

' Death and Impermanence'

As taught by Ven. Geshe Sangey Thinley at Jam Tse Dhargyey Ling on Sunday 1 August 2004.

To generate a positive motivation and determination when we engage in spiritual practice is crucial.

This means we should have a strong intention to benefit other living beings in the short term and in the long term. Also, having been born we will eventually die and we should reflect on this, thinking what would be most beneficial or useful when death comes, and for our future lives. We should reflect on this seriously and prepare well. We all have to die and there are very few people who can do this peacefully and well.

In general, there are two ways of dealing with death. The first is to just put it out of our minds. There are people who don't like to think about dying, and when they do it makes them uncomfortable. This way of thinking does not eliminate or minimise the suffering of death. The other way is to look at the problem, analyse and become familiar with it, and become clear that it is part of our life. It is inevitable and cannot be avoided.

Because we have a body, we can see that there will inevitably be sickness and suffering. If we are able to accept this as a part of our life we will be able to cope with it better. Also, if we train ourselves mentally in this way, when we face problems and suffering we will be much better able to deal with them. We should of course make the effort to look after ourselves and cure any illness. As a result there will be less physical stress when we do get sick and have to face problems.

The great Indian scholar Shantideva said

*"If there is a way to overcome suffering, there's no need to worry.
If there's no way to overcome suffering, then there's no use in worrying".*

So, when we face problems and difficulties we should look for the solution, there's no point in worrying. In some cases, when we cannot find a solution, then we have to accept the situation, and there's no point in worrying. This kind of rationale is very useful, and when we face problems we should recollect Shantideva's advice and apply it. Write it down and try to memorise it.

As practitioners we need to think about impermanence and death. Without doing so it can become very difficult to practice. Death is a natural and inevitable part of our life whether we like it or not, so it is better to understand it and prepare how to face it rather than avoid thinking about it. We often see and hear about stories of murder and death on the news, but some people think it's something that does not happen to them, only to others, and there are many other tragedies and suffering that we do not hear about. We shouldn't think that they only happen to other people. They can happen to us at any time. We all have the same body and flesh, and it can happen to anyone.

Death will come sooner or later to all of us, whether it is natural or accidental. If we accept this and prepare for it, it will be much easier to face.

When we face difficulties, there are two methods we can use. There are also two possible results. One result is mental anxiety, fear, doubt and depression. In the worst case it can end in suicide. The other possibility is that because of a tragic experience you become more realistic and closer to reality. With the power of investigation, a tragic experience can make you stronger, more self-confident and self-reliant. It can be a cause of inner strength and this can be used in a positive way. If we use the wrong approach it can make things much more difficult.

As Shantideva says, when we face problems and difficulties we should look for a solution and apply the remedies rather than worrying.

This kind of approach is important so that we can apply the right remedies.

There are some people who are very sick, but they try to hide it and don't see a doctor. This is not the correct solution as it will not cure the illness. As human beings we have to face illness and death, and we need to find the correct solutions and remedies as they are part of our life. It is important to build knowledge of ourselves in order to deal with them. To make our life meaningful we have to learn to deal with them.

We do some meditation on Sundays, so it will be useful to think about these things. If we think about it seriously, even for only a short time, it has great meaning and power. The great yogis meditate on death six times a day, so they are well prepared when it comes, and know exactly what remedies to apply.

(Translated by Tsering Samdup: Transcribed by Ven. Ani Jampa Tsekyi: Typed out by Yvette Phillips: Lightly edited for Dharma News by Ven. Ani Jampa Tsekyi.)