

TRAINING TO DIE AWAKE

Deborah Jones

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There's a rigor, and there's a letting go.*



The Tibetan Buddhist tradition teaches that when the body dies, something continues. And that something which continues is your consciousness – an individuated spark of divine life that precedes birth into form and transcends the cessation of breath in the body. Most spiritual traditions make reference to this “something”; be it your Soul, your Life Force, your Divine Nature, Atman, Higher Self, Spirit... and many other names you can likely recite

This article does not attempt to defend or prove that such an essence animates the human body (and all life on this planet), that it exists or doesn't exist, that it continues beyond a declaration of *clinically dead* or ceases to “be” when the brain dies or the heart stops. Rather this article presents the time-tested statement that you can prepare your thinking mind, your emotions and your inner countenance to open to death when it arrives so this inevitable transition occurs with ease and offers benefit.

Dying awake is a journey rather than a single moment during the dying process. As in meditation, there is a time of inner preparation, a time of tending the practice carefully with concentration, a time of accessing greater clarity rather than dullness, and a time when all tended attention gives way to an open state where meditation becomes no-thing. Training to die awake is similar in both its focus and purposefulness. There's a rigor, and there's a letting go.

Training to be present to every movement in the journey of dying and death is the ultimate training for both enlightenment and for living a purposeful life of kindness and peace. Culturized to ignore and even fear death, we act as if it's going to happen to everyone else except me, knowing all the while that death of our bodies is inevitable. And we fail to realize that we can prepare for the liberation of our consciousness, embracing the moment of transference from form into formless as yet another birth. Why wouldn't we want to be awake for that celebration?

Shelves of books are now available on dying, from ancient wisdom teachings to direct experiences of individuals who used death as their teacher. Yet still at the eighth gate (crown chakra), when Mystery School students hear this proclamation, "You are dying and you have 24 hours to train for your death", there is often shock and misgiving. But let's face it. It's happening. We are all dying, without knowing when or where.

The reasons for training to die awake are both simple and complex. Let's begin with a few simple suppositions and see where they take us. When you go to sleep at night, does your mind go to sleep? For those who recall their dreams they would quickly say, "No. My mind continues to use the more subtle material of the dreamscape to create yet another reality." This is true. In fact, when we are dreaming and the mind is less tethered to the density of body, it creates even more wild and crazy scenarios than it does in your usual waking state. So, mind continues while I'm asleep.

The dying process is like a dream. As the body dies there's a dissolution of its elemental qualities. This dissolution is necessary for releasing the individuated aspect of embodied consciousness which animates form (the body) during "life." As these elemental qualities dissolve, the body's stronghold over embodied consciousness loosens (much like during a dream), freeing the mind to continue its creation of images, sights and sounds and even thoughts. So, mind continues during the dying process.

When the body dies, the liberated aspect of consciousness survives death and its journey continues; which is another kind of "life." The movement of mind also continues for a while... creating according to the habituated patterns developed during waking and dreaming life. So, mind continues after death of the body.

Now if you're still with me, and hopefully nodding your head, here is the distilled supposition... training to die awake, means training your mind.

We all know the mind is a wild creature used to getting its way. We allow it to run unattended. We even encourage it during times of creativity believing it's our minds that are creative rather than our deep-seated awareness. Training the mind doesn't mean demonizing the mind – making it bad. Rather training the mind, as taught in all wisdom traditions, is to teach the mind to become a useful and powerful tool of awakening and opener of the way. That means training the “thinking” aspect of your mind to be still and wake up to its True Nature which no longer divides in order to conquer, but rather recognizes Unity as the Cosmic Law and empowers rather than overcomes.

We can train our minds to be still. We can teach our minds that out of stillness it can move with great clarity while remaining undivided, thus bringing the entirety of your awareness straight to the object being experienced. Your mind can be freed from its constant objectification of life... from the ceaseless interpretation, conjecture and judgment that defines usual thinking.

The Buddhists teach that your mind creates all that you perceive as “real”. Beware of interpreting this to mean that nothing exists outside your mind. It simply, and most complexly, means that your interpretation of what you are perceiving only exists in your thinking mind. Although that might sound like a nihilist view, it is not. When understood at its depth, it is the key to liberation. If my perceptions only exist as thought inside my own mind and I can train my mind, then surely I can change all that I perceive as “real.” I can bend reality with my mind. Now that's a game changer.

*The only thing you have at the time of your death,
Is the quality of your Consciousness.*

In the ancient teachings, the quality of our consciousness at the time of death is what dictates our experiences after the physical body stops breathing. In the subtle levels of consciousness that arise while we are asleep, during the dying process and after death, the creative medium of mind is far more subtle, and a thought can take shape more quickly and be more intense than in our waking state. Also, the quality of our awareness transferred across the threshold of death is a gift (or harm) offered back to that something greater – to God, to Consciousness, to all sentient beings. Therefore, training to die awake is beneficial to both you (as the individuated aspect of embodied consciousness) and to the greater whole of existence.

Nine Gates Mystery School students train diligently to uncover the true nature of reality and understand that there is such a skill as stabilizing awareness across all states of consciousness – waking, sleeping, dying, death and even while crafting our next life (in the Buddhist tradition).

Once asked by a student, “Why would I do these death practices without knowing for certain that it’s making a difference?” I sat for a moment and quietly replied, “What have you got to lose? For certain we know that these practices change the way we meet every moment. Why would we want to meet the greatest of all mysteries unprepared?”



Deborah Jones bio:

Deborah Jones is the Executive Director of Nine Gates Programs, Inc., serving as the spiritual leader and primary teacher of the Mystery Schools and other Graduate Programs. She is also the Founder of Nine Gates Graduate program, the Esoteric School. Deborah has worked intensely with wisdom keepers from around the world, practicing the healing arts, shamanism, the integrative application of the Hindu and Buddhist tantric paths, tribal trance dance, the transpersonal psychology of spiritual awakening through the energy and emotional bodies, and other ancient arts of the wisdom tradition schools.

About her own training to die awake, Deborah says, “I’ve been called to the bedside of many individuals during their journey toward the ‘great leap into the sky’. Training for your own death teaches you to be of benefit to those waiting patiently at the threshold. When you arrive, trusting that death is yet another gateway, your energy and skills offer grace and open the way for their enlightenment. There is no greater gift.”

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