

If you knew that today at 5:35pm you were going to die, what would you do? Would you panic or be peaceful? Would you have a “to do” list? Resolve regrets? Forgive or ask forgiveness? Say “I love you” to those who should hear it? What would you do if you knew you were going to die day after tomorrow at 5:35pm? Would it be a different set of tasks? Finally write a will? Clean the house?

We don’t know when we’re going to die, but it’s inevitable for each and everyone of us. We are all just one breath away from ending our life-experience on this planet.

I think it’s safe to say every religion deals with dying. Dying is a reality for all of us. Any being born will eventually die. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a plant, some moss, a fungus, a giant redwood; microscopic or megalomaniac; tiny insects or enormous whales; living on land, in the water, or in the air; or if it’s a human being. Any being born will eventually die. The religions give us direction for how to live our lives from birth until that point of death. This is helpful as we, indeed, come to this planet for a purpose and the religions give us insights into how we can realize that purpose; or, more likely, purposes.

The religions all say there is a continuance after the physical body dies and that

continuance is usually dependent on our thoughts, words, and deeds during this earthly life. The religions give us guidance: most basically, be kind and considerate to all, don’t be harmful, and recognize and affirm the Divine.

There’s much variation in this guidance. Just consider how dietary rules vary among the religions. The rules and “regs” are right for each religion and its practitioners or followers: This gives the discipline that’s an essential part of each religion. We don’t need to critique or judge these. There are many paths that reach the top of the mountain.

The teachings, the guidance, the religions give are for the different bodies: the physical, mental, emotional, moral, and spiritual bodies. To get ready to die, I’d like for us to concentrate on the moral and spiritual bodies as we make our preparations.

The moral realm is about relationship. How do I relate to the Divine? How do I relate to myself? Other human beings? To all life on this planet? It’s about making choices or decisions and their results and consequences. It’s realizing there’s not just some simple binary “action-reaction,” but there is a multiplicity of reverberations that occur at each juncture. What we do, say, and

think makes waves and echoes. The guidance from religions help us figure out the best choices or decisions. Consider such credos as the Buddhist Eightfold Path, Ahimsa or harmlessness from the Jain path, Judaism's Ten Commandments, or "The Golden Rule" which appears in most every religion as showing us the way. We can study these, contemplate on them, apply them in our lives, see how they work, take up the discipline. Find the Truth in them.

A starting point for the getting in touch with the moral realm could be the practice of the Knighthood of Purity. The practice consists of 40 rules, each of which begins with addressing "My conscientious self." Two examples are "My conscientious self, make no false claims" and "My conscientious self, do not look down on the one who looks up to you." A person says one rule each day for 40 days, then moves on to the next one. Forty times 40 equals 1,600 days to complete the practice; almost 4½ years.

The rules are in sets of 10: Iron Rules, Copper Rules, Silver Rules, and Gold Rules. While working with a set, one is designated a Herald of the particular metal until having completed the practice one receives the accolade Knight of Purity.

The rules are moral exercises that can be transformative. Strengthening the moral

being helps us move through the portal, the threshold of death, when that time comes. Why not do something that makes it easier to die?

Death is a mystery. To know it, one must experience it. The religions give us some insight for the spiritual body, the spiritual realm, and help us get in touch with our spiritual being which will have that experience.

We heard some beautiful reassurances to remove the fear of death in today's readings. In 2015 when my father died, I sent some of these inspiring readings to my family in Missouri. They were so taken with the Buddhist scripture, they asked their Presbyterian minister to read it as part of my dad's funeral; which she did.

"The traveler has reached the end of the journey! In the freedom of the Infinite, the traveler is free from all sorrows, the fetters that bound are thrown away, and the burning fever of life is no more."

The Zoroastrian scripture has one of the faithful meet his/her/their own soul and then move into the Good Thought paradise, the Good Word paradise, the Good Deed paradise (and keep in mind the word "paradise" comes from the Persian for

garden) until the faithful one becomes “the endless lights.”

The spiritual being connects us with our limitless being. There are really no words for it.

Getting ready to die, I’d like for us to consider two selections from the first prayer, Saum, we heard today. The first is “Raise us from the denseness of the earth. Thy Beauty do we worship. To Thee do we give willing surrender.”

“Raise us from the denseness of the earth.” You’ve probably heard before “We’re spiritual beings having a physical experience.” There’s truth in that. We ask God in this prayer to lift us up. Let us have these experiences, but help us have the higher perspective and understand the ultimate goal.

“Thy Beauty do we worship.” Let’s always be looking for the beautiful in life and know that beauty is a divine expression. So much happiness can come when we worship the Beloved as beauty. One of the “beautiful names of Allah” is Al Mumeet, the Bringer of Death. Can we let death be beautiful?

“To Thee do we give willing surrender.” If we fulfill this, we have relinquished our limitation; we liberate ourselves. Willing surrenders yields perfect freedom. (Sufis

love the seemingly paradoxical.) Death is the ultimate surrender and liberation.

This triad of requests prepares us for dying. It recognizes our current situation, doesn’t disdain it – it’s a privilege to be a human being – and points us Toward the One.

The second selection to consider from Saum is “Draw us closer to Thee every moment of our life until in us be reflected Thy Grace, Thy Glory, Thy Wisdom, Thy Joy, and Thy Peace.”

“Draw us closer to Thee every moment of our life.” “Draw us closer to Thee every moment of our life.” This is a powerful statement and affirmation. No matter what is happening in my life, no matter what my situation, let me know in my mind and in my heart that I am moving toward ultimate unity with the Beloved. With that being the case, what do I have to fear of death? And in that unity I’ll have Divine Grace, Glory, Wisdom, Joy, and Peace.

You know how I like to personalize our prayers; to change the “we” and “ours” to “me” and “my.” For this opening phrase, I would have it be “Draw me closer to Thee every moment of our life.” Why not change the “our” to “my?” Each of our lives is not separate from the One Life, the Only Being. Hear again today’s reading from the Quran.

“Bismillah Er Rahman Er Rahim. We begin in the name of Allah, Most Merciful and Most Compassionate.

It is We who ordain life and death. To Us all shall return.”

Every moment is a preparation for death. It comes to all. Aligning with our moral and spiritual being, finding our authentic self there, death will be a blip, a short crossing of the threshold, a quick moving through the portal. There will be no more mystery, all will be revealed, and we will know union with the Beloved.