

CHAPTER 7  
*Face Death*

# DISCIPLINE NUMBER SEVEN

The noble warrior accepts death as a teacher and an ally.



## Lesson

Death is a natural part of life. As Jim Morrison once noted, “No one gets out of here alive.” Some cultures recognize this and accept it as a part of life. Others are in complete denial of this reality, as if death is some unfortunate event that shouldn’t occur and that should be postponed and avoided at all costs. This is not the warrior’s approach to death.

The warrior seeks death on a certain level. Every great religion and spiritual philosophy teaches that in order to live spiritually the warrior must learn to die. In fact, Swedenborg says, “The old person must die so that the new person can be conceived.” Jesus says, “Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Lao Tzu says, “If you want to be reborn, let yourself die.” What must die is the ego, the overriding concern for oneself. What must die is selfishness, self-centeredness, self love. When this is given up, allowed to pass away in importance, a new self is born, a loving, integrated, spiritual self. The appearance is that if the warrior gives up on self that he/she will die, will find no more joy, contentment, happiness. But in reality, as the warrior gives up the self, not only do joy, contentment, and happiness flow in, but even a greater sense of selfhood and self-determination. It is one of those contradictions in spiritual growth: losing selfhood one finds it.

There is also an attitude within the brave warrior that one has already died before entering battle so that one need not worry about death. This can be misunderstood to mean that a true warrior acts recklessly in battle, throwing caution to the wind. But this is not what is meant. The warrior who goes into battle knowing he is already dead gives up on the ego part of the self, no longer acting from fear, or from self-interest or self-preservation alone. This is the coward’s way of fighting, always looking out for number one, never willing to risk for a greater cause than that of self, fighting from the fear of being killed. But the spiritual warrior does not fight from the fear of being killed, or to preserve oneself as the ultimate goal, but rather to forward the cause for which the warrior fights. With this as the ultimate goal, the warrior operates in a manner which will give the greatest assurance of victory, which includes both taking risks and taking care of one’s self. Maximizing effectiveness in battle, the warrior also does what is necessary to ensure self-preservation, but only for a higher purpose or goal. Therefore, as long as self preservation achieves the goal, the warrior struggles for it, but the warrior is also willing to die, if the benefit of such a death outweighs the cost of such a death. For this is the ultimate sacrifice of the warrior, and is the death of a hero. And so Sioux warriors would enter into battle with the war-cry, “Hokah Hey!” “Hokah Hey” means, “It’s a good day to die.”

Death, to the noble warrior, is an ally. Awareness of death causes an awareness of life. Death is the constant reminder that life in this world is short. There is much to be learned, much to be accomplished, much to be sought after, fought after, and enjoyed. There is too little time to waste away. With death as a constant reminder of the brevity of life, the warrior recognizes that every moment has importance, because this moment may be the warrior’s last moment. The warrior lives here and now. Therefore, the warrior does not fear death, but honors it. The warrior does not run from death, but does not tempt it either. Death is our witness, the ultimate time keeper and scorekeeper. Death demands our attention and our respect. For it is because of death, that we can comprehend the meaning and value of life.

# Gems from the Masters

Hokah Hey!  
It's a good day to die.!

Sioux War-cry

If you want to become full,  
Let yourself be empty.  
If you want to be reborn,  
Let yourself die.

Lao Tzu

Generally speaking,  
The Way of the warrior  
Is resolute acceptance of death.

Miyamoto Musashi

Death will come,  
Always out of season.

Big Elk

Each soul must meet the morning sun,  
The new,  
sweet earth,  
And the Great Silence  
alone!

Charles Alexander Eastman

The longest lived  
And the shortest lived man,  
When they come to die,  
lose one and the same thing.

Marcus Aurelius

Death is our eternal companion.  
It is always to our left,  
An arm's length behind us.  
Death is the only wise adviser  
that a warrior has.  
Whenever he feels that everything  
is going wrong  
And he's about to be annihilated,

He can turn to his death  
And ask if that is so.  
His death will tell him that he is wrong,  
that nothing really matters outside its touch.  
His death will tell him,  
“I haven’t touched you yet.”

Carlos Castaneda

Here’s Death,  
Twitching in my ear:  
“Live,” says he,  
“For I am coming.”

Virgil



## Questions for Personal Reflection and Discussion

When has death touched your life? What did you learn from it?

What is your greatest fear about dying?

What needs to die within you in order for you to be reborn?



## Meditation

Get comfortable. Allow your body to sink into whatever is supporting you, a chair, bed, the floor. Pay attention to your breathing. Allow your breathing to become even and natural. Let all thoughts and worries fly away. You are in the perfect place at the perfect time. In this state of relaxation and peace, consider how you can learn from an awareness of death. It helps you to see what is important in life, and who is important to you. Awareness of death helps you to see what lies incomplete and what calls for resolution. Some indigenous tribes had a ritual in time of death. When a person reached old age, and it was perceived that the time of death was at hand, that person put things in order and moved into a small house removed from the rest of the tribe. Here the person would spend his or her last days in contemplation, and also in resolution. People would come and visit the dying person and they would speak to each other for the last time. Issues would be resolved, words of love would be shared, goodbyes would be said. It was a time and place of final resolution and farewell. After all had come to visit, each one at a time, the person never saw them again, and spent his or her remaining days alone until death came to retrieve them.

Imagine for a moment, that your time on earth is coming to an end. Imagine that you now willingly put your affairs in order and travel to your house--your final place of contemplation and resolution. As you approach

the house, can you see what it looks like? See yourself sitting comfortably, reflecting on your life. Be that person in the house. What have you done with your life? What are your regrets? Pause and reflect. . . . What pleases you most about your life? Pause and reflect. . . . Now imagine that there will be individuals who come to you to say their final goodbye, and to find resolution. Let your mind be clear as you wait for each to come, one at a time. There is a knock on the door of your house. It is the first person to come to see you to talk and say goodbye. Open the door. Who is it? Invite the person in. What do they say to you? What needs to be resolved? Pause and reflect. . . . Have a conversation with that person, and say whatever needs to be said before you say goodbye. . . . When you are ready, say goodbye to that person, and see that person leave. A few moments pass, and there is another knock on the door. It is the next person to come to you for resolution. Open the door. Who is it? Invite the person in. What does this person say to you? What do you need to say in return? Come to a resolution with this person. Take your time. . . . When you are ready, say goodbye to this person. See that person leave your house, never to return. Now, in silence, repeat this process in your own mind, who else comes, what does each person need to say, and what needs to be said to them? Do this until no one else comes to visit your house. It may be a long list of people, but if you take just five minutes right now in this meditation, who comes, what is said, and what do you learn? When you are finished, ask yourself, "What have I learned about these relationships? Can I come to resolution with some of these people now, while I am alive and in good health?"



## Process

This process may seem morbid and uncomfortable, but it will help you to reflect on your life, and allow your life to become more valuable and enjoyable. Imagine that your time has come. Right now. That's it. Ugh. You're dead. Yes. You just died, right now. There is nothing you can do about it, no more bills to be paid, no more amends to be made, no more plans to be laid, and no dreams to be followed. It's over. Imagine a bit of time has passed for people to make preparations to your funeral. And you are able to see the people who come to pay their last respects. Who is there? Imagine that afterwards the people closest to you when you lived are gathered together, talking about you. For an individual, imagine what each of these people would say about you. Take some time with it, and be serious. What would each of the important people in your life say about you? For groups, one person at a time will volunteer to be the one who has suddenly died. That person will sit with his or her chair facing away from the others, and out of their site. Or, the person may lay down in the middle of the room and remain still while other speak of that person as if they were attending the funeral. One person speaks at a time, sharing a few words, a brief eulogy, and goodbye. When every person has had an opportunity to listen to what is said. Come back together and briefly share what that was like for you?

What do you learn from this process? Was someone missing from the funeral that you hoped would have been there? Why were they missing? Does something need to be resolved? Did what the people say about you ring true to you? Is there something you have learned about yourself? Is there something you can do to improve your life, your relationships, your outlook, your effect on the people around you?



What are your closing thoughts about Facing Death?

End this lesson with a prayer.