

Conquering the Fear of Oblivion (in 10 minutes)

Most people fear death. And amongst those, most do so because death seems to entail oblivion. But here I offer a simple mindfulness meditation you can follow, based on your own direct experience, to realize that, whatever death may be, it isn't the end of you... not even of a *part* of you. So let's start. Simply remove yourself from the distractions of others for 10 minutes, and focus on this one essential idea:

Have you noticed that you experience yourself to be the *same being* since as early as you can remember? My first memory is a brief flash of my first exploration of the woods in back of our house. I was wandering alone along a footpath surrounded by tall green trees. Looking about, I still remember the slight apprehension I had not knowing what lay in the shadows further on. In my experience, that three-year-old child definitely *was* me. Yet, nothing about him has remained the same: not a single atom of his body is likely to have remained in mine since then. His thoughts, fears and goals have nothing to do with mine today. His appearance has surely changed completely. The pattern of his genes may have remained largely the same, but that doesn't explain why I still identify myself with him. After all, people with an identical twin sibling don't feel that they *are* their sibling, do they? So you see, there's nothing one can pin down about that three-year-old boy that could explain this continuing sense of identity. Yet, I have a crystal-clear, undeniable sense that he indeed *was* me.

If you search your own memories and feelings, you can easily recall an infant memory and notice the same. There is nothing you can identify about the infant, the child, the teenager or the young adult you once were that has remained intact in you today. Everything about them has changed: their bodies, appearance, feelings, dreams, thoughts, opinions... everything. Yet, you absolutely believe, even know, that they *were* you. Now, if you inquire a little deeper within yourself, you will notice that the only thing that *has* remained intact is the felt sense of "I" behind them all, which is still the exact same sense of "I" you experience today.

Stop reading now, pause, and confirm this for yourself. Don't look for anything you can grab and give words to, in order to label this felt sense of "I." You can only *feel* it, not define it, for 'it' is that which does all the defining. Can you see how that sense, and that sense alone, *is* the real you?

This "I" has never left and has never changed throughout your life, although everything else did. This "I" is the only constant and it can't, thus, be explained in

terms of anything else, for everything else *did* change. Clearly, the real you isn't your body, thoughts, opinions, emotions, etc. The real you is this constant "I" that has *witnessed* the body, thoughts, opinions, emotions, etc., as they changed throughout your life. Don't let your rational mind intrude here so that you lose touch with our experiment; keep your attention on your own felt sense of being an essential 'I.'

This experience provides a mirror to the fact that you are a witness. 'Life' and 'World' are a symbolic mirror for that which experiences them. The problem is that, at some point before adolescence, you began to look at the images in this mirror and say: "That *is* me!" You began to point at these experiences and think that you *are* them. In a rationalist-dominated culture such as our own, 'conceived identity' swallowed your 'felt identity.' The result is exactly equal to a person staring into a mirror, and proclaiming himself to *be* the image in the mirror. But if I broke the mirror, the witness of the image would remain intact, without a scratch, wouldn't he? I can't hurt or kill a person simply by breaking the mirror he is looking into.

Death is simply the melting away of the mirror. Yet you are not, and have never been, an image in the mirror. The fact you *think* you are, is just that: a thought. When the mirror dissolves, you remain intact. Nothing about you goes away or is lost.

Human beings are the only animals that know the mirror will eventually dissolve. And because we, absurdly, think that we *are* an image in the mirror, we derive great anxiety from this knowledge. As death approaches, the mirror begins to crumble and crack. Staring in horror at the increasingly distorted images within it, we imagine we are losing ourselves bit by bit. We think we are vanishing. But again, we are the ones looking *at* the mirror, not the image in it. Unconscious of this fact, we grasp at illusions and try to hold 'ourselves' together. Naturally, this is futile. We go nowhere after the mirror vanishes. We remain right where we were all along, being exactly what we have been all along: the Observer. The witness. The 'I am.'

Anxiety about oblivion vanishes if this one idea is truly integrated. Once understood, we then know that the mirror eventually unfolds simply so we can once again rest in pure being. Yet the underlying truth of the matter is that, like it or not, we are all condemned to the vertigo of eternity.