**4 Essential Meditation Practices for Realizing the Deathless**

**Discover the Secret to Liberation: Meditations to Realize the Deathless**

**Introduction**

I want to talk about death today – everyone’s favorite topic. When we hear the word death most of us think of the death of the physical body. I would like to expand this to also talk about the death of the egoic or phycological self. We fear death because we fear the loss of the egoic or psychological self. Think about it. If we believed with absolute conviction that our self would survive the death of the physical body, we wouldn’t be afraid of death at all. Human beings create a variety of creative ways in the form of religions to escape the death of the self. In our culture we are very good at denying and hiding from death.

In this talk I will begin by defining the concept of the deathless, explore how it is realized and provide some concrete practices. Death meditation has two outcomes. First, we see the impermanent nature of the physical body and mind and therefore overcome attachment to it. This releases our fear of death an enables us to enjoy life in each moment. Secondly, through death meditation we can directly see that what we truly are is beyond the body and mind. We transcend the egoic mind and physical body and realize the deathless. Let’s explore each of these and explore how the deathless is realized. At the end of the talk I will detail how the directly seeing the deathless is enlightenment.

**Awaken to Impermanence: Appreciating Life**

We can learn to accept our inevitable death, see impermanence and recognize it as a natural part of life. The practice of awareness of death allows us to confront our fears directly and awaken to the impermanence of all things, including our body and mind. This can bring us a lot of peace in our lives.

In awareness of death practice, we begin to see that birth, life and death are parts of our existence. All parts are acknowledged and accepted. In this acceptance, we discover deeper peace and contentment with the natural flow of life. It can lessen our attachments to the body/mind formation and to things in the world. This can reduce suffering and increase appreciation for the life we are living. We may begin to see each moment as precious.

**Die before you Die: The Falling Away of the Egoic Self**

There is a deeper death practice that enables us to see our true unborn and deathless nature. The egoic self is afraid of dying and since the death of the physical body is associated with the death of the self. Humans are caught in the illusion of a separate egoic self that intensely fears physical death. The egoic self will go to any length to sustain itself, and since it cannot avoid physical death, it is deeply afraid. It has invented all kinds of religious beliefs to avoid facing its death and to rationalize a way that it can continue after death.

Enlightenment is closely linked with death, as true liberation requires dying before we physically die, shedding our egoic self and letting go of everything we hold onto as our identity. This involves surrendering completely to the present moment and relinquishing our attempts to control and manipulate life.

Ramana Maharhi's enlightenment story illustrates the benefits of death contemplation. When he faced a sudden fear of death at 17, he asked himself what it meant and imagined his own death. By imitating a corpse and realizing that only his consciousness was real, he transcended his fear of death and dwelled permanently in the deathless as a spirit beyond the body.

**Realizing the Deathless**

I would like to emphasize that no one is truly born or dies, and instead, it is merely conditions of the mind that are changing. The mind's attachment to the world of perception, thought, feeling, memory, and the material world creates the illusion that we are being born and dying.

Realizing the deathless state involves awakening to the fact that birth and death are mere appearances resulting from our attachment to the senses. The enlightened never die in the sense that they have awakened to the self beyond the cycle of birth and death. The construct of our perception of the world, including birth and death, is created by our minds and our six senses.

However, what is the ultimate reality that knows the world? It is the quality of knowing, lokavidū (Pali), which is formless and beyond individuality, time, and location. When we embody this awakened awareness, we realize the deathless and are liberated from our identification with the born and dying.

But when we let go of our identification with being a person in a particular place, passing through time, the puzzle is solved. The mind can then be free from time, location, and individuality, and the true nature of the world can be known.

By letting go of our identification with the self, we can achieve immortality. This doesn't mean that "me" or egoic self goes on forever, but rather that we see ourselves as transparent and not-self. The awakened mind is always present and provides refuge.

To understand death, we must first realize that our body and mind are merely localized expressions of infinite Consciousness. When our body/mind dies, we do not cease to exist, we simply return to the infinite Consciousness that we came from. To explain this idea, consider the metaphor of a wave and the ocean. A wave is merely a localized expression of the ocean, and when it hits the shore and dissolves, it returns to the ocean - its true nature. Similarly, our body/mind/ego are waves that appear for a period of time and eventually dissolve back into Consciousness.

Remember, none of the above is something to be believed. The ego can take up statements such as these and make a whole story about how it will survive death as consciousness. The deathless can only be realized in our direct experience, free from the conditioning and filtering of the conceptual egoic mind. It is a direct unmediated seeing of reality as it is.

**Death Meditation/Contemplation Practice**

To realize the deathless, we need to turn our attention inward and practice awareness of the present moment. This can be done by simply withdrawing our attention from the objects of the mind and inclining it towards the deathless, the unborn. This is not a complicated practice but a simple and natural one. By relaxing and noticing that which has been here all along, we can begin to experience the deathless.

The deathless is not something to be believed or understood by the mind. The ego, which likes the idea of living beyond the physical body, cannot truly understand it. Enlightenment means to extinguish the ego, and only then can the deathless be seen. It is like asking a dream character to understand the mind of the person having the dream.

Practicing awareness of death encourages us to deeply investigate the nature of our experience. By attending to the deathless, we can cultivate a sense of stability, clarity, and wisdom that can support us in our daily lives. The open and empty field within which all experiences arise, exist, and eventually vanish is not inert but aware and knowing, making it an aware field. Therefore, we are this open and empty aware field within which all experiences arise, exist, and eventually vanish. We may also begin to realize that the deathless is not separate from us but is, in fact, our true nature, which is always present and available to us, no matter what our external circumstances may be.

The emptiness that allows clouds to exist in the sky is similar to the medium in which all experiences arise. This emptiness enables the fullness of experiences to arise within it without preference or discrimination, like an empty space that allows any experience to manifest. This open and empty field is not inert, but aware and knowing, allowing all experiences to arise within it and eventually vanish. We are this open and aware field within which all experiences occur.

**Discovering the Deathless: The Art of Being in Silence**

Meditation, as we commonly understand it, is often misunderstood. In our attempts to achieve inner peace and stillness, we often become trapped in our ego's illusions, obstructing our path to true enlightenment. But what if we told you that the key to unlocking our true nature lies not in achieving anything, but in simply being in silence?

To begin to realize the deathless, we can ask ourselves two simple questions:

1. Is there silence here before I try to be silent?
2. What is the nature of my mind prior to the arising of a thought, sensation, or perception?

As we sit in silence, we're not seeking answers from our minds. Instead, we're feeling into a natural stillness, a space within which our thoughts and experiences arise. This stillness is already present within us, and we can learn to embrace it by releasing our attempts to attain it. If we fabricate stillness, it will inevitably be fleeting and fragile, easily shattered by external stimuli.

The second question leads us to explore the medium or field in which our thoughts, sensations, and perceptions arise, exist, and eventually fade away. This medium is difficult to define since it is not an object itself, but rather the container of all objects. It is empty of any thoughts, sensations, and perceptions, yet full of the potential for them all.

To refer to it as a "medium" or a "field” is not entirely accurate. It is more like a presence, a space-like presence that is the basis of our experience. To use the analogy of a dream, imagine a character in a dream who wants to explore the nature of the knowing with which she knows her experience. The knowing with which the character knows the dream world is the dreamer's mind, but it cannot be found anywhere in the dream character's world. Similarly, the space-like presence in which our experience arises cannot be found within the experience itself. It has no dimensions, and it does not appear in time or space. It is simply a presence, a fundamental basis for our experience.

To explore the reality of our experience, we allow ourselves to conceive of a medium or field in which our experience arises, as a kind of space. However, this is a concession to the mind that desires to think about it. Our thoughts simply flow through this space like birds through the sky, leaving no trace. And just as the sky has no opinion on the quality or number of birds that fly through it, awareness has no opinion on the content of our thoughts. It remains at peace, independent of the existence, quality, and quantity of thoughts.

The open, empty, and bright space of awareness is always present, peaceful, and unchanging. It is the ultimate reality of our existence, and it is accessible to us regardless of our experiences. Our experiences, such as thoughts and emotions, are like passing clouds in this field, and they do not impact the field itself. Hence, we need not attach any significance to our experiences, good or bad, or label them because they do not alter the field of awareness. The field remains in its pristine state, untarnished by any experience that arises within it.

**Body Meditation to Realize the Deathless**

The body and its sensations are a rich domain for mediation on the deathless. To start it is important to let go of our memories, ideas, and images about the body. In the practice we pay attention to the true experience of the body or the current sensation or flow of sensations. Without our memories, we cannot even be certain that the sensation we are experiencing is a sensation of the body. Therefore, we can learn to experience the current sensation as if it were the first experience we had ever had. We must approach it like a newborn infant with no memory or conceptualization of the experience, just raw sensation.

We must ask ourselves where this pulsating sensation comes from. Does it appear within the field of awareness, or outside of it? Is the sensation located inside us, or are we located inside the sensation? Is our awareness located inside the sensation or is the sensation located inside our emptiness? The purpose of these questions is not to find rational answers, but rather to dive deeper into the experience itself. By experiencing the reality of our sensations, we can determine whether they need changing or not.

When experiencing the current sensation, we can also ask ourselves if it has a clearly defined border or outline. We should not refer to an image of the body, but rather our own direct and intimate experience. We can also determine the size and age of the sensation, and whether it is healthy or sick. We should do all of this without reference to thought or memory.

Through this process, we are not attempting to manipulate or change our experience. We are simply trying to understand and taste the reality of it. By doing so, we may come to the realization that suffering only exists when we refer to thought or memory. Ultimately, the goal is to be fully present in our experiences and sensations, without being weighed down by the past.

Meditation with the body is a way of connecting with a deeper aspect of ourselves that is beyond the limitations of the physical world and the cycle of birth and death. Meditation with the body can be a powerful tool for exploring the deeper aspects of our being, which go beyond the limitations of the physical world and the cycle of birth and death. The body is a gateway to experiencing the fundamental nature of reality, which is timeless, boundless, and free from the limitations of birth, aging, sickness, and death.

Through meditation, we can develop a deep and intimate relationship with the body and cultivate a sense of awareness that is not confined to the physical form. We can learn to experience the body as a field of energy and sensation, rather than as a solid and fixed entity. By directing our attention inward, we can become aware of the subtle movements and sensations within the body and observe them with a sense of detachment and equanimity.

As we deepen our practice of meditation with the body, we may begin to experience a profound sense of peace, stillness, and presence. We may become aware of a dimension of ourselves that is timeless and unchanging, which exists beyond the impermanence and suffering of the physical world. This is often referred to as the deathless, or the unconditioned aspect of our being. We may begin to recognize that the deathless is not something that is separate from us, but is in fact our true nature, which is always present and available to us, no matter what our external circumstances may be.

**Mindfulness of Death Practice**

The *Maraṇasati Sutta*, or the Sutta on Mindfulness of Death was offered by the Buddha as a teaching for the Buddha’s disciple, Ananda. It was presented as a way to develop mindfulness and wisdom by contemplating the inevitability of death. The sutta begins with the Buddha describing how a person who is mindful of death will be able to overcome all kinds of unwholesome mental states, such as greed, hatred, and delusion. The Buddha then gives Ananda a list of six different reflections on death that one can use as a meditation object:

1. I am not the only one who will die; everyone who is born will die.
2. Death is certain; the time of death is uncertain.
3. My actions are my only true belongings; I cannot escape the consequences of my actions.
4. My body is subject to decay and disease; it is not a permanent or lasting thing.
5. Everything that is born must die; nothing in this world is exempt from death.
6. My death could happen at any moment; therefore, I must be mindful at all times.

The Buddha then tells Ananda that by contemplating these six reflections on death, one can develop a clear understanding of the impermanent and unsatisfactory nature of all things. This understanding can lead to the realization of the deathless, or the unconditioned state of liberation from suffering.

**Gradual Training to Realize the Deathless**

The *Anupada Sutta* is a teaching delivered by the Buddha that describes a specific method for the practice of meditation leading to the realization of the deathless. In the sutta, the Buddha instructs his disciple Sariputta to teach the monks a practice called the "gradual training" (anupubbikatha, Pali), which consists of four stages. These four stages are:

1. Establishing mindfulness of the body
2. Establishing mindfulness of feelings
3. Establishing mindfulness of mind (thoughts, emotions, and mental formations)
4. Establishing mindfulness of mental objects (concepts, ideas, and perceptions)

The Buddha recommends that the monks practice each of these stages sequentially, one after the other, until they have fully developed their mindfulness and concentration.

The monks are instructed to establish awareness of these various aspects of to develop a deeper awareness of their impermanent and unsatisfactory nature or a greater understanding of the nature of reality which enables them to realize the deathless.

**Zen Koan Practice**

The passage discusses a Zen Koan called "The Man Up the Tree" which is meant to provoke the conditioned or egoic mind until it is exhausted. The story involves a man stuck up a tree with his hands tied behind his back and his feet off the ground. A monk asks him to say the one true thing that can save his life. The man cannot figure out what to say without letting go of the branch and falling to his death. The Koan is intended to represent situations in life where we feel trapped and cannot find a way out. The passage suggests that by surrendering to the truth of the situation, in this case, that the man is going to die, he can experience actual living without fear, anger, or worry.

I am not going to tell you the answer to the Koan, but you can see how surrendering to the truth that you are going to die allows actual living to occur. By surrendering, the man had a few seconds of actual living – living without fear, anger or worry. He would have touched upon eternal life or Nirvana. In seeing clearly his situation and completely surrendering he entered the deathless.