“You will come in due course to realize that your true glory lies where you cease to exist.”
- Ramana Maharshi

“You poor sad thing thinking death is real all by itself.”
- Ikkyu

As for the death of the body, so-called physical death, it should be clear that a question or difficulty can only arise if there is identification as the body. Thus identified, you see bodies die; you assume that the discreet individual who was that body died with it; and you conclude that one day you yourself will die.

The ego sense of individual self tries to generate hope in an afterlife, or a rebirth, or some kind of second chance, but the evidence for these is sketchy at best and so panic and dread set in because physical death sure looks pretty final.
Perfect Brilliant Stillness

Most of the world religions teach some form of immortality, but you don’t believe them; if you did you would not fear the annihilation of death. It has been said that fear of death is the basic, primal fear that generates all other fear, and is the underlying psychological factor shaping all of life.

All of this is illusion, and all based on the essential misconception that you are an individual, inseparably associated with the body that apparently dies.

What is unborn cannot die. You are the unborn. This is basic to the Understanding: how can there be any concern over the apparent death of these body/mind organisms, these characters in the dream, when it is known that what ‘I’ is, what the ‘I’ is that animates all such organisms, is All That Is; eternal, unbound, unborn.

“What is real does not die. What is unreal never lived.

“Once you know that death happens to the body and not to you, you just watch your body falling off like a discarded garment.

“The real you is timeless and beyond life and death. The body will survive as long as it is needed. It is not important that it should live long.”
(Nisargadatta Maharaj)

After the death of the body, ‘I’ is the same timeless, unborn impersonal Presence which ‘I’ is before the birth of the body. The identification as a body/mind is a transient phase and does not effect what ‘I’ is.

But there is more to this. Even within the dream, even if there is identification as the body/mind you call yourself, still the fear of death is misguided and unnecessary. Our cultures
have done us a disservice, created a bogeyman out of death that does not hold up to scrutiny. The western medical model is that death is failure; and as such it must be denied, avoided, postponed as much as possible. This belief runs deep in our culture, but it is only conditioning, and is not shared by many other cultures. Indeed, once again, a little reflection reveals it to be insane thinking. Once the body is born, its death is inevitable, absolutely, certainly; a natural consequence of birth. In what reasonable way can it possibly be seen as failure, as something to be avoided?

No one ever experiences their own death. No one ever will. By definition, it is not possible. The most widely accepted definition of physical death is 'brain death;' flatline; no sensory perceptions, and no processing of perceptions; no thought, emotion, memory, no internal activity of any kind; therefore, what we call no experience. Death is the ceasing of experience in that body/mind. Therefore, if there is no experiencing in that body/mind, there can be no experiencing of death in that body/mind.

It's similar to falling asleep. In all the times you have fallen asleep during your life, you have never experienced it. You experience being drowsy, you experience lying down, getting sleepier... next thing you know you are waking up and postulating that at some point you must have fallen asleep, but you do not have a direct experience of that because the one who would have experienced falling asleep, had it been awake, had fallen asleep!

So it is with death. There is perceiving and experiencing up until death, then the experiencing stops and we say that the body/mind has died. Simple. Death is never experienced, because experiencing stops. How can one possibly
Perfect Brilliant Stillness

fear that which one will never experience?

Certainly, it is a possibility that there may be pain or suffering in the body/mind before death, before the experiencing ceases. And this may be feared, or at the very least not looked forward to. This is a natural response in the body/mind. So, we can be clear: it is old age, or sickness, or a specific disease, which may be feared. But death itself does not exist as something to be experienced; it is merely the word we give to the cessation of experiencing.

Much fear of death arises from misinformation, based on the segregation and active avoidance of death in our cultures. In fact, the body is well designed to die, and it is rare that physical death itself is accompanied by intense suffering. It does happen, yes, but most commonly pain or suffering comes before, during the sickness, and when the time for death arrives the physical and mental functionings naturally draw back and shut down gradually. Death is usually much easier and gentler than the popular imagination holds. This is confirmed by those who work regularly with the dying.

At bodily death, then, Consciousness no longer experiences the dream in or through that body/mind organism. The animating force of Consciousness ceases functioning in that body, and so the body no longer appears animated, is no longer sentient, no longer is what we call 'alive,' and it rapidly disintegrates, decays into its constituent elements. But there can be no direct experience of this because the experiencing has, by definition, ceased already. And Consciousness, which is what I is, what You are, which is All That Is, continues; is unborn, never dies, is eternal. Was never limited to that body/mind in any case.
So we return to the concept that the only true death is not the death of the body but the death, the annihilation, of the sense of individual self. It is this death, this annihilation of self, that the ego fears and is busy constructing morbid, gruesome fantasies about. It is this death that generates the fear of physical death. And it is this death that is actually worth investigating.

There is an image frequently encountered in dreams: an open door, darkness beyond; stepping through, falling into empty space. The ego would have you wake up at this point in a sweat, fear of death making your heart pound.

But this reaction is only a matter of conditioning, of belief; a matter of identification as the body. In fact, the imagery is very appropriate. Nearly every spiritual tradition advocates stepping off the edge into Void. The ego sense of individual self will necessarily interpret its own negation as Void; that which it is not, that where it cannot go.

Please see that this next bit is very rational and quite simple, but transformative if truly understood. It is rare to find anyone to whom this concept has even occurred, let alone one who truly understands it. It is the secret of life and death, and the certain knowing inherent in awakening:

If ‘this,’ the world of things and ideas, is seen as what is real, as true, as ‘reality,’ then That which is completely and radically ‘not-this,’ for which there are no words or ideas within ‘this,’ will necessarily be seen as no thing, as unreal, as Void. Thus it may be feared, dreaded, denied.
Perfect Brilliant Stillness

It is only when 'this,' this so-called 'reality'
is completely understood to be dreamlike illusion
that what is 'not-this'
will, at the same time, be seen to be What Is.

Void, then, is not your enemy, but your true Self;
and it is the function of the nonexistent, false sense of
individual self to hide this from you.
The fear and avoidance is seen to be misplaced;
in fact it is now impossible; it disappears, and
the heart turns from the illusion of 'this'
and opens to What Is.
Knowing that its true glory lies where it ceases to exist.

There is much to be said for dying now and not waiting until
the body dies; things might be a little rushed then, and one
might find it hard to concentrate. Now, in the midst of what you
take to be your life, there can be, if needed, a 'positive' prac-
tice of building up and strengthening the sense of individual
self until it is strong enough to undergo the 'negative' process
of realizing that it is a sham, unreal after all, never did exist;
and then perhaps it can be let go, let die, let fall away.

Then there can be a liberation from that ego that haunted
and plagued us all our lives with fears of its own demise,
for it turns out not to be anything real, nothing even to
struggle against or try to defeat. The ego, and the death
it has convinced you is your greatest fear, is only a tired
tape recording in an empty room, which from outside you
thought was a powerful and fearful enemy; but now the plug
is pulled and the voice slurs to a stop.

This is what it is to ‘die before you die;' to step through
the gateless gate into Void, and to walk the universe alone.

This book and much more is available free at www.PerfectBrilliantStillness.org