

The Nine-Point Death Meditation

Death is Certain

No power in the universe can stop death

Every person born will have to die, including great arhats, bodhisattvas and yogis, even Buddha. No one has ever been able to remain, not even Jesus and the Christian Saints. In 100 years from now, nearly every person alive today will be dead. We cannot run away from death, there is nowhere we can escape to. Even if we are very wealthy, we cannot bribe death. Even if we are very strong and powerful, we cannot defeat death. Even if we have miraculous powers and clairvoyance, we cannot evade death. Nothing can prevent death.

With every moment that passes I come closer to my death

With each moment of our life that passes, we come closer to death. From the time of birth onwards, we are racing toward death. I breathe in, I breathe out. But that out-breath has gone forever, and I have moved one breath closer to death. Even when we are asleep or distracted, we come closer to death. Of course, I know that I will die. And if I go through various intellectual arguments, I can see that I will die. Why then, don't I feel as if I'm going to die?

The free time I have left in my life to study and practise the spiritual teachings is extremely limited

If we live for 75 years, one third is spent sleeping. The rest is spent working, eating, quarrelling, shopping, travelling, watching phone and computer screens and so on. Very little time is spent actually practising the spiritual teachings. When we are young, we put off our practice till later. When we are middle-aged, we are too distracted by other things, busy with our career and our family. When we are old, we look back with regret that we didn't practise.

RESOLUTION: *Because death is certain, I am going to make this promise to myself: I resolve to study and practice the spiritual teachings while I am still alive.*

The Time of Death is Most Uncertain

The lifespan in our realm and time is uncertain

Our lifespan is not fixed. At this moment, we are not at some magical age when no one dies. We could die in the next moment. Age is no guarantee; children often die before their parents. Health is no guarantee; a healthy person can die before a sick one. Future plans are no guarantee; we can die before we complete our work.

The things that kill us are many, the things that keep us alive are few

External conditions like accidents, natural disasters etc. and internal conditions like illness and so on can kill us. Even those things that normally sustain life can become the conditions for death: food, house and medicine. King Farouk II choked to death on his dinner. Many people who die start a normal day, doing normal things, not expecting to die.

Here are some of the ways we might die:

- Disease
- Old age
- Murder, war, terrorism
- Fire, flood, tempest, lightning
- Dangerous animals
- Spirit beings
- Suicide
- Starvation
- Accident (something that wasn't meant to happen, but millions happen every day)
- Political arrest, torture, death
- Eating, food poisoning

In general, the body is extremely fragile

Since huge trees, forests, and even mountains and planets get destroyed, no wonder our frail bodies will not last long. At the end of this world system, the sun will get so hot that the earth and all in it will be burnt up.

RESOLUTION: *Because the time of my death is uncertain, I will stop sacrificing my life to worldly concerns, and immediately start studying and practising the spiritual teachings. I must not postpone my practice day after day because something more important crops up.*

Only My Mental and Spiritual Qualities Will Help at the Time of Death

No money or possessions can help me

Naked and empty-handed we leave this life. A king and a beggar experience death in a similar way. Thus, wealth cannot help. At the time of death, my attachment to wealth and possessions will not help; in fact, it will obstruct and cause problems. Most of us have no idea how much attachment we have to things and stuff, to ideas and concepts. We will only find out at the time of death. Lama Zopa Rinpoche said that the amount of pain you experience at death depends on the amount of attachment you have and the negative karma you've created.

Family and friends cannot help

Near and dear ones often give rise to attachment and pain. We don't want to separate from them and hang on. But they can't help us. No one can share our experiences of death. Death is experienced by ourselves alone. We must let go, let go of everything.

Not even my own body can help me at the time of death

Our body, which we cared for and pampered so much, is helpless. It fails us. Despite all the love and attention we give our body, our hair, our teeth and so forth, it is of no help at the time of death. What will help at the time of death is a calm, peaceful mind imbued with virtue, such as feeling grateful for the kindness of your carers.

RESOLUTION: *Because only my mental and spiritual qualities will help me at the time of death, I will devote myself not just to studying and practising the spiritual teachings, not just to starting immediately, but also to doing it as well and as purely as I can.*

From: *Extended Lam-Rim Outlines: Beginners' Meditation Guide*, compiled by Karin Valham, Kopan Monastery, Kathmandu, 2007, (Page 24) and Venerable Thubten Dondrub's teachings at Hayagriva Buddhist Centre. Presented by Len Warren to 24th Annual Reiki Day on 1 July 2018.