

## Understanding Death by Paramahansa Yogananda

*Excerpts from the book "Where there is Light"*

Though the ordinary man looks upon death with dread and sadness, those who have gone before know it as a wondrous experience of peace and freedom.

At death, you forget all the limitations of the physical body and realize how free you are. For the first few seconds there is a sense of fear — fear of the unknown, of something unfamiliar to the consciousness. But after that comes a great realization: the soul feels a joyous sense of relief and freedom. You know that you exist apart from the mortal body.

Every one of us is going to die someday, so there is no use in being afraid of death. You don't feel miserable at the prospect of losing consciousness of your body in sleep; you accept sleep as a state of freedom to look forward to. So is death; it is a state of rest, a pension from this life. There is nothing to fear. When death comes, laugh at it. Death is only an experience through which you are meant to learn a great lesson: you cannot die.

Our real self, the soul, is immortal. We may sleep for a little while in that change called death, but we can never be destroyed. We exist, and that existence is eternal. The wave comes to the shore, and then goes back to the sea; it is not lost. It becomes one with the ocean, or returns again in the form of another wave. This body has come, and it will vanish; but the soul essence within it will never cease to exist. Nothing can terminate that eternal consciousness.

Even a particle of matter or a wave of energy is indestructible, as science has proved; the soul or spiritual essence of man is also indestructible. Matter undergoes change; the soul undergoes changing experiences. Radical changes are termed death, but death or a change in form does not change or destroy the spiritual essence.

The body is only a garment. How many times you have changed your clothing in this life, yet because of this you would not say that you have changed. Similarly, when you give up this bodily dress at death you do not change. You are just the same, an immortal soul, a child of God.

The word “death” is a great misnomer, for there is no death; when you are tired of life, you simply take off the overcoat of flesh and go back to the astral world.

The *Bhagavad Gita* speaks beautifully and solacingly of the immortality of the soul:

*Never the spirit was born; the spirit shall cease to be never;*

*Never was time it was not; End and Beginning are dreams!*

*Birthless and deathless and changeless remaineth the spirit forever;*

*Death hath not touched it at all, dead though the house of it seems.*

Death is not the end: it is temporary emancipation, given to you when karma, the law of justice, determines that your present body and environment have served their purpose, or when you are too weary or exhausted by suffering to bear the burden of physical existence any longer. To those who are suffering, death is resurrection from the painful tortures of flesh into awakened peace and calmness. To the elderly, it is a pension earned by years of struggling through life. For all, it is a welcome rest.

When you reflect that this world is filled with death, and that your body, too, has to be relinquished, God’s plan seems very cruel. You can’t imagine that He is merciful.

But when you look at the process of death with the eye of wisdom, you see that after all it is merely a thought of God passing through a nightmare of change into blissful freedom in Him again. Saint and sinner alike are given freedom at death, to a greater or lesser degree according to merit. In the Lord’s dream astral world — the land to which souls go at death — they enjoy a freedom such as they never knew during their earthly life.

So don’t pity the person who is passing through the delusion of death, for in a little while he will be free. Once he gets out of that delusion, he sees that death was not so bad after all. He realizes his mortality was only a dream and rejoices that now no fire can burn him, no water can drown him; he is free and safe.

The consciousness of the dying man finds itself suddenly relieved of the weight of the body, of the necessity to breathe, and of any physical pain. A sense of soaring through a tunnel of very peaceful, hazy, dim light is experienced by the soul. Then the soul drifts into a state of oblivious sleep, a million times deeper and more enjoyable than the deepest sleep experienced in the physical body....

The after-death state is variously experienced by different people in accordance with their modes of living while on earth. Just as different people vary in the duration and depth of their sleep, so do they vary in their experiences after death. The good man who works hard in the factory of life goes into a deep, unconscious, restful sleep for a short while. He then awakens in some region of life in the astral world: "In my Father's house are many mansions."

Souls in the astral region are clothed in gossamer light. They do not encase themselves in bundles of bones with fleshly covers. They carry no frail, heavy frames that collide with other crude solids and break. Therefore, there is no war in the astral land between man's body and solids, oceans, lightning, and disease. Nor are there accidents, for all things coexist in mutual helpfulness, rather than antagonism. All forms of vibration function in harmony with one another. All forces live in peace and conscious helpfulness. The souls, the rays on which they tread, and the orange rays they drink and eat, all are made of living light. Souls live in mutual cognizance and cooperation, breathing not oxygen, but the joy of Spirit.

"Friends of other lives easily recognize one another in the astral world," **Sri Yukteswar** said.

"Rejoicing at the immortality of friendship, they realize the indestructibility of love, often doubted at the time of the sad, delusive partings of earthly life."

How glorious is life after death! No more will you have to lug about this old baggage of bones, with all its troubles. You will be free in the astral heaven, unhindered by physical limitations.

When a dear one dies, instead of grieving unreasonably, realize that he has gone on to a higher plane at the will of God, and that God knows what is best for him. Rejoice that he is free. Pray that your love and goodwill be messengers of encouragement to him on his forward path. This attitude is much more helpful. Of course, we would not be human if we did not miss loved ones; but in feeling

lonesome for them we don't want selfish attachment to be the cause of keeping them earthbound. Extreme sorrow prevents a departed soul from going ahead toward greater peace and freedom.

To send your thoughts to loved ones who have passed on, sit quietly in your room and meditate upon God. When you feel His peace within you, concentrate deeply at the Christ center, the center of will at the point between the two eyebrows, and broadcast your love to those dear ones who are gone.

Visualize at the Christ center the person you wish to contact. Send to that soul your vibrations of love, and of strength and courage.

If you do this continuously, and if you don't lose the intensity of your interest in that loved one, that soul will definitely receive your vibrations. Such thoughts give your loved ones a sense of well-being, a sense of being loved. They have not forgotten you any more than you have forgotten them.

Send your thoughts of love and goodwill to your loved ones as often as you feel inclined to do so, but at least once a year — perhaps on some special anniversary. Mentally tell them, “We will meet again sometime and continue to develop our divine love and friendship with one another.” If you send them your loving thoughts continuously now, someday you will surely meet them again. You will know that this life is not the end, but merely one link in the eternal chain of your relationship with your loved ones.