

Reincarnation

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Student: I received some bad news yesterday. My mom had a major stroke in her sleep. There was a lot of bleeding in her brain and major damage was done that put her in a coma. She will be taken off life support in the next few days.

Everything changes in *samsara*, including life and death. This situation is not affecting me very much. I don't know if it's because of my spiritual practice or it would have been that way anyway.

James: I am so sorry to hear about your mother. When my father and mother died I didn't feel emotional at all, not because I didn't love them but because I loved what was eternal in them. I think of them fondly every day. They are in us, they are part of us, they are us. So I can understand your dispassion. You came to the spiritual path because of an innate dispassion, and self-inquiry allows it to grow. As Krishna says in the *Gita*, "The wise grieve neither for the dead or for the living," because everything is the self. Nothing really changes. With a body or without we are all one.

Emotion is natural for the human part but for the self dispassion – clear seeing – is natural; it is not an uncaring state. In fact it is the essence of love. Whatever happens is meant to happen. The way it happens is the way it should happen. If you want to Skype I am always available.

Student: Thanks, James. As I sit with her I was wondering about the subtle body at death. From what I understand, the subtle body is expelled from the physical body at death. But what about when someone is in a vegetative state? She is essentially brain-dead, so is the subtle body still there, and is she as a conscious being also still there?

James: It is clear that she is conscious because she is alive. But her subtle body is totally *tamasic* because of the damage to the brain. A totally *tamasic* subtle body is called a coma, or a vegetative state. Vegetables are living beings but their subtle bodies are completely *tamasic*. They can't think or feel. In a human the *vasanas* are still there in a coma, so there is no way that they can work out, because the equipment, as Swamiji used to call it, is damaged. When we say that the subtle body is expelled at the time of death we mean that it returns to the causal body as it does when you go to sleep at night. Death is just like sleep: when the *vasanas* that make up the person no longer have a way to work out, the *prarabdha* (momentum from previous births) for this "incarnation" is over and they go back to sleep until *Isvara* creates another physical body for them to express through. Your mom, as you know her, will not awaken in another body. She is just a product of the circumstances of this birth. In the next birth a new "mom" will appear as a baby with the *vasanas* of the old mom but in a new environment. It is the combination of the old *vasanas* and the new environment that makes up the "person" who is born and dies. So there is not a continuity of one person through time. There is a *vasana* continuity.