

## What is the meaning of Death in Vedanta?

**Bill (Name was changed):**

Hi Tan.

I have found out this week that my sister is dying of cancer and may have less than two weeks to live. She lives 300 miles from me, but I am hoping to be able to go and see her after Tuesday.

Janice is 62 years old and is a devout Catholic.

How can I support her and the family through this difficult time?

How can I practise in the period leading up to her death and after?

Love,

Bill

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**Tan:**

Dear Bill,

I am sorry to hear that your sister's body has cancer.

**Bill: How can I support her and the family through this difficult time?**

**Tan:**

The best support you can give her and the family is by being fully available to them and fully attending to the situation and them. Why is this the best support? Full attention, undivided attention is the equivalent to love. If attention is undivided, there is no distance between yourself and the object of attention. No distance means love. If love guides your actions, they will be always adequate to the situation.

In order to be able to give her and the family your full attention and serve the situation fully without interference of your own personal fears and needs, you will have to be clear about what death means to you.

In order to be fully attentive your fears, ideas or misconceptions about (your) death have to be identified, evaluated and laid to rest.

This requires a practice of discrimination. You have formulated this in your second question and I will answer it below. But a couple of things first:

Most people who grieve, who are full of discomfort when facing the death of a loved one or known one, actually fear their own death and not necessarily the death of the other. This is egoistic fear and has nothing to do with attention for your loved one. The imminent death of a known person makes them uncomfortable because it reminds them of their own death.

Once you have understood what death means for you and you have been able to end grieving about “your death”, you will have the capacity to be fully attentive to your sister and the family.

Full undivided attention -undivided love-, is the best way to support her and them.

Now to your second question of how to practice and be able to discriminate and understand what death means.

**Bill: How can I practise in the period leading up to her death and after?**

Let us examine together what death means in Vedanta. By contemplating on this knowledge you can practice this knowledge.

The practice of discriminating what you are and what you are not will make it clear what dies and what not.

Death in Vedanta means change. Everything that is born will die. Everything that arises will disappear again back to where it came. The wave will arise, grow and will fall back into the Ocean.

Let us explain this further by looking at the physical body meaning the Gross Body in Vedanta.

## **Will the physical body, the Gross Body, die?**

Yes, it is clear that the Gross Body, the physical body, dies. Dying actually means that it is constantly changing into another form. Where is the body of baby Bill? It is gone. It has changed from baby to Bill, the young boy. The “baby” has died. What happened to the body of the young boy? It has changed to the body of the man. The young boy has died. An individual person such as “Bill” only apparently seems to survive because of memory and the fact that the ego in the Subtle Body claims ownership of the memory and identifies with it. Each moment since birth the Gross Body has changed and has died moment by moment. In the end the Gross Body will also merely change again as it always has done into earth, dust and will become mere nourishment for other physical forms. That is also why it is called the food sheath (*Annamaya Kosha*)

Are you the physical body?

No, you are not.

## **Does the Subtle Body die?**

The Subtle Body consists of the mind, the centre of feelings, the Intellect, the center of thoughts and the ego, the sense of doership. The Subtle Body driven by the *Vasanas* and by memory creates the waking state world and the dream world in consciousness, meaning you.

What about the waking state world? The waking state world changes into the dream world. The dream state world changes into the waking state world.

Let us say that you lead a totally different life in your dream state world. Let us say you have a different body, gender, and job and have different friends. If your friend in the dream world becomes terminally ill you may grieve in the dream world. But what happens in the waking state, once you are awake? Will you grieve about your dream friend? No you will not.

If you are in the dream state and you have a completely different dream life and have no sister in the dream. Will you grieve about a sister that you never had? No very probably not.

How real are these two states? They are not real. They are only an appearance.

In the Bhagavad Gita therefore Krishna says in Chapter 2 Verse 16:

*„What is unreal never exists. What is real never ceases to exist. This is the knowledge that sets you free. “*

And if we further examine deep sleep, we can see that the mind, the intellect and the ego vanish in deep sleep. This means that the Subtle Body, the source of individuality, dies in deep sleep. Every day the person dies in deep sleep and is born again in the dream state and in the waking state. How real is that person?

Actually the Subtle Body changes from moment to moment and therefore dies every moment to be reborn every moment.

And what is our recollection of deep sleep which is the closest approximation to the death of the individual person which we fear so much?

It is Bliss. Deep sleep which grants limitlessness and no boundaries of any kind is experienced as total bliss.

So is there a reason for grief?

Krishna answers this question in the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2 Verse 11:

*“The wise grieve neither for the dead, nor for the living. „*

He continues in the next verse:

*„There was never a time that I did not exist, nor you nor these kings. Nor will any of us cease to exist in the future. “*

If you continue to contemplate on this and practice self-knowledge as we have discussed in our last email conversation, you will understand that what you and your sister are – Consciousness- will never cease to exist. The wave falls back into the Ocean. But you are water, you are consciousness, and thus are independent of the fate of the wave. This understanding will set you free and then you will be the best support for your sister and the family.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask. May God bless you and your family with strength and love during this time.

With Love

Tan

**Bill :**

Hi Tan.

Thank you for this. It was very helpful. My sister died on Wednesday.

Love,

Bill