

Life Without Death

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The Buddha teaches us that death is an inevitable fact of life. The very act of being born in a physical body guarantees that the body will eventually die. This is part of the natural process of birth, old age, and death. Given this truth, it behooves us to be constantly aware of the impermanence of the body – as well as the impermanence of all manifest things.

Life, existence, and the inevitable death is a continual process of birth and rebirth. To understand this essential point, one has to seriously examine one's internal world – through meditation and constant introspection. For example, are you the same person now that you were at the age of five? Or ten? Obviously not. Are you the same person now that you were yesterday – and even earlier today? Five minutes ago? You may be tempted to answer “yes” to this second question, but the true answer is “no.” In actual fact, you have died and have been re-born millions of times – each and every second.

This brings us to another truth that was taught by the Buddha: **death is not the end of life**. The Buddhist concept of *anatta* denies the existence of any permanent entity – like a soul. There is an “essence,” however, and this “essence” will still remain. It continues with its accumulated human characteristics (from multiple rebirths) and attachments. These characteristics are described by the Buddha as: *vedana* (sensation), *sanna* (mental formations), *sankara* (habitual actions), and *vinnana* (consciousness). Each of these exerts an influence over the successive series of rebirths in the cycle of life.

Death, therefore, is merely the end of the body we inhabit in this life, as well as of the mind, emotions, personality, mental formations, habitual actions, and consciousness that are associated with the body. Another way to describe this phenomenon is to say that physical death is the end of *experiencing*, and a new birth is merely the beginning of a new *experiencing*. There is no permanent *experiencer*, only *experiencing*; in Buddhism we say there is no *person*, only *impersonal actions*.

Successive rebirths, therefore, are the result of successive actions, *karma*, as well as of the accumulated characteristics and attachments from previous rebirths. For example, how many of us can remember all of our past actions from *this very life*? Therefore, how could we possibly know how all of these actions in this very life will influence our *next rebirth*? Impossible.

The Buddha teaches us, as well as does *reality* itself, that it is possible to have life without death. We call this life's ultimate achievement, *Nibbana*. *Nibbana*, or full enlightenment, is characterized by:

- Total ease, complete calm, absolute stillness, safe freedom, perfect happiness and pure peace...
- Absence of any uncertainty, any doubt, any confusion, any delusion and all ignorance...
- Presence of confidence, cleared certainty, understanding all, and direct experience...
- Absence of any greed, lust, desire, urge, attraction, hunger, temptation, and pull...
- Presence of imperturbable indifference, serene composure, and the stillness of equanimity...
- Absence of any hate, anger, aversion, hostility, irritation, and stubborn rigidity...
- Presence of universal goodwill, infinite friendliness, all-embracing and boundless kindness...
- Not a place, not an idea, not a fantasy, not a deception, not a conceit, not a conception...
- Not a cause, not an effect, not finite, not definable, not formed, not changing, but eternal...
- Unborn, unbecoming, unmade, uncreated, uncaused, unconditioned, and unconstructed – yet real...
- Void of eye, visible objects, and visual consciousness; void of ear, sounds and auditory consciousness,
- Void of nose, smells, and olfactory consciousness; void of tongue, tastes, and gustatory consciousness,
- Void of body, touch, and tactile consciousness; and void of mind, thoughts and mental consciousness...