



CONTEMPLATION OF MINDFULNESS ON DEATH (*Maraṇassati*) WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO VISUDDHIMAGGA

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ABSTRACT :

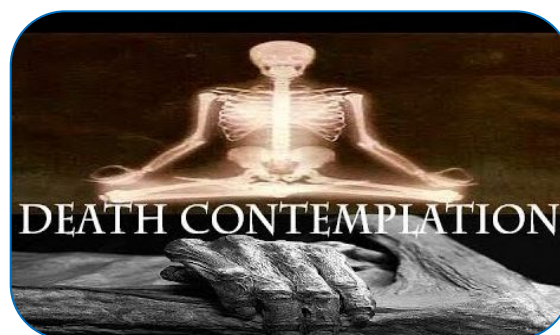
All sentient beings must definitely die one day; it cannot be eluded by anyone. It is a natural law. That's why we need not elude from the dead but prepare to face it calmly contemplating of mindfulness on that death. As budding mushrooms always come uplifting dust on their tops, so beings are born along with aging and death. Nobody can elude from death after appearing as living beings. In Jarāmaraṇa Sutta of SanyuttaNikaya, the Buddha replied to King Kosala, who asked that there are any beings born in this world can elude from aging and death, that it cannot be eluded by any beings and even Arahants who escaped from all defilements. Even the Buddha succumbed to the inexorable law of change and He passed away on his 80th years.

KEYWORDS : *Death, Mindfulness.*

DEATH AND SOUL OR EGO

Some people in other religions may accept death is a transmigration of "Soul" or "Self" and they think there is the unchanging and permanent soul in our fathom long body and it transmigrate a life afterlife even though we died and it never stops. It is the wrong view on the process of continuity of being. Actually, a combination of physical and mental forces or energies is called "a being" and there is no permanent and unchanging substance, nothing passes from one moment to the next moment. So quite clearly, nothing permanent or unchanging can pass or transmigrate from one life to the next. It is a series that goes on unbroken but changes every moment. According to Buddhist thought, these physical and mental phenomena are constantly changing; they do not remain the same for two consecutive moments. Every moment they are born and they die. It is like a flame that burns through the night: is not the same flame nor is it another.

According to Buddhist philosophy, what we call death is the total non-functioning of the physical body. When this physical body is no more capable of functioning, energies do not cease with it but go on to take some other shape or form and we can call it another life. The difference between death and birth is only one moment: the last moment in this life conditions the first thought-moment in the so-called next life, the continuity of the same series. Thus, we can see clearly that re-born after death is not transmigration of "permanent and unchanging soul or self" but a series of continuity of forces and energies working continuously in the series of the moment by moment (*samsāra*).



IS THE REBIRTH A TRANSMIGRATION OF A SELF OR SOUL?

According to Buddhist philosophy, there is no a “being”, an “individual” and “I” apart from five aggregates. What we call a ‘being’ or an ‘individual’ or ‘I’ is nothing but a mix or a combination of those five aggregates: the aggregate of Matter, the aggregate of Sensations, the aggregate of Perception, the aggregate of Mental Formation and the aggregate of Consciousness. In other words, it is only a combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces or energies. Actually, it is a series of cause and effect. Matter, sensation, perception, volition, and mental formation are included in the five aggregates and they are working as an interdependent phenomenon.

One thing vinishes, conditioning the appearance of the next in a series of cause and effect. There is no unchanging substance in them. There is nothing behind them that can be called a permanent self, individuality, or anything that can, in reality, be called 'I'. Everyone will agree that neither matter, nor sensation, nor perception, nor any of those mental activities, nor consciousness can really be called 'I'. But when these five aggregates which are interdependent are working together in combination as a psycho-psychological machine, we get the idea of 'I' or 'being' or 'individual'. But it is only a false idea, the idea of self (*sakkāya-ditṭhi*). That's why, as Ven. Buddhaghosa says: 'For there is ill but none of feel it' (*Duddhamevahinakocidukkhitto*) "For there is action but no doer" (*Kāraṅkonakiriyāvavijjati*), there is nothing 'being' or 'I' lasting behind those five aggregates.

UNPREDICTABLE THINGS ON OUR DEATH

As a worldly being, we cannot be predictable the following things in the case of all living beings. They are life span, the sickness, the time, the place where our body will be laid and the destiny. No living world can know these things. They are unpredictable by anyone. Firstly, the life span has no sign because there is no guarantee such as just so much must be lived, no more than that. All living beings may die in various stages and ages. And, the sickness has no sign because there is no definition such as beings die only of this disease, not of any other. And the time has also no sign that one has to die only at this time, not at any other. We may die in the morning and at any of the other times, such as noon. And the place where the body will be laid down cannot be known in advance by anyone. For the individual of those brought into the world inside a town is dropped outside the town, and that of those brought into the world outside the town is dropped inside it. This can be multiplied in many ways. The final one is destiny; it cannot be foretold by anyone. According to Buddhism, there are five abodes where the worldly being may be reborn again: divine world, the human world, hell, animal abode and departed ghost world. As a worldly being, one goes round and round the five kinds of destinies like an ox harnessed to a machine. That's why the most important thing that we must recognize is that we may die at any time. We should be mindful of our death every time.

We must undoubtedly bear in mind that all health ends in illness, all youth ends in aging, all life ends in death, all worldly nature is procured by birth, plagued by ageing, astonished by sickness and struck by death. The Buddha urged us to be always mindful of our death. We forget the death, thinking that I may be alive for 75 years, 80 years, 85 years, and up to more. In fact, tomorrow is nearer than the next existence. The Buddha articulated the person who develops mindfulness of death thus let me live a night and day or a day or as long as it takes to chew and swallow four or five mouthfuls that I may attend to the Blessed One's teaching, surely much could be done by me - as one who dwells in negligence and slackly develop mindfulness of death for the destruction of cankers. And the Buddha praised the person who develops mindfulness of death thus let me live for as long as it takes to chew and swallow a single mouthful or as long as it takes to breathe in and breathe out, or breathe out and breathe in, that I may attend the Blessed One's teaching, surely much could be done by me - as one who dwell in diligence and keenly develop mindfulness of death for the destruction of cankers. The meaning of that message is that we must be mindful of our death every time because we may die in any short time.

EVER CONTEMPLATION ON OUR DEATH

Death, here, means the interruption of the life faculty included within a single existence. But it is of three kinds: death as termination or cutting off the misery of the round of rebirth, i.e., the Arahant's death (Samucheda Marana), death as momentary dissolution of formations (Khanika Marana) and death as conventional usage in such expressions as "dead tree", "dead metal", and so on (Sammuti Marana). A meditator who wishes to develop his mind does not need to contemplate on mindfulness of all of three kinds of death.

And another way, it is of two kinds: timely death and untimely death. Herein, timely death can be accounted for as with the exhaustion of merit (Punnakkhaya Marana), a life span (Ayukkhaya Marana), and both (Ubhayakkhaya Marana). Untimely death comes about death because of other's interruptions (Upaccheda Marana). Here, mindfulness of death is the remembering of death; in other words, of the interruption of the life faculty. A meditator who wishes to develop his mind has to contemplate on mindfulness of four kinds of death mentioned above. One who wants to develop his mind should contemplate in seclusion and solitude either by looking at the dead body, which lies in a cemetery, or by recalling the death of a wealthy person. Then he must meditate wisely thus: "Likewise, I shall have to die", "Likewise, I shall have to die" or "There is such a thing as death", "There is such a thing as death". This is the proper way of meditation.

If one contemplates the death of some beloved one, one will be sad. If one contemplates on the death of an unbeloved one, one will be glad. If one recalls the death of someone to whom one is indifferent, one will not be remorseful or agitated. If one reflects on one's own death, one will be frightened. All this happens to one because of the lack of mindfulness, apprehension, and knowledge. Therefore, it is very important for a meditator to reflect on death in a proper way. That's why a meditator must cultivate more and more to become mindfulness, apprehension, and knowledge. As long as there doesn't appear one's mind mindfulness, apprehension, and knowledge, he or she can't yet cultivate to develop his or her mind to face the death and liberate from the round of birth and death, Samsara.

That's why it was said in Visuddhimagga that so he should look here and there at beings that have been killed or have died, and advert to the death of beings already dead but formerly seen enjoying good things, doing so with mindfulness, with a sense of urgency and with knowledge, after which he can train his attention in the beginning, "Death will take place." Only when a meditator reflects on death in the right way, his hindrances get suppressed, mindfulness becomes established with death as its object, and he will enjoy good benefits such as attaining *Upacārajhāna*, being free from *lobha*, *dosa*, etc., truly understanding the nature of death from which no one can escape and being diligent in performing good deeds, etc.

EIGHT WAYS OF REFLECTION ON DEATH

One should do his recollecting of death in eight ways.

They are:

1. Reflecting on death as having the appearance of a murderer: because death comes with birth and it takes away life, it must be recollected as a murderer who will kill everyone he meets.
2. Reflecting on death as the nature of dissolution of what has arisen: just as the risen sun moves on towards its setting and never turns back even for a little while from wherever it has got to, our birth or starting never turn back youth and it goes straight to the death.
3. Reflecting on one's own death, by comparison, the death of others: here, death should be recollected by comparison in seven ways with those of great fame, great merit, great strength, great supernormal power, great knowledge, with Buddha and Paccekabuddhas.
4. Reflecting of the various dangers to one's body that can cause death: our body lives in dependence on the outer skin, inner skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, and feeding on them and it is shared by the several hundred internal diseases, as well as by such external causes of death as snake, scorpions and any other dangers.

5. Reflecting on death as to the frailty of life: for the life of beings is bound up with breathing, with the postures, with cold and heat, with the primary elements, and with nutriment. Life occurs only when they run in balance, but the life process is interrupted.
6. Reflecting that no one can know in advance when he will die and of what reflecting on the impermanence of existence,
7. Reflecting on the shortness of life-span, the extent of human life is short and one who lives long lives a hundred years, more or less. The Buddha, hence, said that monks, this human life span is short. There is a new life to be gone to, there are profitable deeds to be done, and there is the life of purity to be led. There is no one not dying for the born. And the Buddha said when a bhikkhu develops mindfulness of death thus, 'Oh, let me live as long as it takes to chew and swallow a single mouthful and to breathe in and breathe out or breathe out and breathe in, that I may attend to the Blessed One's teaching, surely much could be done by me - he can be called a bhikkhu who dwell in diligence and keenly develop mindfulness of death for the destruction of cankers (Asavas).
8. Reflecting on the fact that in the ultimate sense, the life of beings lasts only for a single moment: ultimately, the life period of living beings is extremely short, being only as much as the occurrence of a single conscious moment. When one moment of conscious has ceased, the being is said to have ceased. That's why, there stated in Buddhist discourses that Life, person, pleasure, pain - just these alone join in one conscious moment that flicks by. Ceased aggregates of those dead or alive are all alike, gone never to return. For this condition, some said that one can throw down in one river twice.

THE BENEFITS OF REFLECTION ON DEATH

A meditator who reflects on death will gain the following benefits:

1. being always zealous,
2. Acquiring the concept of absence of delight in all forms of existence,
3. Giving up hankering afterlife,
4. Condemning evil deeds,
5. Not craving for the requisites of life and lacking stinginess,
6. Contemplating the nature of impermanence, suffering, and non-self,
7. Dying without fear and bewilderment,
8. Being reborn in a good destination even if he does not attain *Nibbāna* in this very life.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, everyone should diligently reflect on death (*MaranassatiKammaṭṭhāna*), which can produce great benefits. Every worldly being is really afraid of death, which nobody can elude from. Actually, death is not frightening, but not dare to face calmly with death is extremely frightening and horrible. So, one who wants to face death calmly and peacefully have to cultivate mindfulness on death mentioned is extremely short above.

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