



# Review of ReseaRch

ISSN: 2249-894X

Impact Factor : 5.7631 (UIF)

Volume - 12 | Issue - 11 | August - 2023



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## MEDITATION ON DEATH (*MARANASSATI*)

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### ABSTRACT

*Maranasati meditation is essentially a set of Buddhist mind fullness of death exercises that include contemplating the possibility of death occurring at any time, going deeper, and eventually focusing on the final disintegration of the body throughout the dying process. The Visuddhimagga, also known as the Path of Purification, has a commentary on the practice and two Pali suttas on mindfulness of death. The Pali word sati, which also means recall and memory, is translated as "mindfulness" in English. The terms "mindfulness" and "recollection" are frequently used interchangeably in the English translations of the Pali suttas and related commentaries.*



*According to legend, the Buddha urged monks to constantly be aware of the possibility of passing away at any time in order to increase their thankfulness and respect for their priceless human life and develop a sense of urgency for practising. According to Buddhaghosa, he describes monks who practise awareness of death: "Perception of impermanence grows in him... He dies fearlessly and undeluded without experiencing any of these states, whereas beings who have not yet developed mindfulness of death become victims of fear, terror, and confusion at the time of death. As a preventative measure against disputes and strife, the Buddha also emphasized the importance of practising death-mindfulness. So, Maranassati Bhavana (meditation on death) is a crucial method in meditation field.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Maranassati Kammatthana, Mindfulness on death and Reflection on death.*

### INTRODUCTION

In general, we don't think much about death in our daily lives. We do not consider death to be a future occurrence that may or may not occur; rather, the fundamental attitude of mindfulness towards death is the attitude and awareness that death will undoubtedly occur. Additionally, it's crucial to relate death to time when engaging in meditation for death mindfulness. Therefore, "temporality of death" and "practising of meditation" must exist if we are to apply the concept of mindfulness of death to the practise of meditation. In particular, as the word "mindfulness" suggests, the mindfulness of death falls under the umbrella of meditation, which is based more on experience than theory and suggests that meditational applications may have a more direct impact on human psychology. This article discusses *Maranassati*, a type of death meditation.

**Mindfulness of Death:** *Maranānussati* means mindfulness of the death of a living being.

### Four Kinds of Death:

There are four kinds of death. They are as follow;

1. Death, which is the cutting-off of life faculty limited by one existence.
2. Death, which is the cutting-off the death of an *Arahat*, i.e, the cutting- off the misery of the round of rebirth.
3. Momentary Death, which is the momentary dissolution of the conditioned phenomena.
4. Death in conventional usage in such expression as 'dead tree', 'dead metal', and so on.

Out of these four, one should mediate only the death which is the cutting-off the life faculty. One who wishes 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 dead 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 reflects on the death of some beloved one, one will be sad. If one reflects 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.

Only when a meditator reflects on death in the right way, will he enjoy good benefits such as attaining *Upacāra Jhāna*, 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:** There are eight ways of reflection on death. They are as follow;

1. reflecting on death as a murderer,
2. reflecting on the nature of dissolution of what has arisen,
3. reflecting on one's own death by seeing the example of an other's death,
4. reflecting on the various dangers to one's body that can cause death,
5. reflecting that no one can know in advance when he will die and of what reflecting on the impermanence of existence,
6. disease he will die,
7. reflecting on the shortness of life-span,
8. reflecting on the fact that in the ultimate sense, the life of beings lasts only for a single moment.

### Reflecting on Death as a murderer:

One should reflect on death thus: "As a murderer with sword in hand approaches one, saying, 'I will kill you' death also approaches one. As a mushroom bud grows up carrying soil on its top, beings are also born carrying ageing and death."

Moreover, one must also reflect on death repeatedly thus: "As a mass of cloud move forward without stopping for a moment, as the risen sun goes towards its own setting without turning back in the slightest degree from its way, as a water-fall flows down from the mountains without stopping for a moment, man once conceived within his mother's womb also goes continuously towards death without pausing for a moment. Again a meditator must reflect thus:

"Just as days and nights gradually pass by, just as the water of streams and rivers dry up day by day in summer, the lives of all beings will gradually come to and end. Just as ripe fruits will certainly fall from trees, all beings will surely die one day. Just as the earthen pots made by potters will break finally, all beings must die finally. Just as the dew on blades of grass vanishes easily because of the heat of the sun, the lives of all beings will be destroyed easily because of the nature of impermanence of life."

### Reflection on the Nature of Dissolution of what has arisen:

One should reflect on wholeness and dissolution in pair like this: "In this world wholeness exists so long as dissolution does not overcome it. In reality wholeness without dissolution does not exist," Further, one should also reflect on death thus:

“Health ends in sickness, youthfulness ends in old age, and life ends in death. All beings in the world are followed by the danger of rebirth, always approached by the danger of ageing, oppressed by the danger of sickness, struck down by the danger of death. Just as huge rock mountains which reach up to the sky roll down crushing and grinding everything in the east, west, south and north, ageing and death also roll down, crushing all beings including kings, princes, Brahmins, merchants, householders, poor men, beggars, etc. No fighting in battles or bribery can win over death.

### Reflecting on one's own Death by seeing the Example of another's Death:

One should reflect on death by seeing the example of others' death thus: “In this world, those who have many followers, those who possessed great glory and merit, those who are mighty, those who have great power, those who have wisdom, *Pacceka Buddhas* (the lesser *Buddhas*), and the Fully Enlightened Buddha, all fall into death's power. So how should I be free from it? I will surely die one day.”

One should continue one's reflection repeatedly thus: “Although king *Mahāsammata*, the Universal Monarch *Mandhātu*, etc., were very famous and had great number of followers, and though they had enormous wealth, yet death inevitably caught up with them in the end. So how should I be free from death? And I will surely die one day.

Even the possessor of great merit like the rich man *Jotika*, *Jaṭila*, *Ugga*, *Meṇḍaka*, *Puṇṇaka*, *Anāthapiṇḍika*, etc., all died, what need is there (to speak) of a man like me. Even *Vāsudeva* and *Baladeva*, those of great strength, died at last, what need is there (to speak) of a man like me?

Even the second Chief Disciple *Mahāmoggalāna*, who was the foremost among those possessed of supernormal powers, who could shake *Vejayanta* terrace mansion with his foot, died, what need is there (to speak) of a man like me?

Excepting the Buddha, even the Venerable *Sāriputta* who was the foremost one in wisdom fell into death's power too, what need is there (to speak) of a man like me?

All *Pacceka Buddhas* (lesser *Buddhas*) those who by the strength of their own knowledge and energy destroyed all the defilements, are not free from death, what need is there (to speak) of a man like me?

Even the *Buddha* who is the Supreme Enlightened One knowing all that should be known was not free from death, what need is there (to speak) of a man like me?

### Reflecting on the Dangers of the Body:

A meditator reflects on death thus: “My body is shared by eighty kinds of worms. They eat various parts of my body. In my body, they are born; they grow old and die, defecate and urinate. My body is shared by many internal worms and is subjected to various diseases; there are also snakes, scorpions and other external dangers. Because of these dangers, I may die anytime.”

### Reflecting on the Impermanence of Life:

One reflects on death thus: “The life of beings is bound up with inhalation and exhalation, with the four postures, with cold and heat, with the four primary elements, and with nutriment. Life goes on only when it has a regular functioning of the breath inhaled and the breath exhaled. When the breath going out from the nose does not enter the body or when the breath which has gone inside does not come out again, then one is reckoned to be dead. Again, life proceeds when it gets a regular functioning of the four postures. Through excess of any one of these, the life process is interrupted. And life functions when it has a balanced measure of heat and cold. When one is oppressed by excessive heat, one is liable to die. Again, life can function when it has a balanced measure of the four primary elements. When one of the four elements fails, one will suffer from any kind of disease and die. Life also functions when enough nutriment is at the proper time; not getting food, life comes to an end.

**Reflecting on the Unpredictability of Death:**

A meditator reflects on the five kinds of unpredictableness of death thus: "All beings can die even in his mother's womb or at the time of birth, or within the life-span or beyond life-span. No one can know at what age, with what disease at what time, he will die; at what place his dead body will be buried and where he will be reborn after his death."

**Reflecting on the Shortness of Life Span:**

A meditator should reflect on the shortness of life-span thus: "The life span of man in the present times is of short duration. One who lives long can live only a hundred years, or a little more. So, everyone should perform meritorious deeds and take up the noble practice. Anyone who has been born will surely die.

**Reflecting on the Shortness of Life Moment:**

A meditator should reflect on the shortness of human life thus: "In the ultimate sense, the life moment of a living being is extremely short. The life of a living being lasts only for a single conscious moment. When that consciousness has ceased, that being is said to be dead".

When a meditator repeatedly reflects on death in any of the ways mentioned above, he will be accustomed to that reflection, and mindfulness will be established with death as its object, the hindrances will be discarded and the neighbourhood concentration of *jhāna* will be attained.

**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 after life,
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 unless he attains *Nibbāna* in this very life.

**CONCLUSION:**

Everyone who practice meditation on death (*MaranassatiKammatthana*), can have these advantages. Therefore, everyone should diligently reflect on death (*Maranassati Kammatthāna*) which can produce great benefits.

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