesha*, aversion or avoidance of what we don't like, and *abhinivesha*, fear of death. These five are interlinked. Until we manage them, the experiences in our consciousness and our life are painful, and also we are caught on the wheel of karma and dipped into *samsara,* life in this manifest universe, again and again.

To manage these five causes of suffering and bondage, we begin with *abhinivesha,* fear of the unknown. On the physical, emotional level, fear, *bhaya*, is an overwhelming instinct, part of the programming in the more primitive parts of the brain designed to help keep us alive. On a psychic level, fear of dying is caused by not understanding what death is, and therefore wanting to avoid it and continue with the notion of oneself as a single separate entity.

When the fear of death comes, we should shake hands with it. Abhinivesha is a co-traveler on the path of life, accepting that is the first step in breaking free of the circle of karma which binds us to the whole circle of life and death in samsara.

In some cultures, when a person dies, a coin is placed on their closed eyelids to pay for their voyage to the next dimension. Birth and death are the two sides of this same coin.

Realize death is inevitable, and resolve to do it well. See abinivesha as a co-traveller who helped us to live, but whom we should farewell now. One way to manage this is to see death as the onset of a new journey. Just as we feel excitement as we let go of the old routines and get ready for a new journey, so we can see death as an opportunity to let go of the old restrictive fears and attachments, and prepare ourselves for travel.



Relax.

Be aware of the body and realize, 'I am not this body'. Be aware of yourself witnessing the body, and the difference between your witnessing self and the physical body which is made up of gross matter and is subject to suffering and change.

Extend your awareness into the senses and let your perceptions of the external world rove with the senses far beyond the body – the sense of hearing, the sense of sight. Realize even your sensory mental awareness extends far beyond the confines of the body.

Then, as you internalize further, begin practising pratyahara, turn the mind inward and be aware of faces and places that you can see clearly with your mental vision. Be aware of yourself as the witness of your internal perceptions and memories. Witness the *smriti*, the impressions embedded in or projected onto the clear screen of the consciousness.

Bring your awareness back to your present situation. Be aware of your possessions, and realize, 'I am not my possessions'. If necessary, bring some possessions to mind. See them clearly and your attachment to them but

realize, 'I am not my possessions – my home, my land, my books, my animals . . .' Include 'I am not my intellect, my fame, my talents, my faults, my personality . . .'

Be aware of your family, and realize, 'I am not my family and friends'. If necessary, bring persons to mind individually. See them clearly and your attachment to them but realize, 'I am not this body, I am not this mind. Even this dear one who has been travelling with me is not the body, is not the mind; the immortal atma is one and the same in all.

Be aware of a great pyramid in the desert and realize: Possessions, family and this particular body are all left in the sands of time.

After some time, you will become aware again of the mind, the senses, feelings and memories, and how they come and go like waves of the ocean. Notice also that the light of your awareness illumines them. Witness this for some time.

When you are ready, focus the light of your awareness on the ocean of consciousness. Realize yourself as the witness, not just of the waves but of the deep wide steady ocean from which all life arises.

See death as the beginning of a new voyage which goes past your present horizon.

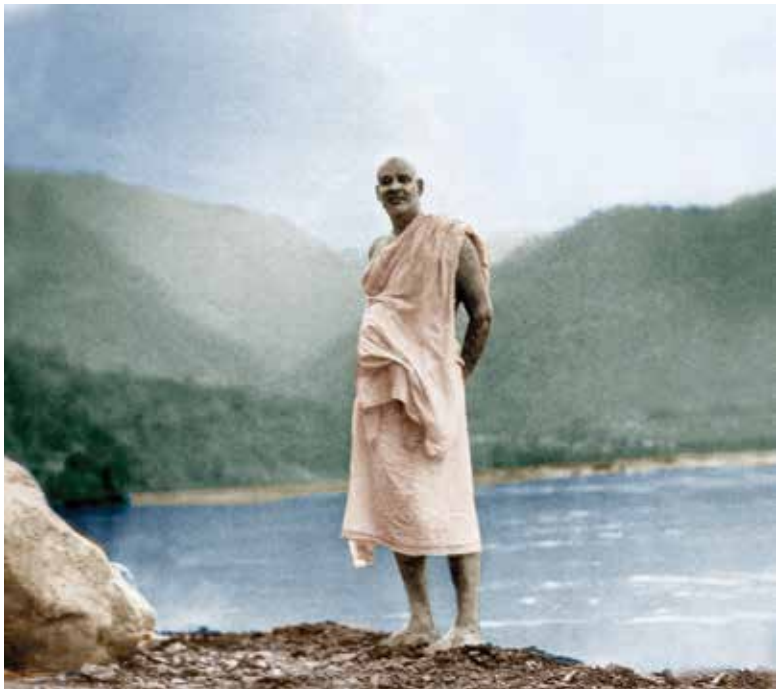
See how *raga* and *dwesha*, attachment and aversion, have been like two reins pulling you here and there in your life thus far. They are not needed for this new journey; death is an opportunity to let go of the old restrictive fears and attachments, and prepare yourself for travel. "Kill this little I, die to live, live the divine life."

See that *ahamkara*, ego, or *asmita*, identification of yourself with the present form of your body and mind, is a limited expression of who you are. The consciousness reaches much deeper than intelligence or emotion or the idea of yourself as a separate individual.

Just as you sleep and wake up from the dreams, know that this life is like a dream. Let that thought crystallize into a

realization: you are about to wake up from this dream of life, you are about to wake up to *sat*, to the eternal reality of goodness.
Move the awareness from the waves of the thoughts and feelings and experiences of this life. Realize that eventually you wake up from this long dream of life; you are about to wake up to *ritam*, to the eternal reality of existence.
Let the impressions become clear and transparent, like the azure blue waters of the ocean reflecting the space of the sky above and the light of the sun.
Become aware of the inner light within the ocean of consciousness and let yourself merge with that, focusing on yourself as the eternal witness.
Focus on the inner light.

Externalize.



Lifestyle

We can strengthen the process of self-transformation through *swadhyaya*, harvesting knowledge from the scriptures, and gleaning it from our own self-study. Then comes *sanyam*, restraint, balance and self-discipline, to overcome *raga* and *dwesha*, our attractions and attachments to pleasures, and our aversions and limiting prejudices. Then we begin to see that *aham-kara*, me-in-this-form, and *asmita*, where we experience ourselves as a separate existence, is a very limited expression of who we are.

Birth and death are the portals of this life as a human being in which we can strive to win *vidya*, the knowledge which is worth striving for. Realize death is inevitable, and resolve to do it well. Live seeing the Self in all, so that even when besieged by fear of the unknown, you can experience deep peacefulness and a sense of completeness.

Life is like a long dream. Let that thought crystallize into a realization: We are about to wake up from this dream of life, we are about to wake up to *sat*, to the reality of goodness and existence, and *ritam*, the cosmic reality supporting both manifest and unmanifest states.

We can live and die without fear of punishment. One name for death is *Yamaraj*, the king of the yamas. The *yamas* are the guidelines for life, the rules, interpreted by religions as the moral code that we must obey to avoid punishment. This is the aspect of death portrayed as carrying the *pash*, the noose attaching us to the consequences of action; or as the grim reaper, harvesting the seeds we have sown.



It is important to understand that we are ruled by karma – we are bound by our attachments and will reap what we have sown – but that karma is for evolution of the

spirit. Yamaraj is our friend. Living by the yamas, such as *ahimsa*, non-violence, *satyam*, truthfulness, *manahprasad*, happiness and *kshama*, forgiveness, is a great achievement, transforming life into a heaven.

IT'S TRUE.

Another name for death is *Dharmaraj*, the king of dharma. *Dharma* here does not mean religion but refers to naturalness, goodness on all levels, adhering to our inner nature which we symbolize in meditation as an inner light. This is the next stage in our evolution as human beings: moving from the struggle to find personal equilibrium to concern for cosmic equilibrium.

Whereas the yamas connect us with individual life and map out how to navigate that, dharma connects us with the inner nature shared by all beings, beyond the body and brain, senses and personality, chromosomes and karma. Dharma unplugs our connection with the mind and plugs us in to cosmic consciousness. The yamas connect us with *satyam*, the right way to live through sat vichara, sat karma and sat vyavahara. Dharma connects us with *ritam*, the cosmic dimension.



When we put the forgiveness meditations into practice in our external life, it clears the smriti of damaging impressions and fosters the growth of positive samskaras. It transforms life and prepares us for a voyage of inner transformation. A new consciousness, stamped with the right samskaras is like a new passport to a new country.

18

Letting Go of Attachments

In the next stage of the journey, we meditate on how to manage the 'twins': attraction and aversion: *raga* and *dwesha*. These are like the reins of a horse: they have steered us one way or another throughout life. They are connected with the instincts of *ahara* and *bhaya*: the urges for self-satisfaction and fear, and their cause is not always the outside factors that we think trigger them; often they are more to do with an internal 'story' we have about ourselves and who we are, which gives a limited sense of self.

These attractions and repulsions cut us off from our surroundings, from people and from opportunities to learn, they tend to limit and define who we are, in this life and the next. Once the limiting shell of *ahamkara*, the form we have taken for this life, is clearly seen for what it is – a means to evolve through our karma – we are not so interested in our likes and dislikes. We can begin to understand ourselves and the full circle of life and death. So after this set of meditations, the next involves *asmita*, our sense of self.

Introduction to letting go of attachments

As the time for death approaches, many of our attachments, the associations that bind us, will automatically become clear if we just watch what we are thinking or worrying about most. This is a necessary process that we can actively facilitate. Rather than being pulled into a painful whirlpool,

'What will happen to my wife, my son, my little girl, the beautiful place that I inherited from my grandfather and that I've cherished, that project I ploughed my life into and worked for through all that struggle . . .' we need to disconnect. To do this, first we must look carefully and discover or recognize the attachments within ourselves, only then can we really become unattached and unselfish. It's like removing a mental blindfold that we've been wearing a long time.

PRACTICE SESSIONS

1. Meditation for releasing attachments to external friends

Relax, and take time to adjust.

Be aware of yourself as the witnessing self, preparing to look steadily at the ones you love, without attachment.

Bring to mind the face of a close friend and be aware of the emotions that come up inside yourself.

Remember the things you would do together and the ideas and activities that you would share. Be aware of the situations and emotions that arose at that time.

Look at the same relationship again, now from the attitude of a witness. No judgement, just observation of your attachment to that friend and how it worked out in your life.

Be aware of how activities with your friend were sometimes following the currents of the instincts. Notice if the relationship was geared towards one of the main instincts: sensuality or sex, fear or thrills, the craving for enjoyment through food or power, the search for relaxation and release. Notice if the relationship was geared to creative expression, or achieving some altruistic activity or selfless service.

Let the face of another friend come to mind and repeat the process.

Be aware of how your life was shaped, enhanced and circumscribed by your friends.

Be aware of the shared assumptions, beliefs and values that your friends have reinforced in your life. Be aware if these attachments brought *satsang*, closer association with truth, into your life.

Consider whether the association with your friend kept you in the realm of instincts, external things and the external world, or whether it led to inner awareness, inner change and evolution. Know you were both involved in a learning process.

Resolve to honour your friend with the resolve not to lose the lesson you have learned from your friendship.

Consider your friendships and attachments in the light of *satyam*, and be aware that your duty to friends and yourself all change as death approaches.

Be aware of what gift you can give – it may be a smile, a thought, a memory or a permission. It may be a request, something they can do, or an object they can keep or deliver. It may simply be thanks for their friendship and love.



Resolve to nurture those dependent on you in the best possible way, by giving love without attachment or expectation.

Be aware of the difference between the ever-changing situations of the external world, and the steady flame of light within.

Let the mantra *Aum* emanate from the light, and feel it as your own true nature.

Again begin the externalizing process – be aware of the breath, the body, the external world and when you are ready, open the eyes.

2. Meditation for releasing attachments to external family

As you practise the meditation on friends, members of the family will probably come spontaneously to the foreground of the mind. If so, then one can move into the next meditation.

With people who are members of your family, the karmic bond is deeper. The relationship is not a new one. The feelings shared and aroused by members of the family are therefore much deeper, and may be harder to see and witness.

We are born into that family because we were attracted by the light of its particular quality. Our family is the keyhole that our samskaras fitted into – and this life opened up.

The basic meditation format is the same as for friends, but to some extent at least, we chose our friends in this life – whereas most of our family got chosen before we were born.

You may practise this meditation systematically – seeing again your mother, father, sister, brother, uncle, son, daughter, great-grandmother. Or one person may simply come forward in your mind, or you can choose someone to work with. There may be one family member you know you need to understand – either for your own sake, or for theirs.

Relax.

Be aware of the body and breath, and be aware of having been born into your own particular family.

Be aware of the body as it is now, and know it has developed from that same body you had as a baby.

Be aware of the mind – and know it has developed from that same mind you had as a baby.

Body and mind, soft and receptive at birth, have garnered so many experiences in life. And are still developing.

Know that this life was shaped the way it was because of the shared experiences, tendencies, genes, karmas, etc. between you and your family members. Know that whatever deep bonds and attachments you experienced with them, they also experienced with you.

Let one person simply come forward in your mind or heart.
Allow yourself to feel the love or the hate, the happy times and the deep regrets from your new standing point as the witness. See the formative power that particular family relationship had on your life, and see the way their association with you formed their life also.
Be aware of your attachment, the bond between you and your child/mother/father/sister/brother/relative/guardian. Remain the witness as you look at their face, feel their touch, smell their smell and hear their voice.
Sometimes we have loved or have been loved more by family than by anyone else. Acknowledge it. Sometimes we have used, or have been misused more by family members than by any other person in life. Witness that also.
Know the bond, the attachment in families runs deep past attraction or repulsion, raga and dwesha, it lasts when friendships might peter out. The family is there in the beginning and at the end, in the cells, in the samskaras.
Know how dear the ones you love in your family are to you, and how they have brought meaning and purpose to your own life just by their existence. Know how dear you are to those in your family who love you past anything.
Remember the sacrifices you made for your child and your parents made for you. Let yourself be aware of the expectations that you always had of your child and that your parents had of you. From birth you were nurtured and formed by family who were nurtured and formed also by you.
Be aware of the folly of expectations and attachments.
Bring to mind a lesson you have learned from your relative – the one related to you by the karmic bond which creates a family – and acknowledge how important it is to you to make things right with your karmic family.
This meditation can be repeated with another family member.

After some time – be aware also of the family as a whole. Be aware of which of the internal enemies and which of your internal allies were fostered most deeply in your family.

From your inner witnessing self, see how that shaped your life and how you have managed that, and have resolved to step forward from that. The harvest you sowed in the past has been reaped in your life, and you have planted, and are planting new seeds with *sat vichara*, right thinking and enquiry, *sat karma*, righteous actions and *sat vyavahara*, the correct lifestyle.

Know that whatever karmic bond, whatever destiny brought you into this life with your family has shaped your life, and be thankful for the lessons you have learned. Resolve not to lose the lessons you have learned from your birth into your family. Honour your family with that resolve.

Consider your family in the light of *satyam*, and be aware that your duties to family and yourself all change as death approaches.

Be aware of what external and what subtle gifts you can give, and resolve to give as you can. Resolve to nurture those dependent on you in the best possible way, by giving love without attachment or expectation.

As death approaches, be compassionate towards the grief and fear some members of the family will feel, but do not identify with that. Be aware of the inner light. Expressing your true inner nature as light is the best gift you can give now.

Be aware of all the surface interactions as the waves of the ocean. Your life is a voyage across the sea of samsara and the ocean of consciousness. You were born as a result of karmic forces leading to manifestation: birth into a particular family in a particular place at a particular time. All throughout you are learning, paying off debts, *rin*, and probably incurring new ones.

Consider your life in this family of humanity in the light of *satyam*, truth, understanding how important the search for understanding and goodness in life is. And be aware of *ritam*, the cosmic reality which stretches beyond the horizon of manifestation.

When you are ready, begin the externalizing process – be aware of the breath, the body, the external world.
Maintain the awareness of the inner light and yourself as the drashta and take your time to externalize.

Lifestyle

This meditation practice can be used as a springboard as we dive back into the external world, and as we prepare ourselves to leave this life.

If a quantity of pure water has been darkened because black ink got spilled in it, how do we get the black stain out of the water? Put the stained water into a much bigger container and keep adding more fresh water until the stain is diluted and eventually disappears.

To overcome attachments, make people who are unknown to you, totally unknown, part of your new circle of



friends and family. Do good to them without any expectations, perhaps without them even knowing that you are acting as a benefactor. To overcome aversions, understand that we're all made from the same stuff.

To overcome the inner attachments to negative feelings and thoughts, see them for what they are. Remain the witness, be benevolent to yourself and others.

Make this practical. To the poor give opportunities as well as goods. To the lonely give something to live for, time and appreciation. Paramahamsaji, Swami Satyananda, taught that this is the best way to purify the disturbed waters of our own hearts and minds.

Many of our attachments are emotional, but some may be intellectual: rigid concepts and beliefs, some may be physical for example to one's own body. Also, not all attachments are to *raga*, to things that we like and are attracted to. We can be equally attached to *dwesha*, to things we dislike, things or people or situations that we assiduously seek to avoid. This means that we have to include the *shadripu*, the six internal enemies, which are so much a part of our nature that Swami Niranjanananda refers to them as our 'friends': *kama, krodha, lobha, mada, moha and matsarya*, passionate desire, anger, greed, arrogance, delusion and jealousy.

Sanyam, pratipaksha bhavana and swabhava

To manage these, we need to develop sanyam and pratipaksha bhavana. *Sanyam* is a combination of *sam*, 'total' plus *yam*, 'a state of mind that you can cultivate and hold'. Sanyam takes all the dimensions of a human being through a process of transformation. In pratyahara it starts with the control of the senses, it develops to being able to restrain and rechannel prana, emotions and mind from selfish to selfless expressions. Just as food nourishes the physical body, and pleasure refreshes the mind, sanyam plays the same role for the soul. Sanyam releases the energy of the spirit.

Sanyam means to hold a balanced attitude so that the instincts, obsessive desires, and the rest of the shadripu,



can no longer distract us. Sanyam in itself is a complete sadhana that can take lifetimes to perfect. However, sanyam prepares the ground of the consciousness so that we can plant the seeds of our own evolution.

A farmer may not be able to clear all the weeds and stones from a field before sowing the seeds for the next harvest, the fertilizer and irrigation systems may not be perfected. Still, one reaps what one sows, and having the right intention and resolve, and making a sincere effort to implement it, is a big step in itself.

Swabhava is a combination of *swa* 'one's own' plus *bhava* 'being' or 'nature'. Your swabhava dictates your last thoughts in this life and directs the course of the next phase of evolution. The seeds that we plant in our own consciousness, through learning the lessons of life, and in meditation through pratipaksha bhavana, form and change our swabhava.

Therefore, in this sequence of meditations, we really focus on sanyam and *pratipaksha bhavana*, bringing up the positive qualities in our psyche and implementing them in our expressions and actions. This restrains the selfishness that the mind and senses conditioned by the instincts would naturally gravitate towards if they remained dominated by instinctive reactions and the shadripu. It frees us from reactive behaviour, and realigns or retunes the consciousness. In this way we can reach the dimension of the spirit, expressing compassion and love, the language of the heart.

A review of where we are

In the first three months of this sequence we had begun to recognize the six inner enemies in ourselves, because we have to be able to see them to triumph over them.

Traditionally they are presented in the following order: kama krodha, lobha, moha, mada and matsarya. The first three are rajasic, and it is *kama*, passion or overwhelming desire that starts off birth, rebirth, and the thoughts and actions in between. The next three are tamasic qualities, like whirlpools in the consciousness that suck us down, away from the light.

In this book, we deal with the three connected with *bhaya*, fear, first, because you can really get frightened when you realize that you, or a person you love is going to die. *Lobha, matsarya* and *krodha*, always wanting more, jealousy and anger, all have a big component of fear. Then we move to the three connected with *ahara*, the effort for self-satisfaction, *kama, mada* and *moha*. We need to manage our fear so we can connect with the sattwic aspect of *ahara* as nourishing oneself and others. It is this positive aspect we can then express in our lives as *sat vichara, sat karma, sat vyavahara*, right enquiry, selfless action and good conduct. However, if you know you need to focus on one of these enemies do so – it is not necessary to follow a particular sequence.

A summary of what we practised is given here, but feel free to modify it according to your own experience.

1. Greed, *lobha* (relating to the instincts of satisfying oneself, *ahara*, and fear) – being aware of it in oneself, admitting it – practising awareness of oneself as the drashta, practising prana nigraha and then pratipaksha bhavana: summoning a sattwic counterpoint as your ally – for example, generosity and the practice of giving.
2. Jealousy, *matsarya* (relating to *bhaya* and *maithuna*, fear and sexual instinct) – being aware of it in oneself – being the drashta, practicing prana nigraha and then pratipaksha bhavana, for example, contentment.

3. Anger, *krodha* (bhaya/ahara) – being aware, being the drashta, prana nigrahha, pratipaksha bhavana, e.g. discrimination, forgiveness.
4. Desire/lust, *kama* (maithuna/ahara) – being aware, drashta, prana nigrahha and pratipaksha bhavana, e.g. serenity and self-restraint.
5. Arrogance, *mada* (ahara/*nidra*, sleep) – being aware, being the drashta, prana nigrahha and pratipaksha bhavana, e.g. non-doership, humility.
6. Delusion, *moha* (nidra/ahara) – being aware, being the drashta, practising pratipaksha bhavana and *sat vichara*, right enquiry, *sat karma*, good actions, *sat vyavahara*, the correct sort of lifestyle.



Keep going



We have seen that at various times in our life, we were attached to negative qualities, knowingly or unknowingly, and although it's hard, we have started work removing the deep-rooted weeds and hard stones from our psyche, heart and expressions through *swadhyaya*, self-study, and sanyam. Perfecting such practices takes a long time, but once we can practise restraint of our energy, emotion and conduct to some extent, we can beneficially begin transforming these tamasic expressions into sattwa through pratipaksha bhavana.

In the following meditation, to begin with, bring to mind just one of the qualities you have really decided to eradicate from your hard drive, then focus on the positive luminous quality which you would like to develop in its place.

A *jivanmukta*, one liberated from the wheel of karma while alive, is completely pure; and doesn't have to install new programs. However, for those of us who have to keep on going, it is necessary to summon *viveka* and *vairagya*, discrimination and non-attachment towards our own samskaras. We need to win freedom from tamasic and rajasic samskaras and move towards sattwa – move towards the light.

As a preparation, you can dwell on positive qualities which come to mind during your practice of pratipaksha bhavana and give strength. Generosity, magnanimity, creativity, discrimination and self-restraint, patience, compassion, courage and gentleness, humility and a selfless outlook – choose a quality that you really admire and can sincerely strive for, and aim for that.

3. Meditation for releasing attachment to the inner 'friends'

Relax, and take time to adjust.

Be aware of how you are feeling.

Many feelings may be there, or one may predominate. You may choose a positive feeling and relax into that, or you may choose a negative feeling and reflect on how to transform it through pratipaksha bhavana, and purify the store of samskaras in the consciousness.

Deeper than feelings that come and go, be aware of the residing qualities, such as the four instincts, *maithuna*, the sexual or procreative instinct, *bhaya*, fear, *ahara*, the urge to satisfy oneself through food and other things, and *nidra*, the urge to sleep and go back to the source. We should learn to manage them, like we learn to manage the senses, for they shape our lives, and they relate to the shadripu.

Become aware of one of the shadripu: *lobha, matsarya, kama, krodha, mada* and *moha*: greed, jealousy, passion, anger, arrogance and delusion, or your own special demon.

Rather than regarding them as enemies, we nurtured them like friends. Now is the time to break these attachments that make us self-centred and needy.

To begin with, bring to mind just one of the qualities you are eradicating from your hard drive, then focus on the positive luminous quality which you would like to develop in its place.

Witness a situation when the inner drives related to the six enemies and unconscious instincts took over in the course of your life.

See it clearly, accept it, and realize that at that time, you were following a set of compulsions, you were not able to remain the witness and ride the storm of tamasic and rajasic instincts, desires and fears and unconscious triggers.

This is a strong practice. If you perceive negative thoughts and emotions that are stirred up by admitting mistakes

made in the past – guilt, regret, a feeling of having failed – be aware of them but don't identify with them. Be aware of their cause but don't be dejected. Do not be bound to self-punishment; the resolve is simply to improve oneself. Begin practising prana nigraha, withdrawing the energy from that old cycle.

Resolve not to fall into that chasm again. Instead, focus on the ally you have chosen through pratipaksha bhavana, and let your energy and feeling flow into that.

If an emotion like guilt comes, allow yourself to witness the source; then summon the ally of forgiveness. If thoughts associated with lust, anger, greed, arrogance, your old infatuations and illusions, jealousies and injustices come, still let yourself see it. But then move on from there, do not be attached to negative feelings.

As incidents or people come to mind, retain a detached manner. In the light of what you have learned during your life, visualize what you would do now in the same situation with strength and courage.

Know that the practice of pratipaksha bhavana builds positive strengths.

Summon *viveka* and *vairagya*, discrimination and non-attachment towards your own samskaras. Resolve to win freedom from tamasic and rajasic samskaras and move towards sattwa – move towards the light.

Let your mind dwell on positive qualities which give strength: generosity, magnanimity, discrimination, patience, courage, gentleness, humility and a selfless outlook. Work out which is the pratipaksha bhavana you need to overcome your weakness.

Remember someone you know or a saintly or heroic figure who embodied those qualities, or remember someone you know who lives those ideals. Let yourself feel the respect and joy this figure and their actions and their promise awakens in you. Let your energy flow into this icon who can open new vistas of your consciousness.

Remember your own striving to be good, and how you wish to continue. Choose a quality that you really admire and can sincerely strive for.

Visualize yourself employing this new quality in your life. You may begin in a little way, but start straight away.

Visualize yourself acting from compassion and understanding, or your chosen virtue and ally. Let any pain or hurt be cleansed as you forgive yourself, and as you forgive others who have acted against you through the influence of the six internal enemies.

Let yourself remember internal victories.

Remember times when you were treated with compassion and understanding, and treasure that. Also, remember times when you yourself felt inner peace and happiness from doing a good deed, or selflessly helping some person or creature that was suffering.

From the right type of enquiry, and good thinking and actions comes *sat vyavahara*, a good lifestyle. Be aware that you have changed your lifestyle many times in the past and can do so again. Resolve not to lose the insights you have gained. Be aware that you are still an emerging new self, open to possibilities and change, and committed to changing positively.



Drop the attachment to qualities that bind you to the circle of life and death and rest in the feeling of fullness and contentment.

When you are ready, begin to externalize, and gently open the eyes.

Lifestyle

In the first three months, practising meditation techniques to look inside and actively spend time clearing the past impressions was a big step. This was strengthened by moving the teachings into active use in daily life. Whenever you found yourself reacting to a situation or person because of these six inner enemies, you began using sanyam, self-restraint, to steer your own course.

These new meditations on the inner enemies (or friends) of a human being deepen this process. We become the active drashta, the active witness, aware of what habitual response or instinct just kicked in, and over-ruling that old programming. We become more self-aware, knowing which instinct programmed into our animal-brain has taken over, and able to exert sanyam, self-restraint and redirection of energy. It is an interesting process. It's not a quick fix but rather a sincere commitment to deepening the consciousness.

Making this effort repeatedly reprograms the mind. We become able to see our own faults and limitations, and this is a big achievement. On the spiritual path, this is more important than seeing the faults of others. Once we can see clearly, then we can move in the right direction. And there is always guidance available.

It is at this stage that you can beneficially sow new seeds in your own consciousness. Whatever sufferings or weaknesses you have gone through can increase your motivation now. Pratipaksha bhavana enables you to draw on the positive strengths and virtues that you choose for yourself as allies in your search for self-improvement, based on your understanding of the aim in life.

Lifestyles change. This happens naturally as we mature, from babies, to children, to teenager, to householder, to searcher for truth – for so many reasons and in so many ways we have changed our life, or it has changed us.

Applying our understanding, living it, makes it part of our swabhava, basic nature. Thus we plant samskaras, seeds



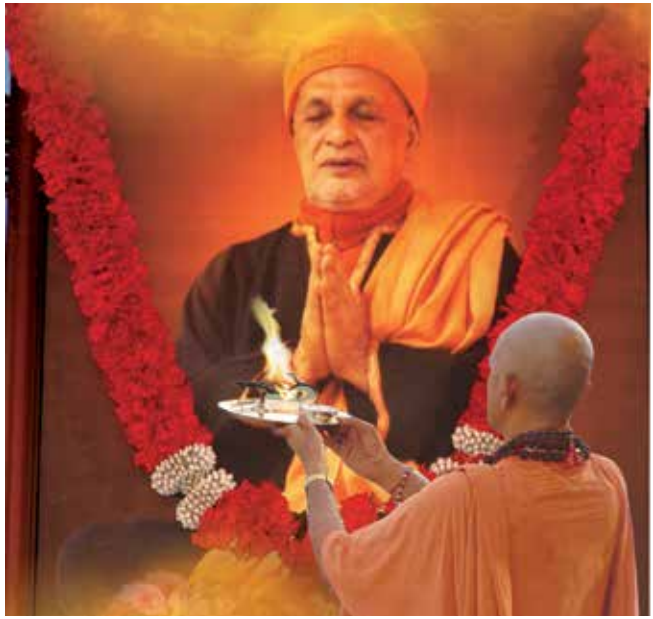
for the next harvest. Particularly if you are 'actively dying' and know you must get ready to go, your relationships with your associates, friends and family in this life will be especially important to you now. Interacting with them is a dynamic meditation in which maintaining the attitude of a witness enables you to develop selfless sattwic qualities such as happiness, forgiveness, respect, tolerance, clarity, love and compassion.

From now on, allow positivity to form the basis of your response to any situation. In the meditations, you have been visualizing yourself acting from the positive qualities, now whenever an opportunity presents itself, behave like that. Live with awareness from one moment to the next moment. This is the most necessary and helpful thing to do in this life and any life.

19

Fullness and Peace

Sri Paramahamsa Satyananda attained the mahasamadhi of a true yogi through the use of mantra. He is the example of one who attained yogic death, where *asmita*, the 'I' identity is transcended, and one moves into a steady state of consciousness, experiencing *shanti* and *poornata*, peace and fullness or completeness.



This section includes meditations which can be practised with different mantras according to which suits you. Examples given here include the *So Ham* mantra, the *mrityunjaya* mantra and the mantra *Aum (Om)*. Similar techniques can be used with your guru mantra, or suitable prayers or mantras from other traditions. If you are a devotee of a particular religion or faith, you may use a yogic mantra or one that is recommended in that tradition. It should be a mantra that you can feel completely at ease with.

PRACTICE SESSIONS

1. Shoonya meditation: merging in peace and completeness

Make the body as comfortable as possible. Become very aware of the posture, and the effect of the motionless posture on the mind, feeling stability and peacefulness.

Feel the immobility of the body.

Be aware, 'I am not this body', and begin to rotate the awareness quickly and lightly around the body, feeling all the limbs, joints and organs of the body.

Remind yourself, 'I am not the body', and yet continue to build up an awareness of the body structures. Be aware of the bones, and the marrow in the bones, the skeletal structure. Be aware of the limbs and joints of the body, aware of the ligaments and muscles. Be aware of the bones and discs of the spine. Awareness of the organs of the body, of the limbs, back, front, head – be aware of the whole body, and yet be disassociated from the body structures.

Be the witness.

Feel the stillness, the motionlessness of your posture, and at the same time of any movements within the body structure caused by the breath, the digestion, the heartbeat. Remind yourself, 'I am not the body'.

Feel the body like an empty shell, full of space. Be aware of the body like an empty shell floating in an ocean of space and awareness which pervades inside and outside of the body.

Just as you have disassociated yourself from the body, now disassociate yourself from the mind. Say to yourself mentally, 'I am not the body, nor am I the mind'.

In order to disassociate yourself from the mind, first, become aware of it in this way: If there are any thoughts, be aware of the thoughts, and disassociate from the thought. If there are any emotions, be aware of the emotions, and disassociate from the emotions. If there are any sensory distractions, be aware of the sensory distractions, and disassociate from them.

Remind yourself, 'I am not the thoughts, I am not the feelings, I am not the senses – I am not the mind. I am the witness of the mind.' Be aware of the mental space. Feel the empty expanse of eternal witnessing consciousness stretching far beyond senses or thought.

Be the witness.



Draw the awareness to *bhru-madhya*, the point between the eyebrows, and be aware of chid-akasha. See there a point of light. See a point of light like the flame of a candle. Its light radiates all throughout the space of the body-mind shell.

Be aware of the flame as being *atma*, the spirit. Be aware of the light radiating from it as being pure awareness.

Be aware of the vibrations and rays of light emanating from the flame and travelling all throughout the body-mind, and all throughout the consciousness.

As you draw close to the light, feel its vibrations pulsating as the mantra *Aum*.

Feel yourself disassociated from the mind and body, and enveloped in the light and the vibrations of the mantra *Aum*.

Continue. Feel the atma as the core of your being, and let the awareness rest in the light of the atma and the vibration of the mantra *Aum*.
Be the witness.
Now discontinue this type of consciousness. Bring the awareness gently back into the body, mind and senses connecting with the external world while retaining awareness of your real nature, your essence, as the atma, the spirit.

When you are ready, gently open the eyes.

2. Changing the focus

i) Meditation on prana: from pain to light

Make the body as comfortable as possible so that you do not have to move throughout the practice. Become very aware of the posture, and the effect of the motionless posture on the mind, feeling stability and peacefulness.
Visualize your body still like a statue.
If there is any tension or tightness in the body, adjust as far as possible and let the body and mind become still. Feel the body immobile like a statue. Be aware, 'I am not this body'.
Move the awareness to the breath within the body. Be aware of movements in the energy, the *prana*, inside the body. There are five main seas of prana within the body: prana, apana, vyoma, udana and samana.
Move the awareness to the breath within the body. The fresh energy entering with inhalation is called *prana* and its seat is in the chest. The clearing energy leaving with exhalation is called *apana* and its seat is in the abdomen.
Be aware of the breath as the life-breath, your companion throughout life from the first to last breath. Be aware of the breath, and be aware, 'I am not the breath'.
The breath brings energy in and out of the body, but the whole body and every cell in it has energy. Expand your awareness from the flow of breath to the body as a whole.

The body is like a statue full of light, full of energy. You may feel or see the whole body-shape full of energy like the warmth of the sun on a pleasant summer's day, like motes of dust dancing in the sun. The energy which fills the whole body is called *vyoma*. Be aware of it for some time.

It's like an atomic experience.

The trunk of the body is full of energy, and also the five limbs. In the limbs it begins to spiral, spiraling up and down the legs, up and down the arms. The energy also moves up into the neck and the head, the command centre where most of the senses are located. This energy is called *udana*, the upward moving energy.

Be aware of these energies all throughout the body, and remind yourself, 'I am not the energies enlivening the body and mind; I am witnessing all this.'

Continue for some time, identifying more with the experience of the pranic body than the physical body, distancing yourself from any physical pains. Experience this subtle dimension through feeling or vision or even sound vibrations if a mantra starts repeating itself spontaneously.

In the womb, energy was brought in and out through the umbilical cord. Even now, we can 'breathe' energy through the navel centre. As you breathe in, draw energy in and let it expand outwards from manipura chakra at the navel refreshing and invigorating the whole body. When you exhale, relax and let the energy wash out blockages, toxins and pain harmlessly through the navel centre.

Experience the balancing energy, called *samana* in the midriff region around the navel. Feel or see it as vibrations and flows of light. As you breathe in it is like blowing on a fire: see or feel the energy in manipura expanding out on all sides. When you exhale, sense the energy contracting in towards manipura from all sides.

As the *drashta*, the witness, summon happiness and peace. Remain the drashta, and experience fresh energy entering, and pain, whether physical or on any level, leaving as you continue to 'breathe' in and out through the navel centre. Let the warmth and light in manipura soothe any pain or blockages, transforming experience into light and understanding. Let the breath deepen and continue for some time, bathing in the light.

Externalize, carefully, being aware of the breath, the physical body and the senses. Check you are aware of the time and place and situation, and when you are ready, open the eyes.

ii) Exploring the light: prana vidya

Make the body as comfortable as possible so that you do not have to move throughout the practice. Become very aware of the posture, and the effect of the motionless posture on the mind, feeling stability and peacefulness.

Visualize your body still like a statue.

If there is any tension or tightness in the body, adjust as far as possible and let the body and mind become still. Feel the body immobile like a statue. Be aware, 'I am not this body'.

Move the awareness to the breath within the body. Although the physical body is still, there are micro-movements associated with the breath and the metabolism – the energy, the *prana*, inside the body. Be aware of the breath as the life-breath, your companion throughout life from the first to last breath. Be aware of the breath, and be aware, 'I am not the breath'.

The breath brings energy in and out of the body, but the whole body and every cell in it has energy. Expand your awareness from the flow of breath to the body as a whole. The body is like a statue full of light, full of energy. You may feel the whole body-shape full of energy like the warmth of the sun on a pleasant summer's day, or see

energy like motes of dust dancing in the sun. Be aware of it for some time.
It's an atomic experience.
Be aware of these energies all throughout the body, and remind yourself, 'I am not the energies enlivening the body and mind; I am witnessing all this.'
In the womb, energy was brought in and out through the umbilical cord. At that time, we did not breathe. After death, again we do not breathe. Yet the scriptures say prana accompanies the soul when it departs from the physical body. The *pranamaya kosha*, the sheath or body of light and energy is a subtle aspect of our existence that ushers us into a new dimension.
Be aware of the bright manipura chakra at the navel as a special centre and begin to 'breathe' in and out through the navel, letting healing energy expand throughout your whole being as you breathe in, and relaxing, letting go of any hurts, as you breathe out.
Continue for some time.
You are visualizing and experiencing the whole physical body filled with energy in movement. The energy body maintains a similar shape to the physical body; within that inner ocean of energy, there are different seas and currents.
In the middle of these seas of energy is the spine, and inside currents of energies flow: ida and pingala spiraling up and down the spine from mooladhara to sahasrara, and sushumna flowing straight and luminous right up to sahasrara.
Be aware of sushumna. When you breathe in, the energy rises from the base in mooladhara chakra to ajna, and beyond to sahasrara at the crown of the head. When you breathe out, the energy descends back down to mooladhara.
Move your awareness up and down synchronized with the breath, and be aware of any sensations or visions of light associated with the flow of prana.

Just as the breathing of the physical respiratory system continues whether we are aware of it or not, so does the flow of energy. Being aware enables one to experience more deeply, and to witness.

For some time, just build up your awareness.

Then, as you breathe in, feel the energy increasing in manipura and funnel it towards sushumna. Let it boost the sattwic luminous energy in sushumna upwards towards sahasrara. As you breathe out, relax.

To begin with, only practise for a few breaths. For experienced practitioners a maximum of 59 breaths can be done, then cease the practice and again be aware of the natural flow of the energies all throughout the body.

The pranas are part of your subtle self, but remind yourself, 'I am not the energies enlivening the body and mind; I am not the experiences that I digest in this life, I am not the resolves I make – I am the eternal witness, the *atma*'.

Be the witness of the body and its energies. Be aware of the many dimensions of existence. Feel the body like a shell, full of prana floating in an ocean of space and awareness.

Feel the expanse of consciousness stretching far beyond the body, senses or thought.

Draw your awareness to *bhrumadhya*, the point between the eyebrows, or to sahasrara at the crown of the head. See there a flame or a point of light radiating light all throughout the body-mind shell. Be aware of the light as *atma*, your inner self or spirit.

To begin externalizing, become aware again of the natural life-breath. Listen to the sounds and check your other senses. Build up your awareness of the physical body and your surroundings. Taking care to externalize completely, say to yourself '*Aum*' and when you are ready, open the eyes.

3. Union with the light

i) Meditation with the mantra *So Ham*

If you wish to practise with a mala, have it ready, or the practice can be done mentally, or as a walking meditation in rhythm with the steps or with the breath.

Relax, and take time to internalize.

Draw the awareness to ajna chakra, at the top of the spine or sahasrara, at the crown of the head, and see there a flame of light.

Be aware of any sensations and relax as far as possible, but stay awake and be aware. Be a witness to any thoughts or feelings, memories or impressions. Summon a feeling of inner happiness, practisean attitude of respectful greeting to any person or creature who comes to mind. Be grateful for what you have learned from them.

Resolve not to lose the lessons that you have learned in life – and let the experiences dissolve into the lake of your consciousness.

Repeat the insight: 'I am not the body, I am not the mind, I am the witness'. Repeat it three times, knowing the truth of this.

Feel the breath in the body, and in the rhythm of the breath hear the message of the breath, '*So*' with the inhalation and '*Ham*' with the exhalation: *So Ham, So Ham* 'I am That Eternal Self, I am That'.

Repeat the mantra *So* with the awareness moving up and the mantra *Ham* with the energy moving down the central energy passage, *sushumna*, in the spine. Continue, and when it comes naturally, just listen to this *So Ham* mantra with every breath that you take.

Continue with the *So Ham* mantra even if thoughts or feelings come and go.

Be aware of how you are feeling – aware of ripples of thoughts and feelings, and beyond that the clear lake of your consciousness and yourself as the witness.

Be aware of an inner contentment and compassion, and remain as the witness, repeating the *So Ham* mantra with each breath.
Continue.
Move deeper within, be aware of the light at *ajna chakra*, the command centre at the tip of the spine, or at *sahasrara*, the thousand-petalled lotus at the crown of the head.
Bring your awareness to that inner space, and be aware of a steady flame of light above a clear lake. Be aware of the light above the lake of your emotions. Feel the light as a guide to right understanding, for yourself and all beings.
Repeat to yourself three times 'I am not the body, I am not the mind, I am the witness.' As you repeat it, know the truth of this and be aware of the breath continually repeating the mantra *So Ham*, 'I am That', reminding you of your inner identity with the immortal Self.
Feel yourself refreshed and aware of your inner nature.

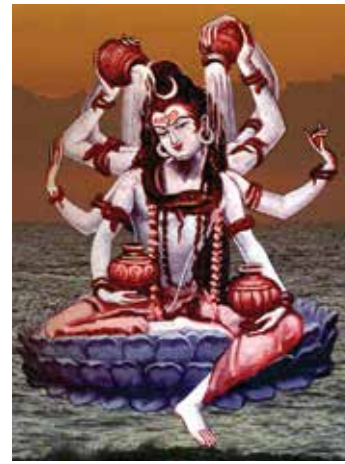
From awareness of the breath and the mantra and the vision of light, begin to externalize by being aware of the other senses.
Remain as the witness as you become aware of the body and surroundings. Externalize, and when you are ready, open the eyes.



ii) Meditation with the Mrityunjaya mantra

If you wish to practise with a mala, have the mala ready, or the practice can be done mentally in any comfortable position, or as a walking meditation in rhythm with the steps or with the breath. This mantra is also practised worldwide by repeating it 108 times as an offering is made into a havan fire on Saturday around sunset. The sankalpa at that time is for healing of any individual desiring that, and for the welfare of the whole world.

The mantra can be practised for one's own benefit or for others. Practising this mantra for healing is a form of *seva*, selfless service, that helps new resolves to take root in your life and become positive samskaras. This mantra can give help in this life, in releasing one from life, and even from the need for rebirth.



Lord Shiva, who symbolizes highest consciousness is the one invoked by this mantra. He is known to have three eyes and so can see within and without, he can see the manifest and unmanifest universe. With his third eye, he burned Kama, the god of passion to ashes – so he is stronger than the forces which make us reincarnate.

For healing

The Mrityunjaya mantra is a healing mantra and gives an opportunity to heal oneself, and to practise for the benefit of others. This mantra can be used for self-healing on all the different levels of your being: physical, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual. Alternatively, with the repetition of every mantra, you can visualize or remember any person you wish to send the healing vibrations of the mantra to. In this way, many can be benefited.

Let yourself relax and become ready for meditation. Be aware of your aim, what healing you are praying for whether in yourself or in others.
Draw your awareness to the eyebrow centre and visualize there a point of light.
With your awareness on the light, begin to repeat the mantra.

Aum trayambakam yajaamahe,
sugandhim pushti vardhanam.
Urvaarukam-iva bandhanaat,
mrityor mukshiya maamritat.

Be aware of what you need to heal in yourself, or let one person simply come forward in your mind, and direct the healing power to that person. Or you can choose someone to work for and devote all 108 repetitions to that one.
No thoughts are necessary. Choose your aim, let your body and mind became steady and clear, and repeat the mantra.

When the practice is complete, return the awareness to the eyebrow centre and be aware of the inner light.
Externalize.



For transcendance

Let yourself relax and become ready for meditation. Draw your awareness to the eyebrow centre and visualize there a point of light.

The words of the mantra can be translated:

Aum trayambakam yajaamahe
Aum, we worship the three-eyed one,

Sugandhim pushti vardhanam
Who is fragrant and increases strength.

Urvaarukam-iva bandhanaat
Like a ripe fruit attached to the vine of mortality

Mrityor mukshiya maamritat
Let me drop free from life and death into immortality.

But the mantra vibrations carry the meaning and intent; you don't have to think it, just immerse yourself in the vibrations and the light.

Remind yourself, 'I am not the thoughts, I am not the feelings, I am not the senses, I am not the mind. I am the witness, I am that auspicious consciousness. Feel the empty expanse of your inner consciousness stretching far beyond senses or thought.

Be the witness.

Draw the awareness to *bhrumadhya*, the point between the eyebrows, and be aware of *chidakasha*, the space of consciousness. See there a point or flame of light. Its light radiates all throughout the space of the body-mind shell. Be aware of the flame as being *atma*, the spirit.

The light radiating from it is pure awareness. Just as the dark night is transformed by the cool light of the moon, so the body-mind vehicle and the all-encompassing space of consciousness is pervaded by light.

From awareness of the breath and the mantra and the vision of light, begin to externalize by being aware of the other senses, and when you are ready, open the eyes.

iii) Meditation with the mantra *Aum* (*Om*)

Our everyday, awake and interactive mind is called *jagrat*, and is like the surface of the ocean of consciousness. In jagrat, wherever we focus the torchlight of our awareness, we can see. The *A* sound in the mantra *AUM* is for jagrat.

Deeper layers are called *swapna*, and relate to the dream state and the subconscious where we catch glimpses of knowledge and different experiences, but usually don't have much focus. The *U* sound in *AUM* is for swapna.

Deeper is *sushupti*, the unconscious state that we experience in deep sleep, and awake from refreshed, but cannot usually recall. The M sound of the mantra *AUM* is sushupti.

We all experience these states daily, but the fourth one is the one we want to develop – because that is the one that survives death. Deeper and wider than the other states that we experience in everyday life is *turiya*, the superconscious state. It is explained as being the ability to see the whole thing, the whole ocean of consciousness. The whole sound of the mantra *AUM (Om)* is for turiya.



Those who have opened their consciousness and trained it through sanyam are called *rishis* or seers. Potentially, we all have the ability to expand our consciousness and energy in this way. The mantra or vibration for releasing this energy and awareness is *Aum*.

If you wish to practise with a mala, have it ready, or the practice can be done with the breath. *Aum* can be chanted out loud, quietly or mentally.

Relax, and take time to adjust and internalize.
Be aware of any sensations physical, mental or emotional.
Relax as far as possible, but stay awake and be aware.

Remember a light that you see on a dark night, and place it at the crown of the head, or the eyebrow centre, or at the heart centre.
Begin to chant *Aum (Om)* mentally, quietly or out loud.
Chant *Aum* and merge with the vibrations of *Aum* and the light.
Continue.
If you become aware of the body, remember, 'I am not this body'.
If you become aware of the mind, realize, 'I am not this mind'.
If you become aware of your family and friends and different situations, realize, 'I am the eternal witness'.
Continue to chant *Aum* and let other concerns drop away.
Unplug yourself from transient material situations; plug into the Source.
Merge with the vibrations of *Aum* and the light. Feel the light as a guide to right understanding, for yourself and all beings.
Chant *Aum*. Merge with the vibrations of *Aum* and the light.
Chant *Aum*.
Merge with the vibrations of *Aum* and the light.
Move deeper within, be aware of the heart.
Bring your awareness to the heart space, and there be aware of, or visualize, a steady flame of light above a clear lake. See a steady flame of light above a clear lake. A golden flame above a clear lake.
Be aware of the light of consciousness above the lake of your emotions and actions and whole life as you move deeper into *hridayakasha*, the heart space.
See the *akhanda jyoti*, the eternal flame of the spirit.
Be aware that you are going on a journey to see the light.
Make your inhaled breath like a bow, and each exhaled breath like an arrow – with the mantra *Aum,* draw close to the light.



Be aware that you are going on a journey towards the light, with each breath experience inner light and peace, riding the waves with the mantra *Aum*.

Identify with the light, and in that clear light look into the ocean of your consciousness. Repeat the mantra *Aum* that pierces and unites all the levels of consciousness.

When you need to leave this state of awareness, when you are ready to be aware of the breath, the body, the senses – externalize.

Lifestyle

Head, heart and hands: we can manifest our inner experience through our actions. Maintaining inner peace and fullness, let us dedicate every day to living moment to moment, as though each day is the first and last day.

Changing dimensions

So, dear human beings, I would like to give a hearty welcome to each and everyone as we gather here again – at the last outpost of life on Earth – about to enter the shuttle craft for our intergalactic voyage beyond space and beyond time.

Thank you, but I'm not sure I'm really going anywhere; I'm reading this more for other people . . .

Don't worry. It's not 'Where no man has gone before', it's more like 'Where every man has gone before, but nevertheless, here we go again'. Ha ha.

You know, you have a strange sense of humor; I don't really think this is a laughing matter. I know we're all mortal

and we're all going to die someday – even me – but, there's always the chance for healing. I'm tired of the pain; I want a break. I don't want to die; I just want a break. I just want a deep refreshing sleep and then wake up with that sense of happiness and freshness I used to have as a child. Can you just give me that much?

YES, WELL, YES – LISTEN.

YOGA NIDRA, YOGIC SLEEP, IS A PRACTICE OF MAINTAINING CONSCIOUSNESS WHILE THE SENSES ARE DISCONNECTED, BUT NOT JUST THAT – IT CAN TAKE YOU ALL THE WAY TO SAMADHI.

IT'S UP TO YOU TO MAKE YOUR OWN SANKALPA TO FOCUS ON THE LIGHT. THEN YOU JUST RELAX INSIDE YOUR BODY. FOCUS ON THE LIGHT AND LET GO OF ALL YOUR ATTACHMENTS.

DON'T STRAIN. EASY DOES IT. JUST LET GO OF EVERYTHING ELSE AND STAY FOCUSED ON THE LIGHT.

GOOD.

DO YOU WANT A RETURN TICKET?

OKAY. GOOD.

WE'RE JUST WAITING FOR CLEARANCE NOW.

YES, WE HAVE THE WHITE LIGHT.

REMEMBER, JUST FOCUS ON THE LIGHT.

iv) Meditation on the light

Lie down in shavasana, or any comfortable position, where the body is completely supported and you can relax deeply without having to support the body at all.

Adjust the position for your comfort so you don't have to move the body at all; the body can remain completely still.

The body becomes very still so you can clearly feel the movement of the breath inside the body.

For some time be aware of the breath. Be aware of the natural flow of the breath.

Feel the body surrounding the life-breath.

Be aware of yourself as the witness and bring to mind your positive *sankalpa*, your positive resolve to experience the

light. The resolve should be something you are sure you want to experience. Repeat the resolve three times, knowing that the resolve you make in yoga nidra forms your reality.
Feel the body surrounding the life-breath.
See the whole body.
See the body as though it's reflected in a mirror. Be aware of the body from all angles. See it from above. See it from below. See it, looking down on the crown of the head. See it, looking at the soles of the feet and up past them.
As though you are outside the body, circling the body from outside, see the body from all angles and see the whole body. See the body as a whole.
Then, see a shaft of white light descending and enveloping the whole body. See the whole body enveloped in a shaft of white light which pervades the whole body, which pervades every cell of the body.
Feel every cell of the body pervaded by light, by the light of pure energy and consciousness.
We are going to rotate the awareness around the body. As you move the awareness from part to part, feel the white light pervading the whole body.
Take your awareness to the right hand thumb. Be aware of the white light pervading the right hand thumb.
Move the awareness to the first finger of the right hand, the second finger, the third finger, the fourth finger – four fingers and thumb together.
As you move your awareness feel the cells of each finger of the right hand being pervaded by the light. The light dissolves away any tensions or toxins or pain from the cells of the body as you move your awareness from part to part.
Continue with the rotation of awareness. Feel the whole right hand, the right wrist, forearm, upper arm, the right shoulder, armpit, right side of the chest.
When you come to any part of the body where there is tension, injury, malfunction or pain, linger there for some time, for a few seconds or up to five minutes.

Linger for some time and see the light pervading that part of the body.
For some minutes you can see the light, the energy, bright in the cells of the body. Any darkness leaves the body like a smoke. The smoke may be dark coloured but as it disperses you discover a feeling of peace within.
Linger for some time and let the light evaporate away the darkness like smoke, like fog, like a fine mist.
Continue with the rotation of the awareness around the body with awareness of the light pervading each and every part.
Be aware of the right waist, abdomen, groin, hip, thigh, knee, lower leg, ankle, heel, sole of the foot, top of the foot, big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, little toe, the whole foot and five toes together.
Be aware of the whole right leg, the whole right side of the trunk, the right arm and the whole right side of the body.
Continue with the rotation of the awareness around the body with awareness of the light pervading each and every part.
Take your awareness to the left hand thumb. Be aware of the white light pervading the left hand thumb.
Move the awareness to the first finger of the left hand, second finger, third finger, fourth finger – the four fingers and thumb together.
Feel the whole left hand, the left wrist, forearm, upper arm, the left shoulder, armpit, left side of the chest.
Aware of the left side of the waist, abdomen, groin, hip, thigh, knee, lower leg, ankle, heel, sole of the foot, top of the foot, big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, little toe, the whole foot and five toes together. Be aware of the whole left leg, the whole left side of the trunk, the left arm and the whole left side of the body.
As you move your awareness from part to part, feel the cells of each part of the body being pervaded by the light, dissolving any tensions or toxins or pain.

When you come to any part of the body where there is some problem or pain, linger there, seeing the light pervading that part of the body. Any darkness leaves the body like a black smoke.
As you linger there for some time, the light evaporates away the darkness like smoke which turns into a fog, or just a fine mist.
Continue with the rotation of awareness around the body seeing the light pervading each and every part, filling the whole body with a sense of peacefulness.
Continue: be aware of the toes, the soles of both feet, the heels, Achilles' tendons, calf muscles, backs of the knees, backs of the thighs, the buttocks, the curve of the back.
Be aware of the whole length of the spine and feel or see the movement of the light in the spine and the whole back. Feel the shoulder blades, back of the arms and hands, the curve of the back of the neck, back of the head, crown of the head, the whole back of the body.
Linger at any point of pain or discomfort and let the light penetrate deeply, evaporating out any darkness or pain like a dark smoke or thin mist.
Be aware of the whole head, the roots of the hair, the forehead, the curve of the right eyebrow, the curve of the left eyebrow, eyebrow centre.
Be aware of the whole right eye and let it relax and be filled with light. Be aware of the whole left eye and let it relax and be filled with light. Feel the hemispheres of the brain soothed with light and peace.
Be aware of the eyebrow centre, the bridge of the nose, the tip of the nose and the breath in the nostrils, filling the whole throat and lungs with air and light.
Be aware of the right cheek, the left cheek, the right ear, the left ear, the upper lip, the lower lip, the teeth, the tongue, the whole mouth, the whole throat, allowing the light to percolate deeply into the cells of the body.
Be aware of the chin, the jaw, the whole face. Let all the little muscles of the face relax, let the whole face glow

with light and relax with a feeling of deep peacefulness and completeness.
Aware of the whole face, the throat, collar bones, arms, chest, abdomen, legs and the whole body.
Aware of the whole front of the body, the whole back of the body, the whole right side of the body, the whole left side of the body, and the whole body.
Whole body awareness and feel the peace, the *shanti*, pervading the whole body. Feel the whole body as light.
Be aware of the whole body as a creation of matter from light.
Be aware once more of your *sankalpa*, the positive resolve that you want to manifest, that you want to experience in life, and repeat it three times, knowing that the resolve you make in yoga nidra will come about in your life.

Be aware of the importance of your intention.
Feel yourself
Reborn.

Become aware of the breath.
Become aware of the body.
Become aware of your surroundings through the sensations of the senses.
Take your time.

Externalize the awareness.
Keep your eyes closed until you are fully externalized and aware of where you are and the situation you have found yourself in this time.
When you are ready – open the eyes.

And always be aware of the light.



And, after all that comes the Naamopathy
of Swami Sivananda.

Rama Naam Satya Hai!

The name of God leads to Truth.

Appendices

Glossary

A

Abhava – not being, non-existence, non-entity; absence; annihilation, death

Abhaya – freedom from fear or danger; secure, safe

Abhimana – egoism; identification with the body; conceit

Abhinivesha – fear of death; instinctive clinging to worldly life and bodily enjoyments and the fear that one might be cut off from them by death; a type of ignorance; fear of the unknown; one of the five kleshas described by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*; see Klesha

Abhisheka – ceremonial bath; consecration

Abhyasa – constant and steady practice without any interruption; to remain established in the effort of sadhana

Achara – conduct; good behaviour; custom, an established rule of conduct, usual formality; a lifestyle

Acharya – one knowing or teaching the acharas; teacher, preceptor, spiritual guide

Achetana – unconscious

Adharma – disharmony; not fulfilling one's natural role in life; unrighteousness; wickedness, injustice, sin; all that is contrary to dharma and the law; demerit

Adhikari – eligible one, qualified person

Adi – beginning; first, primary; 'and so on' (of the same kind or nature, etc.)

Adi Shankaracharya – the celebrated teacher of Advaita Vedanta who wrote commentaries on the major *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Brahma Sutras*. The founder of the Dashnami tradition of sannyasa, he established four maths in the four quarters of India, Kanchi Math, dedicated to Devi, and numerous smaller maths claim him as founder. There is speculation that Adi Shankaracharya may be a composite of two or more historical personages

Agami karma – karma produced now to be fructified in the future; see Karma

Agni – fire; the god of fire; fire of the stomach, digestive faculty; metabolism; the third mahabhuta in Samkhya philosophy with the special property of form; see Pancha mahabhuta

Agni tattwa – fire element, fire principle; see Pancha mahabhuta

Aham – 'I' or ego; the personal pronoun

Ahamkara – 1. egoism; 'I am-ness', self-consciousness, 2. sattwic ahamkara: egoism composed of goodness and virtue; rajasic ahamkara: dynamic egoism with passion and pride; tamasic ahamkara: egoism as expressed in ignorance and inertia, 3. the rajasic state of consciousness limiting awareness of existence

Ahara – third basic instinct, craving food or nourishment; food, nourishment, anything that nourishes the body-mind; see Pravritti

Ahimsa – absence of violence from within; non-violence; harmlessness, abstaining from killing or giving pain to others in thought, word or deed; general attitude of welfare for the entire world; one of the yamas as described in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*; see Yama

Aitareya Upanishad – formed from the fourth, fifth and sixth chapters of the second Aranyaka of the *Aitareya Brahmana*, this short Upanishad teaches that knowledge of Brahman (Brhamavidya) is the only way to be free from the impurities that tie one to karma and the circle of life and death

Ajapa japa – involuntary, unconscious repetition of the same thing, applied especially to the mantra or sound made in breathing, which is 'recited' 21,600 times every 24 hours

Ajna – command, order

Ajna chakra – the third eye, the command or monitoring psychic and pranic centre, also known as the guru chakra; it represents intuition or the inner pure awareness engendered by the confluence of ida, pingala and sushumna nadis. Physically, the concentration point is situated at the medulla oblongata at the top of the spinal column in the midbrain, corresponding to the pineal gland; see Chakra

Ajnana – ignorance, non-cognizance; unawareness; especially spiritual ignorance (avidya) which makes one consider oneself distinct from the supreme reality; see Klesha

Akarta – non-doer

Akasha – 1. element of ether, space, sky; to shine, to appear, 2. primordial state of existence, 3. in Samkhya philosophy: the first mahabhuta, its special property is sound, 4. the three internal spaces most often used in meditation are chidakasha, daharakasha and hridayakasha; see Pancha mahabhuta

Akasha tattwa – space element; ether principle; see Pancha mahabhuta

Anahata chakra – psychic and pranic centre in the region of the heart, the vibration or 'beat' of which regulates life from birth to death; corresponds to the cardiac plexus in the physical body; corresponds to hridayakasha in meditative practice; centre of emotions which, when developed, gives the psychic force to materialize desires; centre where Shiva and Shakti unite; see Chakra; see Granthi

Ananda – pleasure, happiness; pure unalloyed bliss; state of consciousness (in yoga practice); in Vedanta: a name of Shiva; one of the three attributes of the ultimate principle

Anandamaya kosha – the state of bliss attained in samadhi; subtler sphere of existence, consciousness; the innermost wrapper or sheath (kosha) of the embodied spirit; causal body; see Pancha Kosha; see Karanasharira

Anandamaya – the supreme state of bliss; the supreme consciousness; fullness of existence; composed of bliss; plenitude or abundance of bliss

Anna – food

Annamaya kosha – sheath or body of matter; the sphere of existence created by food, maintained by food and which ultimately becomes food, i.e. the body; see Pancha kosha

Antah, antar – inner, internal

Antaratma – the indwelling self, inner soul, the heart; substance

Antahkarana – inner organ, instrument or tool of consciousness; mind; see Manas; see Buddhi; see Chitta; see Ahamkara

Antar mouna – a practice of becoming aware of, managing, and distancing oneself from the influences of the senses and thoughts on the mind. This leads to 'inner silence', where one becomes aware of the undisturbed consciousness

Antaryamin – inner ruler; the supreme being present in every object and guiding all creatures

Anushthana – a resolve to perform mantra sadhana with absolute discipline for a requisite period of time; a fixed course of sadhana undertaken for a definite period of time

Ap, apas – water; the liquid state of matter; in Samkhya philosophy, the fourth mahabhuta with the special property of taste; see Pancha mahabhuta

Apas tattwa – water element; water principle

Aparigraha – freedom from covetousness; abstention from greed; non-receiving of gifts conducive to luxury; without possessions or belongings; one of the five yamas described by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*, its perfection leads to non-possessiveness and non-attachment, making the knowledge of past and future lives less hazardous; see Yama

Apurva – unseen, extraordinary; something unprecedented; the hidden force of a karma that will manifest in the future; in the context of a yajna it refers to effects that were not present prior to the performance of the yajna; faith

Aradhya – the person, force or object that a person adores and worships

Aranya – forest; the name of one of the 10 orders of sannyasins founded by Adi Shankaracharya

Aranyaka – being in or relating to a forest; wild; third part of the Vedas. These texts are contemplative ancient scriptures

containing subtle mystical interpretations of vedic rituals especially relevant to vanaprastha ashrama

Arati – respectfully waving lights before a deity during worship

Arjuna – name of the third Pandava, who was the son of Indra and Kunti; in the *Bhagavad Gita* he received a divine revelation from Lord Krishna

Asakta – unattached, unselfish

Asakti – attachment, associations

Asamprajnata samadhi – stage of samadhi where the traces of the mind (samskaras) become active according to their intensity; samadhi which is experienced between the different phases of samprajnata samadhi; see Samprajnata samadhi; see Samskara

Asana – in raja yoga, a physical posture in which one is at ease and in harmony with oneself; the third limb of yoga as described by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*; seat

Ashaya – receptacle, abode; place where the residue of karmas and unfulfilled desires or experiences is stored in a particular state of mind; mind; heart; intention

Ashram – place for ascetism and spiritual practice under the guidance of a guru; place for hard work externally and internally

Ashrama – 1. hermitage, hut, cell, dwelling or abode of ascetism and spiritual practice; 2. stage, order, or period of life, of which there are four: brahmacharya or studentship, grihastha or household life, vanaprastha or forest-dwelling, sannyasa or total renunciation; 3. the name of one of the 10 orders of sannyasins founded by Adi Shankaracharya

Ashtanga yoga – the eight limbs of yoga described by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*: 1. yama, 2. niyama, 3. asana, 4. pranayama, 5. pratyahara, 6. dharana, 7. dhyana, 8. samadhi

Ashtashraddha – eight funeral rites performed for all worldly relations, including one's previous self; ceremony performed when taking initiation into sannyasa

Asmi – I am, I exist

Asmita – sense of doership; egoism; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*;

awareness of 'I am' superimposed on the body, action and mind; see Klesha

Astra – projectile weapon, like an arrow or a spear

Asteya – honesty, not stealing; one of the yamas of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*; see Yama

Atharva Veda – fourth vedic text containing the tantric concepts and the collection of mantras and spells; see Veda

Atma, atman – personal self; one's own self beyond mind and body; also called supreme consciousness, spirit, soul; the seer of turiya (reality) according to the *Mandukya Upanishad*

Atmabhava – feeling of unity with all; seeing the atman (soul) equally in all beings

Atma jnana – direct knowledge of the self; see Brahma jnana

Atmanatmaviveka – discrimination between the self and the not-self

Atma vichara – enquiring into the self

Atmavidya – knowledge of the inner self

Aum, Om – universal mantra; in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*: repetition of *Aum* and meditation on its meaning is the practice resulting in union with Ishwara; in Vedanta, *Aum* is regarded as Shabda Brahman and as the seed of the Vedas; in the *Mandukya Upanishad*, the 'A' of *Aum* is explained as the waking state of consciousness, the 'u' as the subconscious, the 'm' as the unconscious and the whole reverberation as representing the superconscious state; see Jagrat; see Swapna; see Sushupti; see Turiya

Avadhuta, avadhoota – one who is free from all worldly attachments or mental illusions; an ascetic who has renounced the world and is usually naked; see Sannyasa

Avahana – invocation using mantras so the deity manifests during the time of worship

Avastha – state of consciousness or condition of the mind; position; circumstances

Avasthatraya – three states of consciousness: jagrat or waking, swapna or dream, and sushupti or deep sleep

Avatara – descent, advent or incarnation of God.

Avidya – ignorance; lack of conscious awareness; mistaking the non-eternal for the eternal; the chief of the five kleshas or sources of trouble and confusion described by Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. In Vedanta, it is a mistake that considers the non-eternal, impure, evil and non-atman to be eternal, pure, good and atman; illusion personified or Maya; one of the five restricting cloaks of maya; see Klesha

Avyakta – not manifest or apparent; uncreated; undeveloped; imperceptible; indistinct; inarticulate; undetermined; unknown; a name of Prakriti

B

Bahir – outside, external

Bandha – binding, tying; connection, union; psycho-muscular energy locks which close the pranic exits (like throat, anus, etc.); psychic locks that concentrate the flow of energy in the body at one point or plexus; see Mudra

Bhagavad Gita – 'divine song', Lord Krishna's discourse to Arjuna delivered on the battlefield of Kurukshetra during the great Mahabharata war, a major source of Hindu philosophy, containing the essence of the Upanishads and yoga; see Prasthanatraya; see Sthitaprajna; see Mahabharata

Bhagavan – illustrious one; God, deity

Bhakti – complete devotion to the higher reality of life; love for all beings; devotion as service; channeling of emotion to a higher force

Bhakti yoga – yoga channeling emotional energy to a higher reality of life; a systematic path with nine steps or stages expanding, strengthening and purifying the emotions

Bhashya – commentary, learned text discussing a particular scripture

Bhaya – second basic instinct, fear; fear of death; see Klesha

Bhuh loka – terrestrial, mortal plane of existence, also called jiva loka; Earth; see Loka

Bhumi, bhoomi – the earth, ground, place; degree; situation

Bhu samadhi – burial; installing the body of one who has attained mahasamadhi in the earth

Bhuta, bhoota – existing, real; an element or elemental; state of existence, being; what has come into being; an entity as opposed to the unmanifest; the five elementary constituents of the universe: earth, water, fire, air, space; see Mahabhuta

Bhuvah loka – intermediate realm between earth and heaven, astral plane of existence; see Loka

Bija, beeja – seed, source; origin

Bija mantra, beeja mantra – seed sound, when repeated mentally the seed thus planted in the mind germinates into one-pointedness; a basic mantra or vibration

Bodhisattwa – one whose essence is perfect knowledge; one who does not leave the body after reaching nirvana, but waits in order to serve and help humankind

Brahma, Brahman – 1. God as creator, one of the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheshwara (or Shiva), 2. Hiranya-garbha or cosmic intelligence; eternal, omnipresent principle of existence or ultimate reality. The all-pervading 'something' or 'nothing' from which all time, space and creatures are uninterruptedly being created, 3. the sacred syllable *Aum* (*Om*), 4. the Vedas; see Aum; see Veda

Brahmacharya – one of the yamas described by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as resulting in indomitable courage (virya); see Yama

Brahmacharya ashrama – first stage of life up to 25 years according to the ancient vedic tradition, devoted to study and learning; see Ashrama

Brahma jnana – realization or immediate knowledge of Brahman

Brahmana – of the priestly caste; a person whose life is dedicated to the study of the Vedas and dispensation of the knowledge of Brahman and is thus qualified to act as a priest in vedic rituals; integral part of the Vedas which elucidates the path of ritual to be followed by householders and explains the meaning and use of vedic hymns; see Veda

Brahmarandhra – the gate in the crown of the head; the fontanelle where the bones in the skull of a new born child do not meet. It is said that if the prana and soul

escape through this gate while leaving the body at the time of death, one does not have to return to the cycle of transmigration.

Brahmastra – the weapon or power of Brahma; faith

Brahma Sutras – classical Vedantic scriptures written by Veda Vyasa and commented upon by Adi Shankaracharya in his *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*; see Prasthanatraya

Brahma vidya – science of the self; knowledge of Brahman (the supreme existence); study to attain real knowledge

Brahmin – see Brahmana

Brahmi vritti – aklishta (not painful) vritti that leads to identification with the drashta (witnessing consciousness or Brahman); spiritual aspect of the vrittis

Brihat – large, big, absolute

Brihadaranyaka – literally, 'the great teaching from the forest'; name of an Upanishad from the *Shatapatha Brahmana* of the *Yajurveda*. It discusses the identity of the individual atma (soul) in relation to the universal self, different modes of worship, religion and meditation; see Aham Brahmasmi

Buddha – the enlightened one

Buddhi – discerning, discriminating aspect of mind; the faculty of valuing things for the advancement of life; principle of universal intuition in the super-reflective state of samadhi

C

Chaitanya – the consciousness that knows itself and knows others; absolute consciousness; intelligence, spirit

Chakra – wheel or vortex; centre of energy or psychic centre; confluence point of energy flows (nadis). The main chakras threaded in the region of the spinal column on the sushumna nadi relate to many levels of the human being. On a physical level the main areas of influence are: mooladhara chakra, pelvic plexus; swadhisthana chakra, coccygeal plexus; manipura chakra, solar plexus; anahata chakra, cardiac plexus; vishuddhi chakra, pharyngeal plexus, also connected with the thyroid gland; and ajna chakra, plexus of command at the top of the spinal column, also connected with the

pineal gland. Of the 28 planes of consciousness or regions, the highest seven are called loka, the next seven are chakra, the next seven patala and the lowest seven naraka; see Loka

Chandra – moon; shining, bright; representing mental energy

Chetana – consciousness; unmanifest aspect of consciousness and energy

Chhandogya Upanishad – name of an Upanishad from the *Sama Veda* teaching the origin and significance of the mantra *Aum*; see Tat Twam Asi

Chidakasha – the space or sphere within, where the capacity of sense perception is internalized to observe the process and reactions of individual awareness; the inner space visualized in meditation behind the closed eyes or in the region of ajna chakra; the state of pure, unbounded consciousness; see Akasha

Chiranjeevi – one who experiences no death; one who does not grow old

Chit – thought; perception; intelligence, intellect; understanding; the heart/mind; pure knowing beyond the division of subject and object; the soul, spirit and the animating principle of life; Brahman, the pure consciousness that lies behind all phenomena

Chitragupta – literally, 'secret picture'; the assistant of the god of death who records the inner thoughts, motivations and understandings; see Dharmaraj; see Yamaraj

Chitta – individual consciousness, including the subconscious and unconscious layers of mind; thinking, concentration, attention, enquiry; the stuff of the mind; storehouse of memory or samskaras; see antahkarana

Chikhai Bardo – the Bardo of the moments of death where one has the chance to immediately recognize the Clear Light and transcend the circle of life and death

Chonyid Bardo – the Bardo of experiencing reality, where karmic apparitions or inner tendencies, (perceived as deities in the Tibetan culture) appear if one has not recognized the Clear Light in the Chikhai Bardo

D

Dakshina marga – the southern path; the lower path, the path of darkness; the path that opens as the Sun heads south and the night lengthens; also known as Chandra Marga; see Pitriyana

Dama – control of the outer senses; self-command through self-restraint and curbing the passions; drawing the mind away from evil deeds; taming, subduing; punishment, fine; one of the sixfold virtues; see Shadsampatti

Danti – self-restraint; control of the mind

Darshana – a glimpse, seeing, observing; sight, vision; knowing, understanding; philosophical system of the vedic tradition, is based on revelations or truths 'seen' in a higher state of consciousness; a vision of reality glimpsed in meditation

Deva – luminous being; a god or divine being; inner power

Deva loka – plane of light; sphere of higher consciousness of existence; heaven

Devata – divine being representing the higher state of evolution; illumined form; divinity, deity

Devayana marga – the path of the gods, the path of light; see Uttara marga

Devi – female deity, goddess; name of Durga, Saraswati and others; see Shakta

Dharana – concentration or complete attention; sixth stage of ashtanga yoga described by Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as holding or binding of the mind to one point; bearing, supporting; moulding; keeping in memory; see Raja yoga

Dharma – the natural role we play in life; ethical law; duty; the laws or fundamental support of life; usage, practice, custom; religion; virtue, righteousness, good work; regarded as one of the four aims of human existence; see Purushartha

Dharmaraj – one of the names of the god of death, who represents dharma as the fundamental aim of an evolving soul in life and, once this is established, connects the soul with ritam and the cosmic dimension; see Yamaraj

Dosha – three humours of the body described in ayurveda: mucus (kapha), bile (pitta) and wind (vata). Their imbalance

prevents the flow of energy in sushumna nadi and thus one is bound to the dualities. Hatha yoga techniques are designed to correct this

Dhyana – spontaneous state after deep concentration; the seventh of the eight steps described in raja yoga; the intermediate internal process where the power of attention becomes so steadily fixed upon the object of meditation that other thoughts do not enter the mind; natural expression of the sattwic state; see Raja yoga; see Sattwa

Drashta – witness, uninvolved observer, onlooker, seer; the consciousness which knows what is going on; atman or purusha; see Sakshi

Duhkha – uneasy; difficult; unpleasant; grief, pain, suffering

Dwesha – repulsion; hatred, enmity, dislike; one of the five causes of suffering (kleshas); aversion to the unpleasant; see Klesha; see Raga

G

Ganesha – 'Lord of the ganas (Shiva's attendants)', name of the elephant-headed deity who is the auspicious son of Shiva and Parvati. Ganesha is the scribe of the *Mahabharata*, deity of mooladhara chakra and is regarded as the remover of obstacles and a god of fertility

Ganga – sacred river in India; the Ganges personified as a goddess, the eldest daughter of Himavat (the Himalayas)

Garbhagriha – the womb-house; a sacred and hidden place

Gargi – female sage whose questions and debates are recorded in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*

Garuda Purana – ancient scripture famous for the section dealing with death and the rites associated with death

Gita – song; name given to certain sacred writings in verses, but especially recognized as referring to the *Bhagavad Gita*

Granthi – psychic knot; the three granthis, viz. Brahma granthi, Vishnu granthi and Rudra granthis, on the sushumna nadi bind one to a limited state of consciousness

Griha – house

Grihastha ashrama – the second stage of life according to the ancient vedic ashrama tradition, i.e. household or married life from 25 to 50 years of age; see Ashrama

Guna – quality; attribute, characteristic or property of all creation. According to Samkhya philosophy, prakriti (cosmic primordial matter) is constituted of three different aspects called gunas, viz. sattwa, rajas and tamas. The three gunas undergo transformation from the unmanifest (avyakta) to the manifest (vyakta) state, produce matter and control it, thus creating the whole cosmos with all beings, time and space; strength; see Sattwa; see Rajas; see Tamas

Guru – one who dispels the darkness caused by ignorance (avidya); teacher of the science of ultimate reality who, because of extended practice and previous attainment of the highest states of meditation, is fit to guide others in their practice towards enlightenment

H

Hatha yoga – *Ha* represents the solar or pranic energy (pingala) and *tha* the psychic or lunar energy (ida) in the human body, and the union of these two forces is hatha yoga which specifically deals with practices for bodily purification and balancing the prana so that sushumna nadi opens, enabling samadhi

Havan – a fire ritual

Hiranyagarbha – the first formation from the formless; the golden egg or womb of creation; the cosmic subtle body; Brahma loka

Hridaya – heart; essential centre

I

Iccha – wish, desire; will

Iccha shakti – creative force or that desire which is the first manifestation of the greater mind; omnipotent desire-force

Ida nadi – channel of lunar energy between the left nostril and the base of the spine, governing the left side of the body and the right side of the brain. The ida energy flow criss-crosses

the spine through the major chakras between mooladhara and ajna, conducting the mental force, lunar force or chitta shakti. Ida nadi and its counterpart pingala nadi have been related to ascending and descending tracts of the autonomic nervous system; see Pingala nadi

Indra – king of the vedic gods, the ruler of heaven; lord of the senses; the mind or the soul; the rain god

Indriya – power, force; a god; sense organ, there are ten senses in total; see Jnanendriya; see Karmendriya

Indriya nigraha – skilful control of the senses

Isha – master, lord; name of an Upanishad; powerful, supreme; the all-pervasive deity of anahata chakra

Ishta – object of desire; the chosen ideal; the particular form of God one is devoted to; a sacrificial rite; beloved

Ishta devata – personal deity, one's favourite god, one's tutelary deity, the aspect of God which is dear to you; see Sakara Ishta

Ishwara – higher reality; unmanifest existence; non-changing; principle of higher consciousness; supreme being, lord, master

Ishwara pranidhana – cultivation of faith in the supreme or indestructible reality; complete dedication of one's actions and will to the Lord; see Niyama

J

Jagrat – first dimension of consciousness, witnessed by Vaishvanara according to the *Mandukya Upanishad*; state of consciousness related to the senses and the phenomenal material universe; normal waking consciousness

Jagrita – conscious mind; sense of awakening

Jagat – world; universe; the material dimension; living creatures that can move; wind

Jagat guru (Jagadguru) – one who removes the darkness from the world; world preceptor

Janah loka – plane of rishis and munis; one of the seven higher planes of consciousness; see Loka

Japa – to rotate or repeat continuously without a break; repetition of a mantra or name of God; see Ajapa japa; see Mantra

Jatismarana – remembrance of incidents of one's previous births (whether spontaneously or through special voluntary effort)

Jiva – principle of life, vital breath; individual or personal soul; life, existence; creature, living being; living, existing

Jiva loka – the world of living beings, mortals and earthly existence; mankind; another name for bhuh loka; see Loka

Jivanmukta – a soul who is liberated while living; a person who, being purified by true knowledge of the supreme reality, is freed from future births while yet embodied

Jivanmukti – final liberation in the present state of life; expanded state of awareness

Jivatma – individual or personal soul

Jnana – knowing, understanding; higher knowledge derived from meditation or from inner experience; wisdom

Jnana yoga – yoga of knowledge and wisdom attained through spontaneous self-analysis and investigation of abstract or speculative ideas; the path of knowledge; constant and serious thinking on the true nature of the self as taught by the guru; leading a discriminative lifestyle

Jnanendriya – sensory organ; five subtle organs of perception, viz. ears (karna or shrotra), skin (twacha), eyes (chakshus), tongue (jihva) and nose (nasika or ghrana); see Karmendriya; see Devata

Jnani – one who expresses wisdom in daily life

Jyoti – light, brightness, fire

Jyotisha – astronomy; the eye of the Vedas; a necessary tool to ascertain the auspicious times for different techniques, etc.; one of the six sciences auxiliary to the Vedas; the branch of vedanga that deals with astronomical and astrological matters with respect to vedic karma

K

Kaivalya – final liberation; that state of consciousness which is beyond duality; perfect isolation; final emancipation; nirvana; the state that unifies all differences

Kama (kaama) – emotional need for fulfilment; wish, object of desire; affection, love; the god of love; desire for sensual enjoyments considered as one of the four ends of life; see Purushartha; see Shadvairi

Karana – cause, reason; the unmanifested potential cause that in due time takes shape as the visible effect; material cause of the universe remaining during the period of dissolution

Karanasharira – causal body, the unconscious, also called the vijnanamaya kosha, when it is lit up by awareness it is the anandamaya kosha, the superconscious state experienced in samadhi; see Pancha kosha

Karma – action and result; action in the manifest and unmanifest dimension; work, deed; duty; sacrifice (yajna) at the physical level; law of cause and effect that shapes the destiny of each individual with actions inevitably bearing their fruit as the law operates inexorably throughout the universe; see Sanchita; see Prarabdha; see Agami; see Kriyamana

Karmakanda – the part of the Vedas that relates to sacrificial rules and ceremonial acts on the physical level and highlights the importance of performing one's duties

Karma marga – the path of a dynamic person leading towards self-realization through action

Karmashaya – deep layers of consciousness where the karmas are stored in the form of impressions, symbols or archetypes; repository of karma; aggregate of works done

Karma yoga – action performed with meditative awareness; yogic discipline based on the law of cause and effect; gaining immunity to karma by dedicating one's actions to God; actions performed unselfishly without attachment to the fruit of one's action and renouncing the doership

Karma yogi – one who practises karma yoga

Karmendriya – motor organs, five physical organs of action, viz. vocal cords (vach), hands (hasta), feet (pada), genital organ (upastha), anus (payu); see Jnanendriya; see Devata

Karta – doer, maker, creator, author, one who acts

Kartavya – performing action with knowledge; that which ought to be done; duty

Katha Upanishad – one of the principal Upanishads belonging to the *Taittiriya Brahmana* of the *Yajurveda*, written in verse and dialogue form, in which the seeker Nachiketa speaks with Yama, the god of death

Kena Upanishad – the guru explains Brahman as the source of life and the manifest universe. In story form, the false pride of other powers and of the gods is shown, encouraging the disciple to be resolute in the search for self-knowledge and Bramavidya, which purifies one so that rebirth is no longer necessary and one attains true immortality.

Klesha – pain, anguish, affliction, suffering, distress, trouble; five afflictions or causes of suffering described in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, viz. ignorance (avidya), ego or sense of doership (asmita), attraction (raga), aversion (dwesha) and fear of death (abhinivesha)

Kosha – body or realm of experience or existence; covering of the self which limits manifestation of the ultimate reality; sheath; vessel in general; see Pancha kosha

Krishna – black, dark, dark blue; eighth incarnation of Vishnu, who took birth in Dwapara Yuga as the son of Devaki. To uphold dharma he orchestrated the Mahabharata war. His teachings to his friend and disciple Arjuna during that war are immortalized in the *Bhagavad Gita*. He seems to be an historical figure, as his capital Dwarka has been discovered at its legendary site; see Avatara; see Bhagavad Gita

Kriya – action, in hatha yoga it refers to the cleansing practices

Kriyamana – literally, 'what is being done'; the effect of the deeds of the present life which are to be experienced in the future; the same as agami karma; see Karma

Kriya yoga – a system leading from pratyahara to dhyana. There are two major traditions: one propagated by the Paramahamsa Yogananda tradition, stemming from Babji, another by the Swami Satyananda Saraswati tradition, stemming from the Adi Shankarachaya. Sustained practice results in being stabilized in vijnanamaya kosha, it is designed to speed the evolution of humankind; see Vijnanamaya kosha

Krodha – anger, wrath, aggression; see Shadvairi

Kshatriya – the kingly or warrior caste, one of the four divisions of the caste system in India; one who protects others from injury; see Varna

Kundalini – literally, 'coiled' like a serpent; spiritual energy; evolutionary potential related to the capacity and consciousness of human beings; when the kundalini energy pierces through all the chakras and reaches sahasrara enlightenment takes place in life, one achieves moksha. and one is free from the samsara chakra

Kundalini shakti – Devi described as the potential energy of a human being dormant in mooladhara chakra, which, when awakened, works to awaken the chakras, resulting in progressive enlightenment; see Sushumna nadi

Kundalini yoga – path of yoga which awakens the dormant spiritual force

L

Linga – to be absorbed; mark, sign, characteristic; sign of gender, male organ; idol of Shiva; a naturally formed oval stone; an archetypal symbol; see Shivalingam

Lobha – greed, desire; see Shadvairi

Lila – playful action; diversion, pleasure; life

Loka – open space, place, region; plane of existence, dimension; the world, earth; people, humankind; of the 28 planes of consciousness or regions, the highest seven are called loka, viz. bhuh (or jiva), bhuvah, swah, mahah, janah, tapah and satya lokas; the next seven are chakra, the next seven patala and the lowest seven naraka; seven divine regions explained as being above sahasrara chakra; see Chakra

Lokasangraha – solidarity of the world; upliftment of society

M

Maha – great; noble

Mahabharata – epic of ancient India recorded by Vyasa, involving the history and consequences of the great battle between the five sons of Pandu (the Pandava) and the 100

sons of Dhritarashtra (the Kaurava). It consists of 18 sections and the *Bhagavad Gita* is a part of it; see Krishna

Mahabhuta, mahabhoota – the elements (space, air, fire, water and earth); see Pancha mahabhuta

Mahamrityunjaya mantra – the 'great victory over death' mantra, used to avoid calamities; a form of Shiva

Mahasamadhi – the great samadhi; final liberation experienced on the departure of the spirit from the body; death; see Samadhi

Mahatma – literally, 'great soul'; a title indicating respect

Mahavira – literally, 'great hero' the enlightened founder of the Jain tradition

Manas – finite mind, rational mind; the mind concerned with senses, thought and counter-thought; perception, intelligence

Mala – a garland or necklace; a rosary used in the practice of chanting mantras

Mandala – zone; orb, globe, wheel, ring, disc; troop, group; a division of the *Rigveda*; diagram within a circumference symbolizing the deeper aspects of the human psyche and capable of invoking cosmic power; complex symbol merging macrocosmic and microcosmic realities

Mandukya Upanishad – one of the major Upanishads which describes the three states of consciousness represented by the three sacred letters composing *Aum* and the fourth which unites yet transcends them; see Jagrat; see Swapna; see Sushupti; see Turiya

Manipura chakra – psychic and pranic centre situated behind the navel in the spinal column, corresponding to the solar plexus and associated with vitality and energy; centre of willpower; literally, 'city of jewels'; see Chakra; see Sankalpa

Manomaya kosha – mental sheath or body, investigated with the aid of pratyahara and dharana techniques; mental sphere of life and awareness; see Pancha kosha

Mantra – subtle sound vibration; tantric tool which liberates energy from the confines of mundane awareness and expands the consciousness when repeated; vedic hymn;

a sacred text; word of power; divine power transmitted through word; incantation

Mantra diksha – initiation through mantra

Markandeya – a rishi who was originally destined to have a very short life he steadfastly held on to his mantra and the Shivalingam when death approached. Lord Shiva blessed him so that he never reached the age at which he must die and he thus remained a child-rishi and became one who experiences no death. He is the author of the *Markandeya Purana*. See Chiranjeevi

Maya – the cause of the illusion of the phenomenal world due to two powers: the power of veiling (avarana shakti) and the power of projection (vikshepa shakti); made of, consisting of

Moha – delusion, error; infatuation; attachment; state of mind

Moksha – freedom, release; final emancipation, liberation from the wheel of births and deaths, the aim of yogic practices

Moola, mula – root; basis

Mooladhara chakra – the basic psychic and pranic centre in the human body situated in the perineum in men and the cervix in women and also connected to the coccygeal plexus, it is the seat of kundalini (the primal evolutionary energy in human beings); see Chakra; see Granthi

Mouna – silence; measured speech

Mudra – 'gesture'; physical, mental and psychic attitude which expresses and channels cosmic energy; psychophysiological posture, movement or attitude; the attitude of constant identification with the Self in sahasrara chakra; see Bandha

Mukta – liberated

Mukti – release, liberation; according to Vedanta, liberation is due to right knowledge, or intuition of truth (tattwa jnana); final absolution of the self from the chain of birth and death

Mumukshu – seeker of liberation

Mumukshutva – intense longing for liberation; fourth kind of necessary spiritual effort; see Sadhana Chatushtaya

Mundaka Upanishad – belongs to the *Atharva Veda* and teaches the difference between intellectual studies of the Vedas and intuitive knowledge

Muni – one who contemplates; one who maintains silence or stillness of mind; an ecstatic person; sage; ascetic

Murti – body; form, shape, figure, statue, person; symbol; idol

N

Nada – subtle sound vibration created by the union of Shiva and Shakti tattwas; subtle sound vibration heard in the meditative state; voice, sound, cry, roaring; the prolongation of the sound in mantras such as *Aum*; first vibration from which all creation has emanated; Aumkara (Omkara) or Shabda Brahman; the inner sound on which the yogi concentrates in meditation; flow

Nadi – a subtle river or stream of energy similar although not identical to the nerves in the physical body and the meridians used in acupuncture. The three most important nadis are ida, pingala and sushumna

Nadabindu Upanishad – one of the so-called 'minor' Upanishads and also one of the 22 Yoga Upanishads. It contains 56 slokas on *gupta vidya*, the secret wisdom, explaining the nature of *Aum* and its connection to *savisesha Brahman*, Brahman perceived to have special qualities

Nadanusandhana – nada means sound or vibration, anusandhana means exploration; a practice where one follows a particular sound vibration to its source and meditates on that; see *Aum*

Nigraha – skilful holding; balancing, controlling or managing

Nirakara Brahman – state of pure being without attributes or qualities

Niranjana – stainless, unstained, untainted; free from falsehood; pure, simple; an epithet of Brahman

Nirbija (nirbeeja) – seedless, without any seeds

Nirbija samadhi (nirbeeja samaadhi) – final state of samadhi in which there is absorption without seed; see Sabija samadhi

Nirguna – without quality or attribute, formless; see Saguna

Nirguna Brahman – Brahman without attributes or form; a state of pure being without qualities (gunas); see Saguna Brahman

Nishkama – selfless, unselfish; free from wish or desire, desireless; see Kama

Nishkama karma – action without expectation of fruits and done without personal interest or egoism. This type of action purifies the mind and heart without creating new bondage; see Karma yoga.

Niyama – observances or rules of personal discipline to render the mind tranquil in preparation for meditation; the second step of ashtanga yoga mentioned by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*; inner discipline; doctrine; restraint of the mind or self-purification by discipline

P

Padma – lotus, the form or figure of a lotus, the root of a lotus

Pancha – five

Panchagni – five fires

Panchagni vidya – knowledge or science of the five fires; esoteric explanation of five processes of sacrifice; sadhana of sitting in the middle of four burning fires with the summer sun of India acting as the fifth fire

Pancha klesha – five afflictions or causes of suffering described in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, viz. ignorance (avidya), ego or sense of doership (asmita), attraction (raga), aversion (dwesha), and fear of death (abhinivesha); see Klesha

Pancha kosha – five sheaths, bodies or realms of experience and existence, viz. 1. physical dimension (annamaya kosha), 2. mental dimension (manomaya kosha), 3. energetic and emotional dimension (pranamaya kosha), 4. intuitive dimension (vijnanamaya kosha), 5. blissful dimension (anandamaya kosha)

Pancha mahabhuta, pancha mahabhoota – the five gross or atomic states of nature, consisting of space (akasha), air (vayu), light or fire (agni), water (apas) and solids or earth (prithvi). They are an extension of the tanmatras into the physical world; see Vyakta

Pancha prana – five major divisions of the pranic energy located in the physical body, viz. apana, prana, samana, udana, vyana

Pancha tanmatra – five pre-atomic states of nature, viz. sound (shabda), touch (sparsha), form (roopa), taste (rasa) and smell (gandha). They are the subtle states of the physical mahabhuta: space, air, fire, water and earth

Pancha tattwa – the five elements; five elements of which the body consists; see Pancha mahabhuta

Pandit – priest; learned man; scholar; man of wisdom

Para – used in the *Bhagavad Gita* to indicate the supreme goal of life; distant, removed, remote; beyond; higher, superior; highest, greatest; predominant, principal

Parakayapravesha – the power by which the yogi can leave his/her own body and enter into another body

Para bhakti – supreme devotion (bhakti). It is said to accompany or follow the highest knowledge and be a state of consciousness which is self-contained; see Bhakti

Paramartha – transcendental reality; Reality; absolute truth; see Vyavahara

Paramguru – guru of the guru

Paramahamsa – literally, 'supreme swan', a swan is reputed to be able to separate milk from water, i.e. reality from unreality; one who controls or subdues their passions; a sage, an ascetic; title of a person in the fourth stage of consciousness; see Sannyasa

Paramahamsa sannyasa – a stage of sannyasa where, having completed one's work, one approaches the final goal of moksha or self-realization

Paramatma – cosmic soul or consciousness, supreme self; the atma (self or soul) of the entire universe, of the individual as well as of the cosmos; liberated state of the inner self

Parampara – tradition

Para vairagya – absence of attachment in any form; highest type or state of dispassion (vairagya); the mind turns away completely from worldly objects and cannot be brought back to them under any circumstances; renunciation of a liberated person in which no selfish motive can exert influence

Parjanya – the god of rain

Pashu – animal, brute, beast; often added to words meaning 'man' to show contempt; in tantra it refers to a person living at the instinctive animal level of consciousness

Pashupati – Lord of the Beasts; an epithet of Shiva showing his mastery of the lower instinctive nature

Patanjali – author of the *Yoga Sutras*; an ancient rishi who codified the meditative stages and states of samadhi into the system of raja yoga and is famous as the propounder of ashtanga yoga. According to many authorities, the same person was also the author of *Mahabhashya* (a classical treatise on Sanskrit grammar), a treatise on medicine

Pati – lord, ruler, husband

Phala – fruit; kernel; consequence, retribution, reward, punishment

Pingala nadi – a major pranic channel that flows from mooladhara chakra on the right, criss-crossing all the major chakras to ajna chakra. It conducts the dynamic pranic force manifesting as prana shakti, and governs the right nostril, the right side of the body and left side of the brain. It is associated with the mundane realm of experience and externalized awareness; see Ida nadi; see Sushumna nadi

Pisacha – name given to a human spirit still moving in an earthly ambit for twelve days after death

Pitri – forefathers; ancestors; a divine hierarchy of departed ancestors; a name given to the human spirit that moves on after the twelfth day

Pitriyana marga – the path of the ancestors, also known as the Dakshina marga

Pitri yajna – one of the daily sacrificial rites where offerings are made to gratify the ancestors; see Pancha mahayajna

Pooja, puja – honour, respect; rites; worship; see Yajna

Poornima – the full moon day when sadhana is considered to be very beneficial

Prajapati – a name for the creator of life with awareness; a name for Lord Shiva

Prajna – 1. knowledge with awareness; awareness of the one without a second; individual consciousness; 2. the seer who observes the state of deep sleep (sushupti)

Prakriti – individual nature; manifest and unmanifest nature; cosmic energy; source of the universe; consists of three aspects or qualities called gunas: sattwa, rajas and tamas. They remain unmanifest (avyakta) when in equilibrium, but when this equilibrium is disturbed by the proximity of the witnessing purusha consciousness, manifestation, creation and evolution set in; see Purusha

Prana – vital energy force, essence of life permeating both the macrocosmos and microcosmos; breath, respiration; principle of life; vital energy that functions in various ways for the preservation of the body and is closely associated with the mind; one of the five vital airs (pancha prana vayu), which operates in the region of the heart and lungs; see Pancha prana; see Vayu

Pranam – respectful greeting, it may be performed verbally, or by bowing the head with hands in prayer position, or by touching the feet

Pranamaya kosha – energy sheath, or vital or pranic body; the sheath (kosha) covering the self; see Pancha kosha; see Prana

Prana nigraha – holding energy skilfully; skilful energy control or management

Pranayama – a series of techniques using the breath to control the flow of prana within the body; expansion of the range of vital energy; a systematic and scientific breathing technique by which one can control, conduct and conquer the flow of the life-force in the body; in the Upanishads pranayama is said to have the ability to cut through mountains of karma

Pranava – another word for the sacred syllable *Aum* (*Om*), the primal sound vibration

Prarabdha karma – actions already performed which, like arrows shot from the bow, cannot be retrieved; that portion of one's actions which is bound to fructify in the present life and cannot be averted; see Karma

Prasthanatraya – the three authoritative landmarks in spiritual literature: the Upanishads, the *Brahma Sutras* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, on which Vedantic philosophy is based

Prashna – question

Prashna Upanishad – deals with six questions. The first three questions are about lower knowledge pertaining to this life and death, *apara vidya*, leading to the next three which are about *para vidya*, higher or transcendental knowledge, including knowledge of different states of consciousness, the mantra *Aum* and the distinction between the mortal and the immortal.

Pratyahara – drawing back, retreat; restraining the sensory and motor organs; withdrawal and emancipation of the mind from the domination of the senses and sensual objects; training the senses to follow the mind within; fifth stage of raja yoga; see Ashtanga yoga

Pratyaya – seeds or impressions which remain in the field of consciousness. While these remain one cannot attain nirbeeja samadhi, and one is brought back into the samsara chakra; deep impressions in the psyche which accompany the soul after death and influence events in future lives

Pravritti marga – path of extroversion; path of action of life in worldly society or according to the nature of the world

Preta – spirit, ghost; the name given to a spirit after the thirteenth day, at which time it needs to move away from earthly affairs

Prithvi – Earth, literally, 'the broad one'; earth, the solid state of matter, in Samkhya philosophy it is the fifth mahabhuta with the special property of smell; see Pancha mahabhuta

Purana – past event; ancient, old; name of a class of sacred texts composed by Rishi Vyasa containing the earliest mythology of the tantric and vedic traditions, viz. 1. *Brahma Purana*, 2. *Padma Purana*, 3. *Vishnu Purana*, 4. *Shiva Purana*, 5. *Bhagavata Purana*, 6. *Narada Purana*, 7. *Markandeya Purana*, 8. *Agni Purana*, 9. *Bhavishya Purana*, 10. *Brahmavaivarta Purana*, 11. *Linga Purana*, 12. *Varaha Purana*, 13. *Skanda*

Purana, 14. *Vamana Purana*, 15. *Kurma Purana*, 16. *Matsya Purana*, 17. *Garuda Purana*, 18. *Brahmanda Purana*

Purusha – literally, 'who dwells in the city', the body being the dormant receptacle of consciousness; male, man, mankind; the supreme being, God; see Prakriti

Purushartha – human attainment; the four goals to be fulfilled in life: 1. wealth (artha), 2. desire (kama), 3. duty (dharma) and 4. liberation (moksha)

Purushottama – 'highest purusha (supreme spirit)'; an epithet of Lord Rama who embodied the highest qualities in man

Putra – son, the one who conducts the last rites which guide the departed soul to higher dimensions and saves the soul from the hell called 'Put'

R

Raga – love, affection, passionate feeling; one of the five causes of affliction; being attracted and attached to what gives pleasure; a musical scale forming the basis for composition in classical Indian music; see Dwesha; see Klesha

Raja – king

Raja yoga – the royal yoga; yoga of awakening the psychic awareness and faculties through meditation; the scientific method of union with the supreme universal being through control of the mental processes; enquiry into the inner awareness of samadhi

Rajas – one of the three constituent qualities (gunas) of nature, all matter and ourselves; dynamism; state of activity; creativity combined with full ego involvement; ambition; emotion; restlessness; oscillation; as a personality trait it is expressed by the desire to dominate; see Guna

Rajasic – pertaining to rajas

Rama – the hero of the epics *Ramayana* and *Ramacharitamanasa*, the seventh incarnation of Vishnu as the son of Dasharatha and Kaushalya and disciple of Vishwamitra; beautiful, charming; obscure, dark-coloured, black; white; see Avatara

Ramayana – literally, 'the path of Rama', one of the most famous Indian epics

Rigveda – oldest of the four Vedas and the most ancient sacred book of the Hindus. It contains hymns to the deities or guardians of the law, such as Agni, Varuna, Indra and Mitra, and presents nature as an eternal force working in the interests of humanity; see Veda

Rishi – seer; realized sage; one who contemplates or meditates on the self; one who experiences other dimensions; see Loka

Ritam – cosmic law, cosmic dimension, cosmic experience

Rudra – howling energy; deity of manipura chakra; name of Lord Shiva in the *Rigveda* meaning 'He who proclaims himself aloud'; signifies transformation through dissolution

S

Sabija samadhi, sabeeja samadhi – with seed (sabija), the state of samadhi in which the seeds of desire remain in the mind, thus the seed of actions (karma) is not destroyed; see Nirbija samadhi; see Samadhi

Sachchidananda – the supreme reality as self-existent existence-consciousness-bliss; see Sat; see Chit; see Ananda

Sadhaka – one who practises sadhana; spiritual aspirant, seeker; one who is efficient, effective, skillful

Sadhana – fulfillment, accomplishment; implement, means of accomplishing anything; worship; spiritual practice or discipline performed regularly for the attainment of inner experience and self-realization

Sadhana chatushtaya – the four kinds of necessary spiritual effort, viz. 1. discrimination (viveka), 2. dispassion (vairagya), 3. the sixfold virtues (shadsampatti), 4. intense desire for liberation (mumukshutva); necessary qualifications for a student of Advaita Vedanta; see Shadsampatti

Sadhu – good, excellent, perfect; virtuous, righteous, honourable; kind; holy person; sage, saint; Jaina saint

Saguna – with qualities (guna)

Saguna Brahman – literally 'Brahman with qualities', indicating worship of the Supreme in a chosen form

Sahasrara chakra – the thousand-petalled lotus; abode of Shiva or superconsciousness; highest psychic centre, which

symbolizes the threshold between the psychic and spiritual realms and is located at the crown of the head; see Chakra

Sakara – with form; manifest

Sakara ishta – the preferred deity (ishta) with form; the form of the beloved

Sakshat – realized or experienced directly

Sakshi – eternal witness; witnessing principle; seer; that which observes the actions of the body, emotions, mind and the senses without being affected at all; see Drashta

Samadhana – maintaining awareness of the higher reality; one of the sixfold virtues; see Shadsampatti

Samadhi – culmination of meditation; state of unity with the object of meditation and the universal consciousness; self-realization; see Samprajnata samadhi; see Asamprajnata samadhi; see Sabija samadhi; see Nirbija samadhi

Samadhi prajna – higher knowledge attained through samadhi

Sama Veda – third of the vedic texts, the Veda of chants and hymns, it deals mainly with devotion, worship and contemplation; see Veda; see Chhandogya Upanishad

Samhita – collection of hymns, prayers and mantras, structured using rules of grammar and tone. They are called stotras, suktas, etc. and are chanted during sacrifice (yajna). They are the oldest part of the Vedas; see Veda

Samprajnata samadhi – samadhi with prajna (intuitive awareness); transcendental state. It alternates with asamprajnata samadhi and culminates in nirbija samadhi (samadhi with seed); see Asamprajnata samadhi

Samsara – illusory world, the manifest gross world; cycle of birth, death and rebirth, transmigration, metamorphosis, meta-psychosis; passage; the course or circuit of worldly life, secular life, mundane existence

Samsara chakra – the cycle of birth, death and rebirth,

Samsari – the transmigrating soul

Samskara – mental impression stored in the subtle body as an archetype; influence; patterns and mental impressions of the past, which remain unnoticed in the mind, yet set up impulses and trains of thought; unconscious memories;

impressions that do not fit into our present personality; impressions in the consciousness that form the future

Samyama – conscious oscillation of awareness between the states of dharana, dhyana and samadhi, which allows one to apply insights gained in samadhi to life

Sanatana dharma – system of eternal values underlying the vedic civilization

Sanchita karma – the sum total of all actions done by the living being (jiva) during countless previous births, out of which a portion is allotted for every new birth; see Karma

Sankalpa – will, volition, positive resolve; purpose, aim, intention; determination, conviction; desire, wish; thought, idea, reflection, fancy, imagination

Sankranti – the day on which the Sun, moon or any planet moves into the next zodiac sign

Sannyasa – dedication; complete renunciation of the world, its possessions and attachments; abandonment of the temporal; the fourth of four stations (ashramas) in the vedic concept of a full life

Sannyasa ashrama – traditionally the fourth stage of life for everyone from 75 years onwards; total renunciation; see Ashrama

Sannyasin – one who has taken sannyasa initiation; a yogi; one who is not dependent on the results of action

Santosha – contentment, satisfaction; one of the five niyamas enumerated by the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali; also known as the 'sword of Rama' due to its ability to cut through illusion (maya); see Niyama

Sanyam – self-restraint, self-discipline, mastery of one's behavior, perfection of concentration

Saraswati – goddess of knowledge, speech and learning; speech, voice, words; sushumna nadi; soma; one of the 10 orders of sannyasins founded by Adi Shankaracharya, which is dedicated to preserving spiritual wisdom

Sarva – everything

Sarvajna – omniscient, knowing everything

Sat – true; that which really exists; entity; essence; in Vedanta, one of the three attributes of the ultimate existence or reality

Sat guru – guru who directs the disciple towards the truth (sat); the dispeller of darkness and ignorance (avidya); inner guru

Sat Chandi Mahayajna – a powerful fire sacrifice performed in honour of the goddess Chandi

Sat karma – right action

Sat vichara – right thinking, enquiry into the real nature of things, expression of what is real

Sat vyavahara – right behaviour, expressing the truth in daily conduct

Satsang – gathering in which the ideals and principles of truth are discussed; association with the wise and the good, along with the resolve and effort to express this in life

Sattwa – one of the three constituent qualities (gunas) of nature, all matter and ourselves; state of luminosity, harmony, equilibrium, steadiness and purity; being, existence, reality, true essence; sattwa binds one by attachment to goodness and learning, but one established in sattwa is close to transcendence; life, spirit; consciousness; see Guna

Sattwic – pertaining to sattwa

Satya – real, genuine; honest, sincere, faithful; virtuous, upright; absolute truth; reality; one of the yamas described by Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, it leads to a state where actions are based on and culminate in the truth; a vow to follow truth and renounce untruth in thought, word and action; see Yama

Satya loka – one of the seven higher dimensions of consciousness; also called Brahma loka; see Loka

Satyam – the unchanging principle; the relative aspect of creation perceptible by the senses and understood by the mind; truth; sincerity; goodness, virtue, purity

Shabda Brahman – the Vedas; spiritual knowledge conveyed in words; knowledge of the supreme existence or the spirit; the eternal sound that is the first manifestation of reality and lies at the root of all subsequent creation; see Om; see Nada; see Veda

Shad, shat – six

Shadripu –six enemies; see Shadvairi

Shadsampatti – one of the four necessary qualifications for a serious spiritual aspirant according to *Aparokshanubhuti* of Adi Shankaracharya, literally it means 'sixfold virtues': 1. equanimity (shama), 2. self-control (dama), 3. sensory withdrawal (uparati), 4. endurance (titiksha), 5. faith (shraddha), 6. constant concentration on reality (samadhana); see Sadhana chatushtaya

Shadvairi – six inner 'enemies' of man, viz. 1. lust (kama), 2. anger (krodha), 3. greed (lobha), 4. delusion (moha), 5. arrogance (mada), 6. jealousy (matsarya)

Shakti – primal energy; manifest consciousness; power, ability, capacity, strength, energy; counterpart of Shiva; the moving power of nature and consciousness; in Hindu mythology Shakti is often symbolized as a divine woman; see Shiva

Shama – maintaining equanimity; one of the sixfold virtues; see Shadsampatti

Shankara – name of Shiva, referring to his auspicious nature; a short name of Shankaracharya, an avatara of Lord Shiva

Shanti – pacification, allayment, removal; peace, calmness, tranquillity, quiet, ease, rest; cessation, end; absence of passion, complete indifference to all worldly enjoyment

Shaucha – cleanliness of the body and mind, purity (internal and external); one of the niyamas as described by Patanjali in the ashtanga yoga of the *Yoga Sutras*; see Niyama

Shiva – 'auspicious one' or 'good'; name of the god of the sacred Hindu trinity who is entrusted with the work of destruction, as Brahma and Vishnu are with the creation and preservation of the world; destroyer of ego and duality; the first or original yogi; cosmic consciousness, counterpart of Shakti; see Rudra; see Tantra

Shivalingam – black oval-shaped stone (those occurring naturally in the Narmada river are especially revered); symbol of Lord Shiva; symbol of consciousness; see Linga

Shivoham – 'I am Shiva', an ancient mantra

Shraaddha – commemorative religious rites performed in honour of the departed souls of relatives

Shraddha – trust, faith, belief, confidence; belief in divine revelation, religious faith; composure of mind; respect, reverence; one of the sixfold virtues; see Shadsampatti

Shudra – one of the four varnas or divisions of the caste system in India; in the *Rigveda* it refers to the soul yet to be purified by samskaras; see Samskara; see Varna

Shvetashvatara Upanishad – *shveta* means pure, *ashva* represents the senses. This Upanishad combines Vedanta and yoga, teaching that one who is not distracted by the senses, and sees the Brahman as the source of all manifestation, can be freed from the chain of the circles of life and death

Siddha – perfected being; sage, seer; semi-divine being of great purity and holiness; accomplished soul particularly characterized by eight supernatural faculties called siddhis

Siddhi – accomplishment; control of mind and prana; psychic abilities; eight supernatural powers obtained by yogis as a result of long practice associated with opening of the chakras and the resultant power over the elements. Other siddhis include the power of entering other bodies, the ability to read another person's thoughts, clairvoyance, clairaudience, omniscience, effulgence, vanishing from sight, etc. They are considered to be obstacles on the path to realization because they maintain interest in samsara

Sidpa Bardo – the Bardo of the after-death world and the process of rebirth

Sita – literally, 'a furrow'; as a baby she was found in a furrow and became the adopted daughter of Janaka and the wife of Rama. Sita is the heroine of the epic *Ramayana*, who remained faithful and undaunted though captured by terrorists (Ravana) and maligned by evil-thinking people

Soma – the moon, the nectar of the gods, the name of a plant that was an important ingredient in ancient sacrificial rituals inducing divine intoxication

Sthitaprajna – one whose wisdom is firmly established and does not waver (due to fluctuations of the gunas), who is unmoved by the dualities of pleasure and pain, gain and loss, joy and

sorrow, victory and defeat and is unshakably established in superconsciousness; stabilized consciousness

Sukha – happiness, delight, joy, suitability, comfort

Sukshma – subtle; relating to the world of the psyche

Sukshma sharira – subtle body or part of the subconscious which manifests in the dream state; the subtle aspects of pranamaya, manomaya and vijnanamaya koshas which accompany the soul after death; see Kosha

Sumerini – a small mala often worn on the wrist; see Mala

Surya – sun; vital pranic energy; the sun god; symbol of the atma

Sushumna nadi – central energy flow (nadi) in the spine which conducts the kundalini or spiritual force from mooladhara chakra to sahasrara chakra. It is the main energy flow related to transcendental awareness and opens when balance is achieved between ida and pingala nadis or 'internal and external experience.' When the prana is raised from mooladhara through sushumna and departs from the body through sahasrara at the time of death, one experiences liberation. See Moksha

Sushupti – third dimension of consciousness, witnessed by prajna according to the *Mandukya Upanishad*; deep sleep or unconscious realm of mind; profound repose undisturbed by the senses

Sutra – a brief statement which explains the ancient spiritual texts; thread, string, line, cord, fibre; short rule or precept; aphorism or condensed statements strung together to give an outline of a philosophy

Swa – one's own innate, real force; soul, self

Swabhava – one's own nature

Swadharma – one's own duty in life; one's own real nature

Swadhisthana chakra – literally, 'one's own abode'; psychic and pranic centre situated at the base of the spinal column in the lumbar region (level of the generative organs), associated with the storehouse of subconscious impressions; see Chakra

Swadhyaya – self-study; continuous conscious awareness of what one is doing; one of the niyamas recommended by

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*; education of the self; study of the scriptures and texts of yoga and self-knowledge; see Niyama

Swah loka – one of the seven higher dimensions of consciousness; see Loka

Swami – literally, 'mastery over the mind'; master of the self; title of sannyasins; an honorific denoting respect; see Sannyasa

Swapna – second dimension of consciousness, witnessed by taijasa according to the *Mandukya Upanishad*; subconscious realm of mind, state of dreaming

T

Taittiriya Upanishad – an Upanishad of the *Krishna Yajur Veda* in the form of a lesson to a student. The first chapter, *Siksha Valli*, is on right education, the second, *Brahmananda Valli*, is on bliss, and the third *Bhrigu Valli* is the story of the learning of Varuna's son Bhrigu

Tamas – one of the three constituent qualities (gunas) of nature (prakriti), all matter, and ourselves; inertia, stability, stillness; ignorance, darkness; the gloom or darkness of hell; mental darkness; illusion, error; unwillingness to change; see Guna

Tamasic – pertaining to tamas

Tantra – most ancient universal science and culture which deals with the transition of human nature from the present level of evolution and understanding to a transcendental level; loom, thread; science forming a set of rules for ritual worship, discipline, meditation and the attainment of supernatural powers; from the roots tanoti (to expand) and trayate (to liberate)

Tantric – belonging to tantra which is a path of sadhana laying great stress upon repetition of mantras and other esoteric meditations

Tapas – austerity; process of burning the impurities; heat, fire; suffering; penance; meditation connected with the practice of personal self-denial; cleansing for the perfection of body and senses; one of the five niyama described by the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali; see Niyama

Tapasya – practice of austerity

Taraka – ferrying, carrying over; rescuing, protecting, preserving; ferrying one across the ocean of samsara

Taraka Brahman – *Aum*

Tarpan – a ritual in which water, or honey, rice and sesame seeds and so forth, are offered to the ancestors

Tat – that; That (Brahman); the beyond; other than 'this'

Tattwa – 'that-ness'; the truth about something, or the thing-in-itself; an element; essence, truth, reality; principle, category; in Samkhya 25 tattwas are mentioned, and five of these: earth, water, fire, air and space, the pancha mahabhuta, are often referred to as the five tattwas; the real nature of the human soul and the material world as being identical with the supreme spirit pervading the universe

Titiksha – endurance with no complaint; one of the sixfold virtues; see Shadsampatti

Trataka – to gaze steadily; a yogic practice for developing concentration and extra-sensory perception

Trayi – the three Vedas taken collectively (the *Rigveda*, *Sama Veda* and *Yajurveda* are the three original, ancient and most revered Vedas, with the *Atharva Veda* being a relatively later addition); a triad; a triplet; intellect, understanding

Tulsi – the holy basil plant of India; a herb with many healing capacities; the wood is considered to be very pure and is made into rosary beads (mala) used for mantra japa

Turiya – fourth dimension of consciousness, witnessed by atma according to the *Mandukya Upanishad*; superconsciousness; simultaneous awareness of the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind thus transcending them

Turiyatita, turiyateeta – 'beyond the fetters of nature'; the fifth stage of sannyasa; see Sannyasa

Turiyavastha – the fourth state of existence, combining yet transcending the other three states of waking, dreaming and sleeping, and related to the full understanding or reverberation of the mantra *Aum* according to the *Mandukya Upanishad*; the state of samadhi; see Atma; see Avasthatraya

Tyaga – renunciation or gradual dissociation of the mind from worldly objects and the seeds of desire; leaving, separation; resigning, renouncing; giving away as charity; generosity

U

Upadesha – instruction, teaching, advice, communication of an initiatory mantra or formula

Upanishad – literally, 'to sit near and listen (to the spiritual teacher)'; ancient vedic text containing intimate dialogues and discussions between guru and disciple on the nature of the absolute and the path leading towards it; Vedantic texts conveyed by ancient sages and seers containing their experiences and teachings on the ultimate reality

Uparati – desisting from worldliness; ceasing, stopping; death; abstaining from sexual enjoyment; indifference; one of the sixfold virtues; see Shadsampatti

Upasana – personalized form of worship; sitting near, worshipping or contemplating on God or a deity; devout meditation

Uttara marga – higher path; the path which opens when the Sun heads north and days become longer; path of the gods as opposed to the path of darkness or the path of the ancestors; see Devayana marga; see Pitriyana marga

V

Vairagya – non-attachment, dispassion, detachment from the world and its cause; lower (apara), when it denotes detachment from the objects of pleasure, and higher (para), when a cleansing detachment from prakriti due to attraction to purusha; see Sadhana chatushtaya; see Para vairagya

Vaishvanara – the seer who observes the manifest universe or the external, waking consciousness (jagrat), the first state of consciousness discussed in the *Mandukya Upanishad* as relating to the 'A' of *Aum*; a name according to Vedanta philosophy for an individual in the gross (waking) state, where reality appears through the veil of an individual gross body; epithet of the god of fire; general consciousness; the sum total of created beings; see Jagrita; see Jagrat

Vaishya – one of the four divisions of the caste system (varnas) in India, those who specialize in trade or undertake the responsibility of caring for society

Vanam – forest

Vanaprastha ashrama – third stage of life, traditionally from 50 to 75 years of age, where one retires from worldly life in order to practise sadhana in relative seclusion; see Ashrama

Varna – colour, hue; class of men, tribe, caste (especially applied to the four principal castes); race, kind, species; groups of letters in the Sanskrit alphabet; colour of a mantra

Varuna – a name of the rain god, and regent of the ocean; the ocean; the firmament

Vasana – knowledge derived from memory; ignorance; wish, desire, inclination; a tendency created in a person by performing an action or by enjoyment, which then induces the person to repeat the action or enjoyment; subtle impressions acting like seeds in the mind capable of germinating into action; the cause of birth and experience in general; passion

Vasishtha – a celebrated sage or seer (brahmarishi), the family priest of the solar race of kings, the family guru of Sri Rama, and the author of *Yoga Vasishtha* and several vedic hymns, particularly the seventh mandala of the *Rigveda*.

Vayu tattwa – air element; see Pancha mahabhuta

Veda – knowledge; sacred knowledge, holy learning; the most ancient and authentic scripture of the Sanatana dharma composed before 5,000 BCE, revealed to sages and seers and expressing knowledge of the whole universe. They are what is heard or revealed (shruti), as distinguished from that constructed from memory (smriti); see Rigveda; see Yajurveda; see Sama Veda; see Atharva Veda; see Samhita; see Aranyaka; see Brahmana; see Upanishad

Vibhooti – sacred ash; outer expression of the inner reality; supernatural powers acquired by a yogi in the course of the journey towards perfection through purification of the mind; prosperity, welfare

Vichara – reflection; enquiry into the nature of the self, Brahman or truth; contemplation on the real and the unreal

Vidya – from the root 'vid' or inner knowledge; knowledge, learning, lore, science; higher knowledge, spiritual knowledge; a spell, an incantation; the goddess Durga; see Avidya

Vijnana – intuitive ability of mind; essential knowledge, higher understanding; the principle of pure intelligence; discrimination, discernment; secular knowledge of the self; science

Vijnanamaya kosha – astral or psychic (higher mental) sheath or body (kosha); one of the sheaths of the soul, consisting of intuition. Awakening this kosha leads to awareness of the subtler levels of our own existence with vision, intuition, wisdom and power of understanding; see Karana sharira; see Pancha kosha

Vikara – phenomena

Vishuddhi chakra – literally, 'centre of purification', the psychic and pranic centre located at the level of the throat pit or the thyroid gland. It is the psychic centre particularly connected with purification and communication; see Chakra

Viveka – sense of discrimination between the self and the not-self, between the eternal and the transitory, between consciousness and unconsciousness, between prakriti and purusha; judgement; consideration, discussion, investigation; distinction, difference; true knowledge; see Sadhana chatushtaya

Vritti – whirlpool, circle

Vyakta – manifest, seen; manifest universe

Vyasa – name of a great sage who wrote the *Brahma Sutra* and the *Mahabharata* (which includes the *Bhagavad Gita)*, and codified the four Vedas, etc.; also called Rishi Apantaratamas, Krishnadvaipayana, Rishi Veda Vyasa and Badarayana, and considered to be an avatara of Lord Vishnu

Vyavahara – behaviour; worldly activity, relative activity as opposed to absolute being; phenomenal world

Vyavaharika satta – empirical reality

Y

Yajna, yajana – sacrifice or sacrificial rite; vedic sacrifice; offering oblations to the fire; see Yajurveda

Yajurveda – literally, 'knowledge of sacrifice'; Veda containing all the rituals, mantras, karmas and resulting fruits or effects of karmas (karmaphala) relating to sacrifice. The second of the four principal Vedas, it is a collection of sacred texts in prose relating to sacrifices; see Veda; see Brihadaranyaka Upanishad; see Kathopanishad; see Yajna

Yama – self-restraints or rules of conduct which render the emotions tranquil; the first means of attaining samadhi in the ashtanga yoga of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*; ethical disciplines transcending creed, country, age and time; restraint, forbearance, self control; any great moral or religious duty or observance

Yamaraj – one of the names of the god of death who represents self-restraint, universal moral commandments and righteousness. Yamaraj connects one with satyam, truth and righteous living leading to auspicious rebirth; the planet Saturn; see Dharmaraj; see Kathopanishad

Yantra – geometric symbol designed for concentration or meditation to unleash the hidden potential within the consciousness; visual form of mantra used for concentration and meditation; astronomical diagram; an amulet; that which restrains or fastens; the house or vehicle of a power

Yatra – going on a pilgrimage; a journey; march of an army, expedition, invasion; kind of dramatic entertainment, festival, fair, festive or solemn occasion; course of time

Yoga – the root is 'yuj', meaning 'to join, to yoke, to concentrate one's attention'; a method of practice leading to conscious union of the human being (atman) with the universal existence or Brahman; practices, philosophy and lifestyle to achieve peace, power and spiritual wisdom as well as perfect health, a sound mind and a balanced personality

Yoga brashta – yoga aspirants who have not been able to maintain their practice or vows or who have fallen from

the path, but who have nevertheless accrued positive yogic samskaras that help in future lives

Yoga nidra – yogic sleep or psychic sleep, a systematic practice of relaxation distilled from tantra by Swami Satyananda Saraswati, in which one stays alert and aware past the point where one usually loses consciousness and falls asleep. It can lead from pratyahara to samadhi

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Swami Yogakanti has been studying and teaching yoga for the past 40 years.

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Yoga philosophy and the study of Sanskrit have been areas of special interest and Swami Yogakanti continues to contribute her extensive knowledge to many of the ashram publications.

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As the tile *Life and Death – Full Circle* suggests, this book looks at the full picture of human experience. Traditions of all times emphasize that a change in attitude is necessary to journey through life with peace and harmony and to prepare for the onward journey past the gates of death.

The book concludes with meditations given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati which purify one's intentions and give strong, resilient and positive samskaras, uplifting life after life.

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ISBN : 978-81-943598-9-0

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