

On Death & Dying

A Buddhist Perspective

Why Reflect?

1. Reminder of our **own mortality**, and thus the preciousness of life and the time that we still have
2. A re-focus on what is **important in life**
3. **Reduce attachment** to body, possessions and even relationships
4. Death is an equalizer. Why be vain over your successes, or despair over your failures?

What is death?

1. Clinical death

- No spontaneous breathing
- No pulse
- No blood pressure

2. Brain death

- When the entire brain, including brain stem, has irreversible loss of functions

3. *According to the Buddha, death can be said to have occurred when **vitality** (*āyu*), **heat** (*usmā*) and **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*) leave the body*

Universality of Death

- Story of **Kisa Gotami** and mustard seed [Thig10.1]
 - *It's not just a truth for one village or town, Nor is it a truth for a single family. But for every world settled by gods [and men] This indeed is what is true — impermanence.*
- **Anicca vata sankhara** (impermanence are all formations)
- All that arise must also end

How We May Die

1. Sudden death (unexpected)

- Diseases, e.g. heart attack, stroke
- Accident, e.g. motor vehicle accident
- Violent death, e.g. murder
- Natural disasters

2. Gradual death

- Chronic or terminal illnesses
- Old age

Nearing Death Awareness

1. Communicating with or experiencing the presence of someone who is no longer alive
2. Preparing for travel or change
3. Describing a place they can see in another realm
4. Knowing when death will occur

Fear of Dying

1. Fear of physical pain

- Dilemma: To use pain killer or not
- The misunderstood morphine

2. Fear (or pain) of separation

- Attachment

3. Fear of the unknown after death

- Rebirth or no rebirth ?
- The solutions ...

Apannaka Sutta (A Safe Bet) [MN60]

	There are Heaven and Hell	There are NO Heaven & Hell
Live a Virtuous (blameless) Life	Happiness in this life Happiness in afterlife	Happiness in this life
Live an Evil Life	Unhappiness in this life Unhappiness in afterlife	Unhappiness in this life

No Regrets --- Given your Best

Kamma

- "Intention, I tell you, is kamma. Intending, one does kamma by way of body, speech, & mind. [AN6.63]
- I am the owner of my kamma, heir to my kamma, born of my kamma, related through my kamma, and ***abide dependent on my kamma***. Whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir. [AN5.57]

Maha Kammavibhanga Sutta [MN136]

Kamma, Right View & Rebirth

	Rebirth
Right Speech, Actions, Livelihood Right View (Mundane)	Heaven
Right Speech, Actions, Livelihood Right View (Mundane)	Woeful plane
Wrong Speech, Actions, Livelihood Wrong View	Woeful plane
Wrong Speech, Actions, Livelihood Wrong View	Heaven

In-between State

- Some schools of Buddhism teach that after death, consciousness hovers or pauses in an in-between state (*antarabhava*) for a certain period before being reborn.
- Others assert that rebirth takes place the instant consciousness disengages from the body.
- The Buddha's words suggest that there is an interval between death and rebirth. He spoke of the situation "when one has laid down the body (i.e. died) but has not yet been reborn" (S.IV,400).
- On several other occasions he said that for one who has attained Nirvana there is "no here, no there, no in-between" (e.g. S.IV,73; Ud.8), referring to this life, the next life and presumably, the in-between state.
- [Source: Bhante Dhammika]

Metta Sutta [Sn1.8]

- Whatever there may be with breath of life, whether they be frail or very strong, without exception, be they long or short, or middle-sized, or be big or small,
- or dense, or visible or invisible, or whether they dwell far or they dwell near, those that are here, **those seeking to exist**—may beings all rejoice within themselves.

Kutuhalasala Sutta: With Vacchagotta [SN44.9]

- "And at the moment when a being sets this body aside and is not yet reborn in another body, what do you designate as its sustenance then?"
- "Vaccha, when a being sets this body aside and **is not yet reborn** in another body, I designate it as craving-sustained, for craving is its sustenance at that time."

Channovāda Sutta - Advice to Channa [MN144]

- There is wavering in one who is dependent, there is no wavering in one who is independent; when there is no wavering, there is tranquility; when there is tranquility, there is no bias; when there is no bias, there is no coming and going; when there is no coming and going, there is no passing away and reappearing; when there is no passing away and reappearing, there is no here nor beyond nor **in between**. This is the end of suffering.

Mahatanhasankhaya Sutta: The Greater Craving-Destruction Discourse [MN38]

- Monks, the descent of the embryo occurs with the union of three things. There is the case where there is no union of the mother & father, the mother is not in her season, and a gandhabba is not present, nor is there a descent of an embryo. There is the case where there is a union of the mother & father, and the mother is in her season, but a gandhabba is not present, nor is there a descent of an embryo. But when there is a union of the mother & father, the mother is in her season, and a **gandhabba** is present, then with this union of three things the descent of the embryo occurs.

Assalāyana Sutta [MN93]

- Bhikkhus, there are these four kinds of food for the maintenance of beings that already have come to be (bhūtā) and for the support of **beings seeking a new existence** (sambhavesī). What are the four? They are physical food, gross or subtle; contact as the second; mental volition as the third; and consciousness as the fourth.

Bahiya Sutta [Ud1.10]

- Then, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Bāhiya, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder (hereafter) nor **between the two**. This, just this, is the end of stress.

Last Thought Moment

- The theory of the importance of the last thought moment is not mentioned in any of the Buddha's discourses or even in the later Abhidhamma Piṭaka. The Tipiṭaka records many occasions where the Buddha counselled people who were either dying or critically ill and yet he never brought up the idea of the last thought moment, the most appropriate time to do so one would think.
- The theory of the importance of the supposed last thought moment first appears in an undeveloped form in the *Milindapañha* (approx. 1st century BCE/2nd century CE) which says: "If someone did unskilful things for a hundred years but at the time of death was mindful for one moment of the Buddha, he would be reborn amongst the gods." (Mil.80).
- [Bhante Dhammika]

Habitual Mind State of the Dying

- **Mahanama Sutta: To Mahanama (1) [SN55.21]**
- If one's mind has long been nurtured with conviction, nurtured with virtue, nurtured with learning, nurtured with relinquishment, nurtured with discernment, then when the body...., nevertheless the mind — long nurtured with conviction, nurtured with virtue, learning, relinquishment, & discernment — rises upward and separates out.
- Analogy: Ghee in the container
- *The mind that arises at the time of death is usually the one that the person is most habituated to. People tend to die in character, although this is not always so. [Ven. Pende Hawter]*

Lay Buddhist's Goal: Peace of Mind

1

- Happy in this life and in the hereafter (no regrets)

2

- **Habituate** positive thoughts, positive emotions, positive states of mind; Discard negative thoughts, emotions, states (Right Effort)
- Freedom from fear (of death)

3

- Non-attachment: no aversion or attachment (imperturbable)
- Seeing things as they really are

Cultivating a Friendship with Death

1. Have a realistic attitude towards death

- Talk freely (Not taboo)

2. Live a virtuous life

- Five Precepts
- Right Speech, Right Actions, Right Livelihood

3. Contribute to the happiness of others

- Generosity in giving
- Supporting the Sangha

4. Kalyana mitta

- Spiritual support

5. Cultivate peace of mind

Helping the Dying

- **Goal:** to help the dying have a calm and peaceful mind
- **Chanting & Dhamma sharing**
- **Assurance & Confidence:**
 - Nakula Sutta: Nakula's Parents [AN6.16]
- **Non-Clinging:**
 - Anathapindikovada Sutta: Advice to A Dying Man [MN143]
 - Ven. Sariputta gave advice on non-clinging to Ananthapindika on his death bed

Buddhist Funeral

- Simple, solemn
- Do away with superstitious practices (where possible)
- Does not have to be expensive
- Burial or cremation (personal choice)
- Grieving (silently, softly)
- Eulogy: Remembering the good

Transference of Merits to Departed

- **Janussonin Sutta: To Janussonin**
[AN10.177] On Offerings to the Dead
- **Tirokudda Kanda: Hungry Shades Outside the Walls [Khuddakapatha 7]**

Reflections on Death (Tibetan)

1. Death is certain

- There is no possible way to escape death (nobody ever has)

2. Every moment brings us closer to death

- Life has a definite, inflexible limit and each moment brings us closer to the end of this life

3. Time of death is uncertain

- Death comes in a moment and it's time is unexpected (and even while alive we devote very little of our life to spiritual practice)

What can & cannot help the dying

1. Worldly possessions such as wealth, position or money can't help us
2. Relatives and friends can neither prevent death nor go with us
3. Even our own precious body is of no help to us and we have to leave it behind.

So ultimately the only thing that can help us is the **state of our mind**, the state of our mental or spiritual development.