

# The Nine-Point Meditation on Death

*This is a slightly modified version of the "Death Awareness Meditation" found in How to Meditate—either version can be used. There are different ways to meditate on the nine points. One way is to meditate on all nine points in one session, another is to do one point per session, thus taking nine sessions to complete all the points. A third alternative is to spend one session on each of the three main points: the inevitability of death, the uncertainty of the time of death, and the fact that only spiritual practice can help at the time of death. You can do whichever way you wish.*

## Preparation

Sit in a comfortable position, with your back straight, and let your body relax. Spend some time letting your mind settle down in the present moment; let go of thoughts of the past or the future. Make the decision to keep your mind focused on the meditation-topic for the duration of the meditation session.

## Motivation

When your mind is calm and settled in the present, generate a positive motivation for doing the meditation. For example, you can think: "May this meditation help bring about greater peace and happiness for all beings," or: "May this meditation be a cause for me to become enlightened so that I can help all beings become free of suffering and become enlightened as well."

## Body of the meditation

*(As you contemplate the following points, bring in your own ideas and experiences, as well as stories you have heard or read, to illustrate each point. Try to get a feeling of each point. If at any time during the meditation you experience a strong, intuitive feeling of the point you are examining, stop thinking and hold the feeling with concentration as long as you can. When it fades or your mind gets distracted, return to the contemplation.)*

### A. The Inevitability of Death

We plan many activities and projects for the coming days, months and years. Although death is the only event that is *certain* to occur, we don't usually think about it or plan for it. Even if the thought of death does arise in our mind, we usually push it away quickly—we don't want to think about death. But it's important to think about and be prepared for it. Contemplate the following three points to get a sense of how death is definitely going to happen to you.

#### 1. Everyone has to die

To generate an experience of death's inevitability, bring to mind people from the past: famous rulers and writers, musicians, philosophers, saints, scientists, criminals, and ordinary people. These people were once alive—they worked, thought and wrote; they loved and fought, enjoyed life and suffered. And finally they died.

Can you think of an example of someone who was born on this earth but who did not die?.... No matter how wise, wealthy, powerful or popular a person may be, his or her life must come to an end. The same is true for all other living creatures. For all the advances in science and medicine, no one has found a cure for death, and no one ever will.

Now bring to mind people you know who have already died.... And think of the people you know who are still alive. Contemplate that each of these people will one day die. And so will you.

There are several billion people on the planet right now, but one hundred years from now, all of these people—with the exception of a few who are now very young — will be gone. You yourself will be dead. Try to experience this fact with your entire being.

## **2. Your lifespan is decreasing continuously**

Time never stands still—it is continuously passing. Seconds become minutes, minutes become hours, hours become days, days become years, and as time is passing in this way, you are travelling closer and closer towards death. Imagine an hour-glass, with the sand running into the bottom. The time you have to live is like these grains of sand, continuously running out...Hold your awareness for a while on the experience of this uninterrupted flow of time carrying you to the end of your life.

Another way to get a sense of your life moving continuously towards death is to imagine being on a train which is always traveling at a steady speed— it never slows down or stops, and there is no way that you can get off. This train is continuously bringing you closer and closer to its destination: the end of your life. Try to really get a sense of this, and check what thoughts and feelings arise in your mind.

## **3. The amount of time you have for spiritual practice is very small**

Since you are getting closer and closer to death all the time, what are you doing to prepare for it?....The best way to prepare for death is doing spiritual practice. This is because the only thing that continues after death is the mind, and spiritual practice is the only thing that truly benefits the mind, preparing it for death and the journey to the next life. But how much time do you actually devote to spiritual practice-- working on decreasing the negative aspects of the mind (such as anger and attachment) and developing the positive aspects of the mind (such as kindness and wisdom), and behaving in ways that are beneficial to others?

Calculate how you spend your time: In an average day, how many hours do you sleep? How many hours do you work? How many hours do you spend preparing food, eating and socializing? How much time do you spend feeling depressed, frustrated, bored, angry, resentful, jealous, lazy or critical? And

how much time do you spend consciously trying to improve your state of mind, or doing beneficial things such as helping others, or spiritual study or meditation?

Do these calculations honestly. Assess your life in this practical way to see clearly just how much of your time is spent doing things that truly benefit yourself and others, and that will be helpful for your mind at the time of death and in the next life.

By meditating on these first three points, you should be able to develop the determination to use your life wisely and mindfully.

## **B. The Uncertainty of the time of Death**

By contemplating the first three points, you come to accept that you are definitely going to die. But you might think that death is not going to happen for a long time. Why do you think this way? Is there any way you can know for sure when death will happen? Contemplate the following three points to get a sense of how the time of death is completely uncertain and unknown.

### **4. Human life-expectancy is uncertain**

If human beings died at a specific age, say eighty-eight, we would have plenty of time and space to prepare for death. But there is no such certainty, and death catches most of us by surprise.

Life can end at any point: at birth, in childhood, in adolescence, at the age of twenty-two or thirty-five or fifty or ninety-four. Think of examples of people you know or have heard about who died before they reached the age you are now at...

Being young and healthy is no guarantee that a person will live a long time—children sometimes die before their parents. Healthy people can die before those who are suffering from a terminal illness such as cancer.... We can *hope* to live until we are seventy or eighty, but we cannot be certain of doing so. We cannot be certain that we will not die later today.

It is very difficult to feel convinced that death could happen at any moment. We tend to feel that since we have survived so far, our continuation is secure. But thousands of people die every day, and few of them expected to.

Generate a strong feeling of the complete uncertainty of your own time of death; how there is simply no guarantee that you have long to live.

### **5. There are many causes of death**

There are many different ways that death can happen to people. Sometimes death happens due to external causes. These include natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and volcanic eruptions, or accidents such as car- or

plane-crashes. People can also be killed by other people—murderers or terrorists—or by dangerous animals or poisonous insects.

Death can also happen due to internal causes. There are hundreds of different diseases that can rob us of our health and lead to death. There are also cases of people who are not ill, but their bodies simply stop functioning and they suddenly die.

Even things which normally support life can become the cause of death. Food, for example, is something we need in order to stay alive, but it can sometimes lead to death, as when people overeat, or eat food that is contaminated. Medicine is another thing which normally supports life, but people sometimes die because they took the wrong medicine, or the wrong dose. Houses and apartments enable us to live comfortably, but they sometimes catch fire or collapse, killing the people inside.

Bring to mind cases of people you know or have heard about who have died, and think of how they died. Think that any of these things could happen to you as well.

## **6. The human body is very fragile**

Our human body is very vulnerable; it can be injured or struck down by illness so easily. Within minutes it can change from being strong and active to being helplessly weak and full of pain.

Right now you might feel healthy, energetic and secure, but something as small as a virus or as insignificant as a thorn could become the cause of your death.

Think about this. Recall the times you have hurt or injured your body, and how easily it could happen again and even cause your death.

Your body will not last forever. In the course of your life you might manage to avoid illness and accidents, but the years will eventually overtake you—your body will degenerate, lose its beauty and vitality, and finally die.

By meditating on these second three points, we will develop the determination to begin our practice of the spiritual path right now, as the future is so uncertain.

## **C. The fact that only spiritual practice can help you at the time of death**

No matter how much we have acquired or developed throughout our life—in terms of family and friends, wealth, power, travel experiences, and so on—none of it goes with us at death. Only our mind continues, carrying imprints of all that we have thought, felt, said and done. It is vital that when we die, we will have as many positive imprints—which will bring good experiences—

and as few negative imprints—which will bring suffering—on our mind as possible. Also, we should aim to die at peace with ourselves, feeling good about how we lived our life, and not leaving behind any unresolved conflicts with people.

The only things that will truly benefit us at the time of death are positive states of mind such as faith, non-attachment and calm acceptance of the changes that are taking place, loving-kindness, compassion, patience and wisdom. But in order to be able to have such states of mind at the time of death, we need to make ourselves familiar with them during the course of our life—and this is the essence of Dharma, or spiritual practice. Realizing this will give us the incentive and energy to start practicing Dharma now, and to practice as much as we can while we still have time.

You can experience a strong feeling of this reality by imagining yourself at the time of death, and contemplating the following three points.

### **7. Your loved ones cannot help**

As you lie on your deathbed, or as the plane you are traveling in is about to crash, what kind of thoughts would come into your mind? Our strongest attachments are usually to our family and friends, so you would probably think of them, and feel a strong wish to be with them. But even if they were present with you at the time of death, would they be able to help you? Although they love you very much and do not want you to die, they cannot prevent this from happening. Most probably they will not know what to say or do that will give you peace-of-mind, and instead, their sadness and worry about the coming separation will affect you—stirring up the same emotions in your mind.

When we die, we go alone— no one, not even our closest, dearest loved one, can accompany us. And being unable to accept this and let go of our attachment to our loved ones will cause our mind to be in turmoil and make it very difficult to have a peaceful death.

Recognize the attachment you have to your family and friends. See if you can realize that having strong attachment to people can be a hindrance to having a peaceful state of mind at the time of death, so it is better to work on decreasing this attachment and learning to let go.

### **8. Your possessions and enjoyments cannot help**

Your mind will probably also think of your possessions and property, which occupy a great deal of your time while you are alive, and are a source of much pleasure and satisfaction. But can any of these things bring you comfort and peace at the time of death? Your wealth may be able to provide you with a private room in the hospital and the best medical care, but that is all it can do for you. It cannot stop death from happening, and when you die, you cannot take any of it with you—not even one cent or one article of clothing.

Not only will your possessions be unable to help you at the time of death, but your mind may be caught up in worries about them—who will get what, and whether or not they will take proper care of “your” things. So that will make it difficult to have a peaceful, detached state of mind as you are dying. Contemplate these points, and see if you can understand the importance of learning to be less dependent on and attached to material things.

#### **9. Your own body cannot help**

Your body has been your constant companion since birth. You know it more intimately than anything or anyone else. You have cared for it and protected it, worried about it, kept it comfortable and healthy, fed it and cleaned it, experienced all kind of pleasure and pain with it. It has been your most treasured possession.

But now you are dying and that means you will be separated from it. It will become weak and eventually quite useless: your mind will separate from it and it will be taken to the cemetery or crematorium. What good can it possibly do you now?

Contemplate the strong sense of dependence and attachment you have to your own body, and how it cannot benefit you in any way at death. Fear of pain and regret about leaving it will only compound your suffering.

By meditating on the final three points, we should come to realize how important it is to work on reducing our attachment to the things of this life, such as family and friends, possessions, and our body. We should also realize how important it is to take care of our mind, as that is the only thing that will continue to the next life. “Taking care of the mind” means working on decreasing the negative states of mind such as anger and attachment, and cultivating positive qualities such as faith, loving-kindness, compassion, patience, and wisdom.

Furthermore, as the imprints of our actions in this life will also go with our mind to the next one, and will determine the kind of rebirth and experiences we will have, it is essential to try our best to refrain from negative actions, and create positive actions as much as possible during our life.

It is possible that you will feel fear or sadness when doing this meditation. In one sense, that is good—it shows that you have taken the ideas seriously and have contemplated them well. Also, it is important to get in touch with how you do feel about death so that you can work on being prepared for it when it happens. However, the purpose of the meditation is not to make you frightened. Just being afraid of death is not helpful. What *is* helpful is to be afraid of dying with a negative state of mind and a lot of imprints on your mind from negative actions you have done in your life. You need to get a strong sense of how terrible it would be to die like that, so that you live your life wisely, doing as many positive, beneficial things as possible.

Also, fear arises because of clinging to the idea of a permanent self—there is no such thing, so this is a delusion that just makes us suffer. If we keep death in mind in an easy, open way, this clinging will gradually loosen, allowing us to be mindful and make every action positive and beneficial, for ourselves and others. And an awareness of death gives us enormous energy to not waste our life, but to live it as effectively as possible.

**Dedication**

Conclude the meditation with the optimistic thought that you have every possibility to make your life meaningful, beneficial and positive, and in this way you will be able to die with peace of mind. Remember the motivation you had at the beginning of the meditation and dedicate the merit of doing the meditation to that same purpose—for the benefit of all beings.

## **Meditation on Impermanence**

*The Buddha said that all produced things are impermanent, that is, they change moment by moment. "Produced things" doesn't refer only to things produced in a factory like cars or shoes, but includes all things that arise from causes and conditions, such as plants, trees, animals and insects, mountains and oceans, as well as our bodies and minds. All these things do not remain the same from one moment to the next, but are constantly changing. This isn't just a philosophical theory, but a fact of life; the actual way things exist. Through not being aware of or accepting this reality of things, we become attached to people and things— wishing them to remain the same and last forever— and then become deeply disappointed when they do not. Making ourselves familiar with their impermanence enables us be more realistic and frees us from a great deal of unnecessary suffering, and this meditation will help us to do that...*

### **Preparation**

Sit in a comfortable position, with your back straight, and let your body relax. Spend some time letting your mind settle down in the present moment. Let go of thoughts of the past or the future. Make the decision to keep your mind focused on the meditation-topic for the duration of the meditation session.

### **Motivation**

When your mind is calm and settled in the present, generate a positive motivation for doing the meditation. For example, you can think: "May this meditation help bring about greater peace and happiness for all beings," or: "May this meditation be a cause for me to become enlightened so that I can help all beings become free of suffering and become enlightened as well."

### **Body of the meditation**

Begin the meditation by observing your breathing, and slowly become aware of the impermanence of your breathing. Each breath is different from the one that came before it, and is different from the one that comes after it. You are breathing in different air with each breath, and your body is changing with each breath: there are different sensations around the nose and inside the nostrils; your lungs expand and contract, your abdomen rises and falls. So in each moment, with each breath, there is change, flux and flow.

Then think about other changes that are taking place in your body in each moment. Think of how your body is made of many different parts—arms, legs, head, skin, blood, bones, nerves and muscles—and how these parts themselves are made of yet smaller parts, such as cells. Be aware of the movement that is going on each moment: the beating of your heart, the flow of your blood and the energy of your nerve-impulses. On a more subtle level, cells are being born, moving about, dying and disintegrating.



On an even subtler level, all the parts of your body are made of molecules, atoms and sub-atomic particles, and these are in constant motion. Try to really get a feeling for the change that is taking place each moment in your body....

Then turn your attention to your mind. It too is composed of many parts—thoughts, perceptions, feelings, memories, images— following one after the other, ceaselessly. Spend a few minutes simply observing the ever-changing flow of experiences in your mind, like someone looking out of a window onto a busy street, watching the cars and pedestrians passing by. Don't cling to anything that you see in your mind, don't judge or make comments—just observe, and try to get a sense of the impermanent, ever-changing nature of your mind.

After reflecting on the impermanence of your inner world—your own body and mind— extend your awareness to the outer world. Think about your immediate surroundings: the cushion, mat or bed you are sitting on; the floor, walls, windows and ceiling of the room you are sitting in; the furniture and other objects in the room. Consider that each of these things, although appearing solid and static, is actually a mass of tiny particles whizzing around in space. Stay with that awareness of the impermanent, constantly-changing nature of these things.

Then let your awareness travel further out, beyond the walls of your room. Think of other people: their bodies and minds are also constantly changing, not staying the same for even one moment. The same is true of all living beings, such as animals, birds and insects.

Think of all the inanimate objects in the world and in the universe: houses, buildings, roads, cars, trees, mountains, oceans and rivers, the earth itself, the sun, moon and stars. All of these things, being composed of atoms and other minute particles, are constantly changing, every moment, every millisecond. Nothing stays the same without changing.

While you are meditating, if at any point you experience a clear, strong feeling of the every-changing nature of things, stop the thinking or analyzing process, and hold your attention firmly on this feeling. Concentrate on it for as long as possible, without thinking of anything else or letting your mind be distracted. When the feeling fades or your attention starts to wander, again return to analyzing the impermanent nature of things.

## **Conclusion**

Conclude the meditation with the thought that it is unrealistic and self-defeating to cling to things as though they were permanent. Whatever is beautiful and pleasing will change and eventually disappear, so we can't expect it to give us lasting happiness. Also, whatever is unpleasant or disturbing won't last forever—

it might even change for the better!—so there's no need to be so upset about it or to reject it.

**Dedication**

Dedicate the positive energy from doing the meditation that all beings will find perfect happiness and freedom from all suffering.

# Meditation on the Inevitability of Death

*This is a meditation on the first "root" or main point of the 9-point meditation on death: that death is inevitable and cannot be avoided. The other two root points are: that the time of death is uncertain, and that only spiritual practice helps at the time of death. These two roots are covered in separate meditations.*

## Preparation

Sit in a comfortable position, with your back straight, and let your body relax. Spend some time letting your mind settle down in the present moment; let go of thoughts of the past or the future. Make the decision to keep your mind focused on the meditation-topic for the duration of the meditation session.

## Motivation

When your mind is calm and settled in the present, generate a positive motivation for doing the meditation. For example, you can think: "May this meditation help bring about greater peace and happiness for all beings," or: "May this meditation be a cause for me to become enlightened so that I can help all beings become free of suffering and become enlightened as well."

## Body of the meditation

*(As you contemplate the following points, bring in your own ideas and experiences, as well as stories you have hear or read, to illustrate each point. Try to get a feeling of each point. If at any time during the meditation you experience a strong, intuitive feeling of the point you are examining, stop thinking and hold the feeling with concentration as long as you can. When it fades or your mind gets distracted, return to the contemplation.)*

We plan many activities and projects for the coming days, months and years. Although death is the only event that is *certain* to occur, we don't usually think about it or plan for it. Even if the thought of death does arise in our mind, we usually push it away quickly—we don't want to think about death. But it's important to think about and be prepared for it. Contemplate the following three points to get a sense of how death is definitely going to happen to you.

### 1. Everyone has to die

To generate an experience of death's inevitability, bring to mind people from the past: famous rulers and writers, musicians, philosophers, saints, scientists, criminals, and ordinary people. These people were once alive—they worked, thought and wrote; they loved and fought, enjoyed life and suffered. And finally they died.

Can you can think of an example of someone who was born on this earth but who did not die?.... No matter how wise, wealthy, powerful or popular a person may be, his or her life must come to an end. The same is true for all other living

creatures. For all the advances in science and medicine, no one has found a cure for death, and no one ever will.

Now bring to mind people you know who have already died.... And think of the people you know who are still alive. Contemplate that each of these people will one day die. And so will you.

There are several billion people on the planet right now, but one hundred years from now, all of these people—with the exception of a few who are now very young — will be gone. You yourself will be dead. Try to experience this fact with your entire being.

## **2. Your lifespan is decreasing continuously**

Time never stands still—it is continuously passing. Seconds become minutes, minutes become hours, hours become days, days become years, and as time is passing in this way, you are travelling closer and closer towards death. Imagine an hour-glass, with the sand running into the bottom. The time you have to live is like these grains of sand, continuously running out...Hold your awareness for a while on the experience of this uninterrupted flow of time carrying you to the end of your life.

Another way to get a sense of your life moving continuously towards death is to imagine being on a train which is always traveling at a steady speed— it never slows down or stops, and there is no way that you can get off. This train is continuously bringing you closer and closer to its destination: the end of your life. Try to really get a sense of this, and check what thoughts and feelings arise in your mind.

## **3. The amount of time you have for spiritual practice is very small**

Since you are getting closer and closer to death all the time, what are you doing to prepare for it?....The best way to prepare for death is doing spiritual practice. This is because the only thing that continues after death is the mind, and spiritual practice is the only thing that truly benefits the mind, preparing it for death and the journey to the next life. But how much time do you actually devote to spiritual practice-- working on decreasing the negative aspects of the mind (such as anger and attachment) and developing the positive aspects of the mind (such as kindness and wisdom), and behaving in ways that are beneficial to others?

Calculate how you spend your time: In an average day, how many hours do you sleep? How many hours do you work? How many hours do you spend preparing food, eating and socializing? How much time do you spend feeling depressed, frustrated, bored, angry, resentful, jealous, lazy or critical? And how much time

do you spend consciously trying to improve your state of mind, or doing beneficial things such as helping others, or spiritual study or meditation?

Do these calculations honestly. Assess your life in this practical way to see clearly just how much of your time is spent doing things that truly benefit yourself and others, and that will be helpful for your mind at the time of death and in the next life.

By meditating on these three points, you should be able to develop the determination to use your life wisely and mindfully.

### **Dedication**

Conclude the meditation with the optimistic thought that you have every possibility to make your life meaningful, beneficial and positive, and in this way you will be able to die with peace of mind. Remember the motivation you had at the beginning of the meditation and dedicate the merit of doing the meditation to that same purpose—for the benefit of all beings.

# OM AH HUM Purification Meditation

*From "Life, Death and After Death" by Lama Thubten Yeshe*

## Preparation

Sit comfortably and relax your body. Relax your mind by letting go of or putting aside any other thoughts – of the past or future, people, activities, etc. Decide to keep your attention focused on the meditation for the duration of the session.

## Motivation

When your mind is calm and settled in the present, generate a positive motivation for doing the meditation. For example, you can think: "May this meditation help bring about greater peace and happiness for all beings," or: "May this meditation be a cause for me to become enlightened so that I can help all beings become free from suffering and become enlightened as well."

## Body of the meditation

Visualize a white **OM** in the center of your brain. Recognize that the OM is the pure energy of the divine body of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, or whoever you think is pure.

Recite "OM" slowly for several minutes. While reciting it, visualize that white light radiates from the OM in your head and fills your body. All your conceptions and the impure energy of your body are cleansed and purified. (You can think of specific negative actions you have done— such as killing or harming another being, stealing, or unwise sexual behaviour—and feel that the imprints of these actions are completely purified.) Your entire body, from your feet up to the top of your head, is completely filled with radiant, blissful white energy. Really *feel* this...

When you stop chanting "OM," stay for a while in silence, and just be aware-- not thinking anything is good or bad, not reacting, not making mental conversation. Just place all your attention on the light consciousness at the center of your brain. *Be* there. Be intensely aware and let go—without sluggishness, without distraction

Now visualize a red **AH** at your throat chakra. It looks similar to the sun when it is setting. Recognize that the AH is the pure speech energy of the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

As you recite "AH" slowly for several minutes, visualize that red light radiates from the AH at your throat, and your entire body is embraced by this blissful radiating light energy. It purifies your speech. Purification means that the uncontrolled mind and speech work interdependently with each other.

Negativities of speech mean harming and giving pain to others through lying, slander, (harsh speech and gossip. You can imagine that the imprints of your negative actions of speech are completely purified by the blissful red light). Having a clean-clear mind and controlled speech is the way to purify impure and uncontrolled speech.

After reciting AH for several minutes, let your mind just *be* in the state of intense awareness on your own consciousness. Stay there without any expectation or interpretation.... Comprehend your experience of the non-dual, non-self-existent I, nothingness, zero, empty space as truth, reality. This experience is much more real than your waking fantasy sensory world....

If an uncontrolled, distracted thought comes, remember that not only you, but all other sentient beings are in this situation, so cultivate much loving-kindness for others. Then, when loving-kindness arises, direct intense awareness of loving-kindness towards your own consciousness.

So there are two things: place intense awareness on your own consciousness, and when distractions arise, (generate loving-kindness for all beings and then) direct intense awareness of loving-kindness to your consciousness. Alternate these two.

Next, visualize your loving-kindness energy manifesting at your heart chakra in the aspect of a full moon.

Visualize at your heart, on a moon disc, a blue radiating **HUM**. Recognize that this is the non-duality wisdom of the buddhas and bodhisattvas' energy. Your heart is pure, cool, and calm, opened by the radiating light of the moon and HUM. Infinite blue light radiates from the HUM, and fills your entire body. Your entire body feels blissful. All narrow thoughts disappear. All indecisive minds disappear. All obsessed minds disappear. Being embraced by the infinite blue light leaves no room for fanatical, dualistic concepts. Visualize this while reciting "HUM" slowly for a few minutes.

After this, feel infinite blue light, like your consciousness, embracing the entire universal reality. Your intense awareness is embracing the entire universal reality. *Feel* and *be*, without any expectation or superstition. ...

We need two experiences: wisdom and method. Wisdom experience is intense awareness of your own conscious reality. This is the way of wisdom. Method is when you again become out of control, distracted. That distracted experience is a big resource to again generate loving-kindness. When there is no distraction, stay in the wisdom. So, two things: when there is no problem, place your

attention on the wisdom aspect; when you are distracted, switch to method, which is loving-kindness..... (Meditate like this for as long as you wish.)

### **Dedication**

Conclude your meditation by dedicating the merit, or positive energy of doing the meditation, to all living beings: may it be the cause for all beings to be free of their suffering and its causes— uncontrolled, disturbing states of mind—and may they all attain perfect peace and happiness.



# **A Meditation on Tong Len (Taking and Giving)**

*A simple tong-len practice using a personal problem*

## **Preparation**

Sit comfortably and relax your body.... Relax your mind by letting go of or putting aside any other thoughts that might be in your mind – of the past or future, people, activities, etc. Decide to keep your attention focused on the meditation, and to bring it back any time it wanders away.

## **Motivation**

When your mind has settled down in the present, generate a positive motivation for doing the meditation. The most positive motivation is wishing to benefit others. So open your heart to others, with the understanding that they wish to be happy and free of suffering just as you do. Think that you are going to do this meditation in order to work on your own mind—decreasing the self-centered and negative aspects of the mind and developing the positive aspects of the mind—so that you can become more and more able to be of benefit to other beings.

## **Body of the meditation**

Bring to mind a problem you currently have in your life.... Allow yourself to feel the pain, the discomfort of the problem.... See if you can notice how your mind does not like the problem and wants to push it away, to get rid of it....

Then think: "I am not the only person experiencing a problem like this. There are many others...." Think of other people who may be experiencing the same or a similar problem—you may actually know some people who have the same problem, or you can use your imagination to think of others, around the world... Also, you can probably think of some people who have this problem to an even greater degree than yourself. (For example, if you have lost a loved one, think of people who have lost many loved ones, such as in a war or a famine.)

Then generate compassion, thinking: "How wonderful it would be if all those people could be free from their suffering." Because you have your own first-hand, direct experience of this problem, you are in a good position to be able to understand and empathize with what they are experiencing. So generate as strong and purely as you can the compassionate wish for them to be free....

Then decide that you will accept or take on your own experience of this problem, in order that all those other people could be free from theirs. The simplest way to do this is to reverse the attitude that wants to push the problem away—"I don't want this problem"—and to voluntarily accept it, with the thought, "By my accepting and experiencing this problem, may all those other people be free from theirs. I will experience this problem on behalf of them." Contemplate that.....

If you wish, and are comfortable to do so, you can also do the following visualization of taking on the suffering of the other people. First imagine your self-cherishing

attitude (the selfish attitude of caring more for yourself than for others) in your heart, in the form of a solid, dark spot or a big, dark rock. Then you imagine the suffering of others coming out of their bodies in the form of dark smoke or fog. It comes into your heart and absorbs into the self-cherishing attitude and destroys it. Alternatively, you can imagine other's suffering turning into a bomb or missile, which blows up the solid rock of self-cherishing.

Following that, imagine that all your goodness—good qualities, positive energy, happiness, etc—in the form of a radiant sphere of light, or a wish-fulfilling jewel, in your heart. Visualize rays of light emanating from this light or jewel, going to all the people whose suffering you just took away. The light rays transform into whatever they need to be happy—food for those who are hungry, money for those who are poor, homes for those who are homeless, friends for those who are lonely, courage and strength for those who are frightened and helpless, and so on. Feel that you are really giving them what they need, and they become happy and satisfied, all their needs and wishes fulfilled.... You can also imagine sending them spiritual teachers who teach them the path, and help them to progress along the path all the way to enlightenment.

Spend as much time as you wish doing this visualization and contemplation. Feel joy in what you are doing—taking away other's suffering and giving them happiness. Even if it's just on the level of imagination, it is still extremely beneficial—to purify your own mind, and to cultivate loving-kindness, compassion and other positive qualities. In this way you help yourself to become more beneficial for others now, and bring yourself closer to enlightenment, at which time you can be of the greatest benefit to all beings.

### **Dedication**

Conclude your meditation by dedicating the merit or positive energy that you have created. Remember the motivation you had at the beginning— wishing to benefit others—and dedicate the meditation that it will be the cause for them to be free from suffering, to enjoy greater peace and happiness, and to quickly reach their highest potential, the perfect state of enlightenment.

# Meditation on the Uncertainty of the Time of Death

*This is a meditation on the second "root" or main point of the 9-point meditation on death: that the time of death is uncertain. The other two root points are: that death is inevitable, and that only spiritual practice helps at the time of death. These two roots are covered in separate meditations.*

## Preparation

Sit in a comfortable position, with your back straight, and let your body relax. Spend some time letting your mind settle down in the present moment; let go of thoughts of the past or the future. Make the decision to keep your mind focused on the meditation-topic for the duration of the meditation session.

## Motivation

When your mind is calm and settled in the present, generate a positive motivation for doing the meditation. For example, you can think: "May this meditation help bring about greater peace and happiness for all beings," or: "May this meditation be a cause for me to become enlightened so that I can help all beings become free of suffering and become enlightened as well."

## Body of the meditation

*(As you contemplate the following points, bring in your own ideas and experiences, as well as stories you have heard or read, to illustrate each point. Try to get a feeling of each point. If at any time during the meditation you experience a strong, intuitive feeling of the point you are examining, stop thinking and hold the feeling with concentration as long as you can. When it fades or your mind gets distracted, return to the contemplation.)*

By contemplating the inevitability of death (the first root), you come to accept that you are definitely going to die. But you might think that death is not going to happen for a long time. Why do you think this way? Is there any way you can know for sure when death will happen? Contemplate the following three points to get a sense of how the time of death is completely uncertain and unknown.

### 1. Human life-expectancy is uncertain

If human beings died at a specific age, say eighty-eight, we would have plenty of time and space to prepare for death. But there is no such certainty, and death catches most of us by surprise.

Life can end at any point: at birth, in childhood, in adolescence, at the age of twenty-two or thirty-five or fifty or ninety-four. Think of examples of people you know or have heard about who died before they reached the age you are now at...

Being young and healthy is no guarantee that a person will live a long time—children sometimes die before their parents. Healthy people can die before those who are suffering from a terminal illness such as cancer.... We can *hope* to live until we are seventy or eighty, but we cannot be certain of doing so. We cannot be certain that we will not die later today.

It is very difficult to feel convinced that death could happen at any moment. We tend to feel that since we have survived so far, our continuation is secure. But thousands of people die every day, and few of them expected to.

Generate a strong feeling of the complete uncertainty of your own time of death; how there is simply no guarantee that you have long to live.

## **2. There are many causes of death**

There are many different ways that death can happen to people. Sometimes death happens due to external causes. These include natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and volcanic eruptions, or accidents such as car- or plane-crashes. People can also be killed by other people—murderers or terrorists—or by dangerous animals or poisonous insects.

Death can also happen due to internal causes. There are hundreds of different diseases that can rob us of our health and lead to death. There are also cases of people who are not ill, but their bodies simply stop functioning and they suddenly die.

Even things which normally support life can become the cause of death. Food, for example, is something we need in order to stay alive, but it can sometimes lead to death, as when people overeat, or eat food that is contaminated. Medicine is another thing which normally supports life, but people sometimes die because they took the wrong medicine, or the wrong dose. Houses and apartments enable us to live comfortably, but they sometimes catch fire or collapse, killing the people inside.

Bring to mind cases of people you know or have heard about who have died, and think of how they died. Think that any of these things could happen to you as well.

## **3. The human body is very fragile**

Our human body is very vulnerable; it can be injured or struck down by illness so easily. Within minutes it can change from being strong and active to being helplessly weak and full of pain.

Right now you might feel healthy, energetic and secure, but something as small as a virus or as insignificant as a thorn could become the cause of your death.

Think about this. Recall the times you have hurt or injured your body, and how easily it could happen again and even cause your death.

Your body will not last forever. In the course of your life you might manage to avoid illness and accidents, but the years will eventually overtake you—your body will degenerate, lose its beauty and vitality, and finally die.

By meditating on these three points, we will develop the determination to begin our practice of the spiritual path right now, as the future is so uncertain.

### **Dedication**

Conclude the meditation with the optimistic thought that you have every possibility to make your life meaningful, beneficial and positive, and in this way you will be able to die with peace of mind. Remember the motivation you had at the beginning of the meditation and dedicate the merit of doing the meditation to that same purpose—for the benefit of all beings.