

When Does Death Occur?

We live in a time when the body can be kept alive after the mind has died. Technology can make the line between life and death fuzzy, and we are sometimes faced with making tough choices concerning whether a person is really dead or alive. However, what is it that makes a person a person? Is the person still alive if even a few cells are still alive? Technically yes, but, in reality, no. It is the brain activity, specifically the higher brain functions, that define the line between life and death. In the Church of Reality, when you have lost consciousness, with no reasonable chance of recovery, you are dead. To exist as a living corpse is not considered being alive.

In the Church of Reality, you are your brain. It is your awareness that makes you who you are and from that awareness you experience life as a person. If you are brain dead but the body is kept alive artificially, then the body isn't really you.

We believe that death occurs at the point when the higher brain functions permanently end.

The Church of Reality also recognizes personal choice to help resolve issues when one is within the fuzzy line between life and death. Some people want to hang on as long as there is any chance at all. Some people want to be allowed to let go when the fight to stay alive becomes more painful than they can bear. Some people don't want to be alive if their mind is so damaged that they will have to live a hellish half-life should they be kept alive. A person might choose that half a life isn't enough. Others might decide that any hope is plenty to continue the fight for a recovery.