

[What Happens When We Die?](#)

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FROM THE VEDAS

What Happens When We Die?

Vedic Rishi Yajnavalkya illumines death, karma and rebirth

Just as when the king wishes to depart, the ugras appointed to deal with crimes, the sutas and the leaders of the village gather around him, even so do all the organs gather around the self at the time of death, when it struggles for breath.

Now, when that self becomes weak and unconscious, as it were, the organs gather around it. Having wholly seized these particles of light, the self comes to the heart. When the presiding deity of the eye turns back from all sides, the dying man fails to notice color.

The eye becomes united with the subtle body; then people say: "He does not see." The nose becomes united with the subtle body; then they say: "He does not smell." The tongue becomes united with the subtle body; then they say: "He does not taste." The vocal organ becomes united with the subtle body; then they

say: "He does not speak!" The ear becomes united with the subtle body; then they say: "He does not hear." The mind becomes united with the subtle body; then they say: "He does not think." The skin becomes united with the subtle body; then they say: "He does not touch." The intellect becomes united with the subtle body; then they say: "He does not know!"

The upper end of the heart lights up, and by that light the self departs, either through the eye or through the head or through any other part (aperture) of the body. And when the self departs, the vital breath follows, and when the vital breath departs, all the organs follow.

Then the self becomes endowed with a particular consciousness and passes on to the body to be attained by that consciousness. Knowledge, work, and past experience follow the self.

And just as a leech moving on a blade of grass reaches its end, takes hold of another, and draws itself together towards it, so does the self, after throwing off this body, that is to say, after making it unconscious, take hold of another support and draw itself together towards it.

And just as a goldsmith takes a small quantity of gold

and fashions out of it another a newer and better form, so does the self, after throwing off this body, that is to say, after making it unconscious, fashion another a newer and better form, suited to the manes, or the gandharvas, or the Gods, or Viraj, or Hiranyagarbha or other beings.

That self is indeed Brahman; it is also identified with the intellect, the mind, and the vital breath, with the eyes and ears, with earth, water, air and akasha, with fire and with what is other than fire, with desire and with absence of desire, with anger and with absence of anger, with righteousness and unrighteousness, with all it is identified, as is well known, with this (i.e., what is perceived) and with that (i.e., what is inferred).

According as it acts and according as it behaves, so it becomes: by doing good it becomes good, and by doing evil it becomes evil. It becomes virtuous through virtuous action, and evil through evil action. Others, however, say that the self is identified with desire alone. As is its desire, so is its resolution; and as is its resolution, so is its deed; and whatever deed it does, that it reaps.

Regarding this there is the following verse: "Because of attachment, the transmigrating self, together with its work, attains that result to which its subtle body or mind clings. Having exhausted in the other world the

results of whatever work it did in this life, it returns from that world to this world for fresh work."

Thus does the man who desires transmigrate. But as to the man who does not desire—who is without desire, who is freed from desire, whose desire is satisfied, whose only object of desire is the Self his organs do not depart. Being Brahman, he merges in Brahman.

Regarding this there is the following verse: "When all the desires that dwell in his heart are got rid of, then does the mortal man become immortal and attain Brahman in this very body."

Just as the slough of a snake lies, dead and cast away, on an ant-hill, even so lies this body. Then the self becomes disembodied and immortal Spirit, the Supreme Self (Prana), Brahman, the Light.

Regarding this there are the following verses: "The subtle, ancient path stretching far away has been touched (reached) by me; nay, I have realized it myself. By this path the wise, the knowers of Brahman, move on to the celestial sphere (Liberation) after the fall of this body, having been freed even while living.

"Some speak of it as white, others as blue, grey, green, or red. This path is realized by a knower of Brahman and is trod by whoever knows Brahman, has done good deeds, and is identified with the Supreme Light."

Shukla Yajur Veda

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.3.38 - 4.4.1-9

Translation by Swami Nikhilananda

The Vedas are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, sruti, of Hinduism, likened to the Torah (1,200 bce), Bible New Testament (100 ce), Koran (630 ce) or Zend Avesta (600 bce). Four in number, Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva, the Vedas include over 100,000 verses. Oldest portions may date back as far as 6,000 BCE.

Swami Nikhilananda (1895-1973), was founder and spiritual leader of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York from 1933 to his Maha Samadhi. His Upanishad

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