

Meditation on Life - and Death

Mindfulness Worksheet

Date / Time:

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

Thoughts? Heart? Body? None

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



MEDITATION ON LIFE - AND DEATH

“It is crucial to be mindful of death — to contemplate that you will not remain long in this life. If you are not aware of death, you will fail to take advantage of this special human life that you have already attained.”

— Advice on Dying, by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

Our lives could end at any moment.

Did you notice your reaction to that thought? It's one we shudder to think about. Never mind the fact that, one day, we will one day, lose the people we love.

How do most of us deal with this truth, most of the time?

We think, “That’s the kind of thing that happens to other people, not me.”

Or we simply stick our heads in the sand and don’t think about it at all!

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It's been said that the point of meditation is to prepare us for death.

Gabor Mate said,

“When people are facing death they come up against the truth of their lives. If you can face death you can face life.”

Bhutan is known as one of the happiest countries on earth. They attribute this happiness, at least partly, to a practice of thinking about death 5 times per day.



It was the acknowledgment of old age, sickness and death that spurred Siddharta Gautama, known today as the Buddha, to seek enlightenment.

Buddha said,

“Of all the footprints, that of the elephant is supreme. Similarly, of all mindfulness meditations, that on death is supreme.”

Or, if you prefer, think of the memorable words of Tibetan Lama Chagdud Rinpoche:

“When you have to go to the bathroom, it's too late to build a latrine.”

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In Tibet, the ground is too frozen to bury the dead, so they will chop up the bodies and leave them out for the vultures. These are known as the charnel grounds.

The Buddha, and many, many Buddhist teachers since, instructed their students to meditate at charnel grounds.

As Pema Chodron says:

“There were eyeballs and hair and bones and other body parts all over the place. In a book about Tibet, I saw a photograph in which people were bringing a body to the charnel ground. There was a circle of vultures that looked to be about the size of two-year-old children—all just sitting there waiting for this body to arrive.

Perhaps the closest thing to a charnel ground in our world is not a graveyard but a hospital emergency room. That could be the image for our working basis, which is grounded in some honesty about how the human realm functions. It smells, it bleeds, it is full of unpredictability, but at the same time, it is self-radiant wisdom, good food, that which nourishes us, that which is beneficial and pure.”

Sit quietly, and feel your breath.

Tune into the sounds, or the silence, around you. Notice any smells. Note the shapes and colors around you.

Settle into the feeling of your body. See if there's any discomfort, or thoughts. Notice any places you feel stuck, or emotions. If it's helpful, simply notice one breath at a time.

Look down at your body, and recognize that there will be a point in time when it no longer exists.

Allow this recognition to be there for a few minutes.

Notice what feelings arise from this understanding, and allow them to be there. But stay anchored in the impermanence of you, who is alive, right now.

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Think of someone you love. Understand that there will come a day when that being ceases to be. Sit with this understanding for a few moments.

Visualize the masses of people who populate this planet. Consider the fact that each one of them will, one day, die.

Sit with the fact that all we have are this precious moment. We don't know what comes next.



Let your eyes open. Take a few minutes to reflect, either by writing or just by thinking, on what you noticed about your response to the reality of death. Does it feel terrifying?

Be kind and patient with whatever feelings come up. We are conditioned not to think about death. It can be a big adjustment to start doing so - and a very precious one.

When faced with the reality of death, what seems important?

Consider how can you use this knowledge in your everyday life.

