

LEGACY OF WISDOM

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Wisdom Area: End of Life Preparations

The current generation has been quite pro-active in facing what is often seen as a taboo subject. Death has been challenged to be recognized as a more normal process of life. Nevertheless, it remains a topic fraught with anxiety, denial and drama.

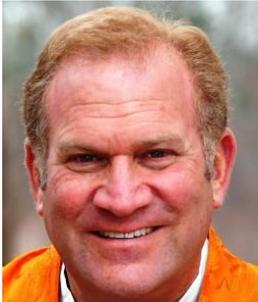
Question: How can we face the issues of death and mortality directly?

YouTube Video Title: Legacy of Wisdom – Lama Surya Das –Facing Mortality

YouTube URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1F5x7U33mc>

Length: 4:03

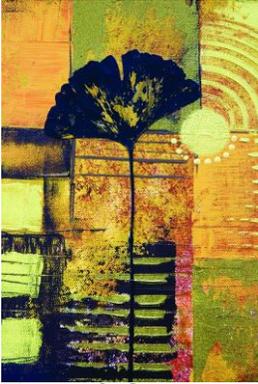
Interviewee: Lama Surya Das



www.surya.org

is one of the foremost Western Buddhist meditation teachers and scholars, one of the main interpreters of Tibetan Buddhism in the West, and a leading spokesperson for the emerging American Buddhism. The Dalai Lama affectionately calls him “The Western Lama.”

Surya has spent forty years studying Zen, vipassana, yoga, and Tibetan Buddhism with the great masters of Asia, including the Dalai Lama’s own teachers, and has twice completed the traditional three year meditation cloistered retreat at his teacher’s Tibetan monastery. He is an authorized lama and lineage holder in the Nyingmapa School of Tibetan Buddhism, and a close personal disciple of the leading grand lamas of that tradition. He is the founder of the Dzogchen Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and its branch centers around the country, including the retreat center Dzogchen Osel Ling outside Austin, Texas, where he conducts long training retreats and Advanced Dzogchen retreats. He has brought many Tibetan lamas to this country to teach and start centers and retreats over the years. Founder of the Western Buddhist Teachers Network with the Dalai Lama, he regularly helps organize its international Buddhist Teachers Conferences; he is also active in interfaith dialogue and charitable projects in the Third World. He has recently turned his efforts towards youth and contemplative education initiatives, what he calls “True higher education and wisdom for life training”.



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Question: How can we face the issues of death and mortality directly?

Transcript: ENGLISH –

Interviewer: do you have any advice to people in terms of having to look at, or should they look at their mortality. Is that a part of the wisdom?

LAMA SURYA DAS: Yes! I think it is wise to look at our mortality not to just assume immortality. That would be kind of foolish. Immortality is an illusion. Now I'm not putting down people believing in the immortal soul. I'm just saying, in general, if we observe, everything as impermanent. So it is wise to observe and look into mortality and change and what's important and what isn't. What's first level of important and second level of important. Like, everybody is important but those that depend on us, our children, are more important, relatively speaking. We are in charge of them, we are not in charge of the other ones as much, although somewhat.

And so similarly we have to pay attention to make these kind of distinctions. And you nicely, euphemistically, said death is our adviser but Buddha is more stark about it, he says “death is our teacher” and meditating on death and mortality is the greatest, the most important meditation. Because that helps us to let go a little, not throw things away, not be Nihilistic as though nothing matters but not be so materialistic and grasping; the things that in any case are passing through our fingers impermanent things, which are in any case passing through our fingers. So if we grip them a little less tightly it's in our higher self-interest, therefore mothering not smothering. Grip them a little less tightly and you get less rope burn, less irritation because they are impermanent things that are passing through our fingers so letting go gracefully of the things of youth and taking on the things of middle age and of older age and being a wise elder and a good grandparent and a good listener.

And, this is for me when I'm thinking about now this stage of my life in my 60s, elevating and deepening not just driving forward and achieving as I was brought up to do. Not just progress in going forward in achieving but elevating, deepening in a vertical dimensional. The timeless dimension not just a horizontal dimension of time and change, past present and future, but the 4th time, the nowness, the sacred time, the Buddhist standard Time, the holy now, elevating deepening. So the being, being in touch with the great Tao, being not just doing and becoming, which is part of that, doesn't mean being paralyzed because that Tao is not static, it's ecstatic and everything is that.