

if i should die before i wake

If I Should Die Before I Wake: Exploring the Meaning and Emotions Behind a Timeless Phrase

if i should die before i wake — these words have echoed through generations, often whispered as a child's bedtime prayer or reflected upon in moments of deep introspection. The phrase carries a profound weight, blending innocence with vulnerability, hope with fear. But why has this simple line endured for so long? What does it truly mean, and how can understanding its depth offer comfort or insight into our own lives?

In this article, we will delve into the origins, interpretations, and emotional resonance of "if I should die before I wake," exploring its significance in literature, culture, and personal reflection. Along the way, we'll also touch on related themes such as mortality, dreams, and the human desire for protection and peace.

The Origins of “If I Should Die Before I Wake”

This phrase is most famously associated with a traditional children's bedtime prayer, often called the "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep" prayer. The full line typically goes:

- > "Now I lay me down to sleep,
- > I pray the Lord my soul to keep;
- > If I should die before I wake,
- > I pray the Lord my soul to take."

The prayer dates back several centuries and has been passed down through families as a comforting ritual before sleep. Its purpose is to invoke divine protection during the vulnerable hours of rest, acknowledging that sleep is a kind of temporary death, a moment when the body is still and the soul is at peace—or so the prayer hopes.

The historical context of this prayer reflects a time when infant mortality rates were high, and the uncertainty of life was much more immediate. Saying this prayer was both an expression of faith and a way to cope with the fragility of existence.

Understanding the Emotional Impact of the Phrase

At its core, "if I should die before I wake" speaks to a universal human experience: the awareness of mortality. Even though we often push the thought of death to the back of our minds, this phrase brings it gently to the forefront, wrapped in the innocence of a child's voice.

Comfort in Vulnerability

One reason the phrase resonates so deeply is its honesty about vulnerability. Sleep is a state where control is surrendered, much like death itself. For children, reciting this prayer can be reassuring—a way of asking for protection when they feel powerless.

For adults, revisiting this phrase can stir a complex mix of emotions: nostalgia, fear, acceptance, and sometimes peace. It reminds us that vulnerability is part of life, and seeking comfort—whether through faith, meditation, or loved ones—is a natural response.

The Duality of Sleep and Death

Many cultures and philosophies link sleep and death symbolically. Sleep represents a temporary rest, a gateway to dreams, while death is the final rest, the eternal silence. The phrase "if I should die before I wake" captures this duality perfectly, acknowledging that one might not awaken from sleep, just as one might not awaken from life.

This connection often prompts reflection on how we live our lives, urging mindfulness about the preciousness of each day and the importance of cherishing moments with others.

Exploring Related Themes: Mortality, Faith, and Protection

The phrase "if I should die before I wake" naturally opens the door to broader discussions about death, spirituality, and the human need for safety.

Mortality and Acceptance

Facing the possibility of death, even hypothetically, can be unsettling. Yet, many find that accepting mortality leads to a richer, more meaningful life. The phrase encourages this acceptance by normalizing the idea that death is an eventual part of the human journey.

Practicing gratitude, nurturing relationships, and pursuing passions become even more vital when we recognize the temporary nature of existence.

The Role of Faith and Prayer

In many traditions, prayer before sleep serves as a spiritual safeguard. The original prayer that includes "if I should die before I wake" reflects a belief in a protective, caring higher power who watches over us, especially in our most vulnerable moments.

Whether through formal religion or personal spirituality, this idea of seeking protection and

peace before sleep can provide emotional comfort and help reduce anxiety about death and the unknown.

Psychological Benefits of Bedtime Rituals

Beyond faith, bedtime rituals like saying a prayer or repeating comforting phrases can soothe the mind and body, promoting better sleep quality. They help create a sense of routine and security, which is especially important for children but beneficial for adults as well.

Incorporating mindfulness, gratitude, or affirmations before sleep can echo the calming effect of this traditional prayer, helping us release worries and prepare for restorative rest.

The Cultural Impact and Modern Interpretations

Over time, "if I should die before I wake" has permeated literature, music, and popular culture, often evoking a mixture of innocence and melancholy.

In Literature and Music

Writers and musicians have used this phrase to explore themes of mortality, innocence lost, and the tension between fear and hope. Its rhythmic and solemn tone makes it a compelling element in poems, songs, and stories that deal with life's fragility.

Modern-Day Usage and Adaptations

Today, many people reinterpret the phrase in personal ways. Some use it metaphorically to express the desire to live fully each day, acknowledging that life is unpredictable. Others may find solace in its words during times of grief or uncertainty.

The phrase also appears in tattoo art, jewelry, and home décor, symbolizing protection, remembrance, or the acceptance of life's impermanence.

How to Embrace the Message in Daily Life

While the phrase "if I should die before I wake" might sound somber at first, it carries lessons that can enrich our daily living.

Practice Mindfulness and Gratitude

Recognizing life's fragility can inspire us to be more present and grateful. Simple practices such as journaling three things you're thankful for each day or taking moments to appreciate loved ones can shift your mindset toward positivity.

Create Your Own Bedtime Ritual

Whether religious or secular, a calming routine before sleep can bring peace. This might include reading uplifting literature, meditating, or silently repeating a comforting phrase that resonates personally.

Foster Connections and Seek Support

The vulnerability expressed in the phrase reminds us that humans need connection. Sharing your fears or hopes with trusted friends or professionals can provide reassurance and help cope with existential worries.

Reflecting on Life's Preciousness

Ultimately, "if I should die before I wake" invites us to reflect on the delicate balance between life and death. It reminds us that while we cannot predict what comes next, we can choose how we live now—embracing love, kindness, and courage.

This timeless phrase continues to inspire, comfort, and provoke thought, proving that even simple words can carry deep meaning across generations. Whether whispered in prayer or pondered in solitude, it encourages us to approach each day with humility and hope.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the meaning of the phrase 'If I should die before I wake'?

The phrase 'If I should die before I wake' is a line from a traditional children's bedtime prayer, expressing a wish for protection through the night and an acknowledgment of the uncertainty of life.

Where does the phrase 'If I should die before I wake'?

come from?

It comes from the classic children's bedtime prayer known as 'Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep,' which dates back to the 18th century and is used to teach children to pray before bedtime.

Is 'If I should die before I wake' considered a comforting or scary phrase?

It can be seen both ways; some find it comforting as a prayer for safety through the night, while others may find the mention of death before waking unsettling, especially for children.

How is the phrase 'If I should die before I wake' used in popular culture?

The phrase is often referenced in songs, movies, and literature to evoke themes of mortality, innocence, or the fragility of life, sometimes used poetically or metaphorically.

Can 'If I should die before I wake' be interpreted as a metaphor?

Yes, metaphorically, it can represent the idea of facing uncertainty or danger during vulnerable times, not only literal sleep but any moment of risk or transition.

Are there modern adaptations of the 'If I should die before I wake' prayer?

Yes, many modern versions of the prayer have been adapted to be less frightening and more comforting, sometimes focusing on themes of safety, peace, and hope rather than death.

How can parents address the phrase 'If I should die before I wake' with children?

Parents can explain the historical and cultural context of the phrase, reassure children about their safety, and use it as an opportunity to discuss feelings about fear and protection at bedtime in a gentle way.

Additional Resources

If I Should Die Before I Wake: An Analytical Exploration of Mortality, Legacy, and Cultural Reflections

if i should die before i wake is a phrase that resonates deeply within the human psyche, evoking contemplations of mortality, the fragility of life, and the rituals surrounding death. Originating from a traditional bedtime prayer, these words have permeated literature,

music, and popular culture, symbolizing the universal uncertainty about what comes after the final moments of existence. This article delves into the multifaceted dimensions of this phrase, examining its historical roots, psychological implications, and contemporary relevance, while considering broader themes of life, death, and legacy.

The Origins and Historical Context of "If I Should Die Before I Wake"

The phrase "if i should die before i wake" traces back primarily to a well-known children's bedtime prayer commonly referred to as "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep." This prayer, dating back to at least the 18th century, was a way for parents to impart a sense of safety and spiritual protection to their children before sleep, a vulnerable state where the boundary between waking and unconsciousness might feel precarious.

The original prayer typically reads:

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

This invocation reflects not only religious faith but also an acknowledgment of life's unpredictability. Historically, when infant mortality rates were significantly higher and life expectancy considerably lower, this prayer encapsulated a poignant awareness of death's proximity even in the innocence of childhood.

The Psychological Underpinnings of Confronting Mortality

From a psychological perspective, the contemplation embedded within the phrase "if i should die before i wake" serves as an early confrontation with mortality. Psychologists suggest that awareness of death is a fundamental aspect of human consciousness, influencing behavior, beliefs, and emotional health.

Ernest Becker's seminal work, **The Denial of Death**, posits that much of human culture—religion, art, social structures—functions as a buffer against the terror of mortality. The bedtime prayer acts as a ritualized mechanism to manage the anxiety associated with death, especially in children who are beginning to recognize their vulnerability.

Furthermore, modern psychology recognizes that existential reflections, such as those prompted by this phrase, can lead to both distress and growth. When individuals engage

with the concept of their mortality in a structured or meaningful way, it often enhances appreciation for life, relationships, and personal values.

The Phrase in Contemporary Culture and Media

Over time, "if i should die before i wake" has transcended its religious origins and entered popular culture, where it frequently appears in literature, music, and film. Its usage often evokes a somber or reflective mood, sometimes underscoring themes of sacrifice, fear, or hope.

For instance, in music genres ranging from folk to hip-hop, artists invoke the phrase to articulate vulnerability or to confront societal challenges that threaten life. In literature, it serves to highlight characters' awareness of their mortality or to foreshadow impending tragedy.

Comparisons with Other Cultural Death Rituals and Expressions

Exploring similar expressions from different cultures reveals a shared human concern with death and the unknown. For example:

- **Japanese funerary traditions** emphasize the peaceful transition of the soul, often accompanied by prayers and rituals to ensure safe passage.
- **Mexican Día de los Muertos** celebrates the memory of the deceased, blending reverence with festivity, acknowledging death as part of life.
- **Ancient Egyptian beliefs** centered on preparation for the afterlife, with prayers and spells designed to protect the soul's journey.

In comparison, the phrase "if i should die before i wake" functions as a succinct, personal prayer reflecting an individual's hope for spiritual safety during the vulnerable state of sleep.

Modern Interpretations and the Role of Faith

In contemporary society, where secular viewpoints often coexist with religious beliefs, the phrase takes on diverse meanings. For believers, it remains a heartfelt appeal for divine protection. For others, it can symbolize a broader existential hope or an acknowledgment of life's unpredictability.

The phrase also reflects the human tendency to seek control or reassurance in the face of

uncontrollable events. Sleep itself is metaphorically likened to death in many cultures, blurring the lines between temporary unconsciousness and the final rest.

Pros and Cons of Embracing Mortality Awareness

Engaging consciously with the idea encapsulated by "if i should die before i wake" has both benefits and potential drawbacks.

1. Pros:

- *Enhanced appreciation for life:* Recognizing mortality can motivate individuals to live more fully and meaningfully.
- *Improved mental preparedness:* Accepting death reduces anxiety about the unknown and promotes peace.
- *Spiritual growth:* For many, reflecting on death fosters deeper faith or philosophical insight.

2. Cons:

- *Increased anxiety:* Constant preoccupation with death can lead to fear or depressive symptoms.
- *Potential fatalism:* Overemphasis on mortality might discourage proactive life choices.
- *Social discomfort:* Discussions around death can be taboo, leading to isolation or misunderstanding.

Balancing awareness of mortality with positive living is thus a nuanced psychological and cultural challenge.

Health Perspectives: Sleep, Mortality, and the Science of Rest

Beyond its metaphorical and spiritual connotations, the phrase also invites consideration of the relationship between sleep and mortality from a medical vantage point. Sleep is essential to physical and mental health; chronic sleep deprivation is linked to increased risks of heart disease, stroke, and other life-threatening conditions.

Studies indicate that poor sleep quality correlates with higher mortality rates, underscoring the importance of restful sleep as a protective factor. In this context, the fear implied in "if i should die before i wake" takes on an empirical dimension, as individuals who struggle with sleep disorders face real risks.

Sleep Disorders and Mortality Risk

Sleep apnea, insomnia, and other disorders affect millions worldwide. Research published in journals like **Sleep Medicine Reviews** highlights that untreated sleep apnea, for example, can double the risk of cardiovascular complications.

This medical insight adds complexity to the phrase's meaning, reminding us that the interval between sleep and wakefulness is not merely symbolic but a critical period with tangible health consequences.

Legacy and the Human Desire for Continuity

Finally, "if i should die before i wake" touches on the fundamental human desire to leave a legacy. Death, while inevitable, motivates individuals and societies to create lasting impacts—through children, art, knowledge, or social change.

The phrase encapsulates a moment of vulnerability but also a call to meaning that transcends one's lifespan. It invites reflection on how we prepare for the unknown and what we hope to leave behind.

Whether through religious faith, personal values, or cultural practices, confronting the possibility of dying before waking encourages us to consider the imprint of our existence.

In exploring "if i should die before i wake," we encounter a powerful nexus of faith, fear, health, and culture. This phrase, simple yet profound, continues to echo through centuries, reminding us of life's precariousness and the enduring human quest for peace amid uncertainty.

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David and Jesse Turner have been happily married for seven years when a fatal car crash takes Jesse away from David. Jesse lies in a hospital bed, fighting for her life. She is thrown into another world, unaware that she is in a coma. Aaron Edwards has spent his life fighting to avenge the wrong that was inflicted on him from an early childhood. He spent the first nine years of his life hidden in an attic then he was separated from human compassion in an institution. While fleeing the scene of a crime, he is also caught up in the same fateful car crash. Together he and Jesse discover that everything is not as it may seem. Thomas Keyes, a decorated police officer, lost his wife and child to a serial killer years ago. He leads an ongoing investigation in search for the person or persons responsible for a series of brutal murders. The investigation runs into a wall, but through a strange twist in fate, a nurse named Edith Allen opens Thomas's eyes to an incredible realization. It is said that beyond all reason, there exists another world. A world not controlled by rationality or predictable thought, but the unpredictable subconscious mind. What happens if that world is discovered? David sits by Jesse's bedside hoping for a miracle when he, as well as Thomas Keyes, are challenged to believe the impossible. Can the world as they know it, hide another whole and complete existence? David is forced to make a choice. In a race against odds, David must decide whether to kill or be killed. His resolve is tested as he takes a leap of faith and follows his heart. Can he save his wife from a serial killer?

if i should die before i wake: *If I Should Die Before I Live* Richard Renwick Smyth, 2017-10-24
A disquieting question persists: "What if I should die before I feel life is full?" It is deeply personal, hauntingly spiritual. It's a challenge to re-visit beliefs and the dynamics of faith, love, hope. Exploration brings a fresh encounter: the human and spiritual elements of "self." These are not contending identities; each supplies unique initiatives for life's fullness. Both need nurturing; either can be ignored. Spiritual experience makes promise and mystery real; this enhances earthly achievements. These Meditations focus on spiritual vitality—especially for seniors. They reach beyond a biological birth-death time-frame. They touch on continuity beyond earth-time. God's initiatives enrich the spiritual self—grace energizes faith. This generates and motivates people to offer acts of love. Love fosters grander character and perspective, wholesome relationships, healing for the heart-hungry/heart-broken. The outcome: a healthier self experiencing joy and peace—wholeness for life beyond death. Richard Smyth's missionary service in India was designated "church development." The Indian church prepared for autonomy, to assure continuity of American mission initiatives. "Development" involved identifying and implementing specific ministries. The challenge: match peoples' needs with relevant opportunities. This affected worship/activity in local congregations as well as their outreach efforts. The goal: design culturally valid strategies, structures and services for the church's mission, organization, workers. An emphasis was proper leadership and resources. He built up a multi-cultural congregation in one of New Delhi's new suburban areas. This housed government, business and military personnel called to national offices. The congregation's focus: build strong fellowship ties and initiate outreach services in the community. This pattern was used for nation-wide training programs by denominational and para-church groups. The last 15 years expanded the ministry to facilitate similar transitions by mission institutions in 14 Asia/Pacific nations. Richard and Sylvia Smyth retired in 1998; they reside in Asheville, North Carolina. Their family of 5 Indian children and spouses, grandchildren and great-grandchildren live in New Delhi, Manila, Dubai and Stockholm.

if i should die before i wake: *If I Should Die Before I Wake* K. Scott Oliphint, Sinclair B. Ferguson, 1995 This brief, fascinating look at death and the afterlife asks the reader: Why do you expect to get to heaven? The authors point out the right and wrong answers to this question and dig deep into Scripture to reveal what the Bible says about the future and what one can expect in heaven.

if i should die before i wake: *If I Should Die Before I Wake: the Nsukka Dream* Lewis K. Zerby, Margaret Zerby, 1971

if i should die before i wake: *If I Should Die Before I Wake (and Even If I Don't)* John W. Sheppard, 1994-09 An estate-planning handbook for people of all ages! -- Will your estate be

unnecessarily ravaged by taxes? -- Will it be claimed by undeserving people? -- Will your family be provided for when you are gone? Resolves such nagging concerns! Explains one's options in simple language, and tells how to develop a comprehensive plan to protect one's future, family, assets, and peace of mind. ...I noticed that a fellow SunBanker...was reading *If I Should Die Before I Wake*. He told me it was quite outstanding and offered to purchase a copy for me and a couple of our other senior executives. I find it to be most helpful... -- T.J. Hoepner, Chairman, President & CEO, SunBank, N.A. You have tackled a very broad subject which can be very technical and rather boring and made it understandable, enjoyable and informative. I will be using your book as a resource for my clients from now on. -- Linda M. Treise, Certified Public Accountant Hughes, Snell & Co., P.A. I found it easy to read, sensitive, very informative and humorous. I noted just over two dozen items for which I want to double-check our own planning... Henry F. Scheig, Former Chairman, President & CEO Lutheran Brotherhood Insurance Company of America

if i should die before i wake: Sermons from Duke Chapel William H. Willimon, 2005-03-02 Offers 57 diverse sermons preached in Duke Chapel by such notable figures as Billy Graham, Paul Tillich, and Barbara Brown Taylor and a fascinating analysis of the acoustic and visual challenges of preaching and listening at Duke Chapel.

if i should die before i wake: I'm Too Young To Be Seventy Judith Viorst, 2007-11-01 The beloved author of *Forever Fifty* and *Suddenly Sixty* tackles the ins and outs of becoming a septuagenarian with wry good humor. Fans of Viorst's funny, touching, and wise decades poems will love these verses filled with witty advice and reflections on marriage, milestones, and middle-aged children. Viorst explores, among the many other issues of this stage of life, the state of our sex lives and teeth, how we can stay married though thermostatically incompatible, and the joys of grandparenthood and shopping. Readers will nod with rueful recognition when she asks, "Am I required to think of myself as a basically shallow woman because I feel better when my hair looks good?," when she presses a few helpful suggestions on her kids because "they may be middle aged, but they're still my children," and when she graciously—but not too graciously—selects her husband's next mate in a poem deliciously subtitled "If I Should Die Before I Wake, Here's the Wife You Next Should Take." Though Viorst acknowledges she is definitely not a good sport about the fact that she is mortal, her poems are full of the pleasures of life right now, helping us come to terms with the passage of time, encouraging us to keep trying to fix the world, and inviting us to consider "drinking wine, making love, laughing hard, caring hard, and learning a new trick or two as part of our job description at seventy." *I'm Too Young to Be Seventy* is a joy to read and makes a heartwarming gift for anyone who has reached or is soon to reach that—it's not so bad after all—seventh decade.

if i should die before i wake: Uncertain Terms Faye Ginsburg, Lowenhaupt Tsing, 1992-08-31 No separate and extended discussion of lesbianism, but some of the writers--e.g., Ellen Lewin (p. 199 et seq.) are open to including lesbians in their discussions. Again, no index, alas.--P. Thorslev.

if i should die before i wake: The Intruders E E Richardson, 2010-05-05 Joel Demetrius is quite looking forward to moving in with his new step-family, but as far as his sister Cassie's concerned, they're nothing but intruders. She doesn't want anything to do with Gerald and his two sons, and to make matters worse their new home is a derelict old house, neglected for decades. Joel thinks it's interesting. Cassie thinks it's a dump. But his sister isn't the only reason the house doesn't feel like a home. As fascinated as he is by the place, Joel has to admit there's something not quite right about it. Not only does he keep seeing things out of the corner of his eye, but his sleep is plagued by nightmares. He can't seem to stop dreaming about a terrified boy who keeps repeating the same fractured prayer: IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I WAKE, I PRAY THE LORD MY SOUL TO TAKE . . . As events in the house become harder and harder to explain, it seems that the line between nightmare and reality is getting steadily more blurred. And when the battle between Cassie and her step-brothers draws everyone deeper into the mystery, all four kids are forced to confront the question of just who the intruders really are.

if i should die before i wake: *A Little Bit of Me* Angela Gascoigne, 2015-03-09 Relax! Put your feet up, and give in to your guilty pleasure. Here we have short stories, flash fiction and a little pinch of poetry in a variety of themes with something for everyone. *A Little Bit of Me*, is my fifth e book to be published, and my second collection. Delve inside the pages of this book to experience a little bit of me - from the soft and fluffy to the dark and deep. There's more than a hint of my dark side in this collection but also a good injection of happiness and humour. There are some sentimental pieces of writing which are very close to my heart and others which evolved from my darkest of days. Join me for a giggle and a grimace, a tear or two and a smile. Read on to see what happens when a good pet goes bad, a healthy eating plan goes wrong, and when a puppy-rustling vegetarian gets more than he bargained for. Read my work, inspired by thoughts that woke me with a shudder during cold dark nights, and words that danced in my head on beautiful mornings, making my spirit smile. Take a break from the daily grind and settle down with *A Little Bit of Me*.

if i should die before i wake: Joy & Pain: A Poetry Collection Jan Wooden Howse, 2014-08-22 Joy & Pain: a Poetry Collection is a collection of heartfelt poems by T. Channi. The collection of poems takes the reader through the experiences, observations and revelations of life's ups, downs, love, lost and everything in between.

if i should die before i wake: *Hearts and Minds* Kenneth Boa, John Alan Turner, 2006 Parenting is about more than molding the behavior of our kids. It's about influencing a child's heart and mind. *Hearts and Minds* shows parents the most effective way to influence a child's heart. This book applies the principles of Christian worldview in *How Now Shall We Live* to the process of raising children. It deals with issues like educational choices, how to handle the teaching of non-Christian worldview in secular schools, and how Christian worldview informs parenting choices.

if i should die before i wake: *11226: Just a Girl from Brooklyn* Anissa Danielle Moore, 2018-09-19 *11226: Just a Girl from Brooklyn* is a collection of poems regarding love and relationships, politics, and everyday life through the lens of race, class, and gender. Inspired by poets, which include Langston Hughes, Nikki Giovanni, and Gwendolyn Brooks, *11226: Just a Girl from Brooklyn* captures the heart and soul of contemporary Brooklyn.

if i should die before i wake: Editorial Cartoon Awards 1922-1997 Heinz-D. Fischer, 2011-04-20 The School of Journalism at Columbia University has awarded the Pulitzer Prize since 1917. Nowadays there are prizes in 21 categories from the fields of journalism, literature and music. The Pulitzer Prize Archive presents the history of this award from its beginnings to the present: In parts A to E the awarding of the prize in each category is documented, commented and arranged chronologically. Part F covers the history of the prize biographically and bibliographically. Part G provides the background to the decisions.

if i should die before i wake: The Infant School and Nursery Hymn Book , 1829

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if i should die before i wake: Daily Grace Cook David C, David C Cook, 2005 Daily Grace is a fresh collection of daily reflections to help readers uncover God's presence, power, and provision for living life purposefully and gracefully. An inspiring scripture, encouraging quote, and profound grace principle accompany each affirming devotion.

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