

The Eight Stages of Dying

The process of dying involves a progressive loss of physical, sensory, and mental functions as nervous activity closes down from the periphery to deep within the nervous system. There are eight stages of this process:

1. *Loss of physical power.* The limbs become thin and weak, vision is blurred and it is difficult to move the eyes. Sensations of suddenly falling or of being buried under earth may be felt, body colour fades and an inner vision like a silvery blue mirage is experienced.
2. *Loss of feelings.* Strong physical and mental feelings of pleasure or displeasure cease, the mouth is dry and sweating ceases, hearing weakens, the ringing sound in the ears stops, and the inner vision becomes like a smoke-filled room.
3. *Loss of discrimination.* One cannot recognize the faces or remember the names of friends and relatives, the hands and feet feel extremely cold, digestion ceases, inhalation is weak and exhalation is long, the sense of smell ceases, and the inner vision is of sparks.
4. *Loss of volitions.* One can no longer move the limbs, the purpose of work in this life is forgotten, the senses of touch and taste cease, breathing stops, and the tongue contracts and turns blue. The inner vision is like a dim light at the bottom of a dark well.
5. *Loss of consciousness.* Although one has stopped breathing, the death process is not yet complete and, under some circumstances, can still be reversed. The last thoughts now cease and the consciousness becomes more and more subtle over the final four stages.
6. *White vision.* The inner vision is like a clear, empty sky filled with the light of the full moon.
7. *Red vision.* A brighter inner vision like a clear, empty sky filled with the rays of a red sunset.
8. *Black vision.* A vision of total darkness, empty of any form, that ends in a momentary complete loss of consciousness.
9. *The clear-light of death.* This most subtle consciousness, like the clear sky at dawn, is the final vision of death. This can last up to three days and death is complete when the mind, together with its physical vehicle of wind, (*rlung*, *prana*) leaves the body. The eight visions then occur in reverse and one wakes up as an intermediate state being.

The intermediate (*bardo*) existence

Like in a dream, one's body is formed from the wind energy that accompanies the mind, and is a projection of the same karmic potential that causes the next birth. One's body is in the form of the future life, it can pass through the sky and through walls, it can see other bardo beings of similar nature and can be seen by human clairvoyants. The bardo existence can last up to forty-nine days.

The next life

Whatever place a bardo being thinks about, automatically its body goes there. The experience can be terrifying or pleasant, according to karma. Through karma, one arrives at the place where rebirth will occur. If one is to be born human, sometimes the bardo being sees its future parents copulating and feels desire for the parent of opposite sex and anger towards the parent of same sex. The desire irresistibly attracts it towards the mother's womb. The anger causes it to die, and the mind, in the state of clear light and together with the subtle wind, joins with the ovum that is about to be fertilized.

Gradually the visions are reversed and the wind energy, moved by mind, becomes the support of life and the primary factor behind embryonic development. If fertilization does not occur, the person reawakens within the bardo. The bardo existence rarely lasts longer than 49 days.

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