
during that time, we try to maintain a 100 per cent focus on our breath and try to distance ourselves from any other thoughts that may come to our mind. We don't allow ourselves to be influenced by them. So for the next few minutes we will engage in this meditation. (*Pause for meditation*).

4.2.2.1.2. The actual way to take the essence

4.2.2.1.2.2. Training the mind in the stages of the path held in common with beings of the medium scope

4.2.2.1.2.2.1. The actual training in the reflections: the way to develop the mind that strives for liberation

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1. Reflection on the truth of suffering – the faults of cyclic existence

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.2. The actual meditation on suffering

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.2.1. Reflecting on the general sufferings of cyclic existence

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.2.1.1. Reflecting on the eight types of sufferings

I will now continue with the text which we have not been able to cover in the last few sessions. The subject we are covering is contemplating the suffering nature of cyclic existence. By contemplating suffering, we can generate distaste for the pleasures of cyclic existence. The teachings present the sufferings in a way that points out the reality of our existence, which are the sufferings that beings go through when living in cyclic existence. Because of the contaminated aggregates that are produced under the influence of delusions and karma, invariably one has to experience the various types of sufferings which are being explained in the teachings. One suffering which was explained earlier is the suffering of birth. Anyone who is born in cyclic existence invariably has to experience the suffering of birth, and then the sufferings of sickness and old age.

We now come to the *fourth suffering* which is *the suffering of death*.

The manner of how distaste for the suffering of cyclic existence comes about is, first of all by relating to the actuality of suffering, we begin to ponder how those sufferings come about? In that way, as the teachings explain, the causes of the suffering become clearer. One can then come to understand how to be free from the various sufferings by identifying and overcoming the causes which are explained in the teachings, such as delusions and karma. The more one contemplates the sufferings, the more one will generate a wish to be free from the sufferings and generate the wish obtain a state of liberation.

Now we come to the fourth suffering, which is the suffering of death. If you asked anyone here if they would like to experience death; if they would like to voluntarily look towards their own death experience, I don't think there is anyone who would eagerly want that experience. Death is something that we commonly do not wish to experience - or even think about. But the reality of having been born with contaminated aggregates - and the very nature of living our existence with contaminated aggregates - means that each person will perish. The nature of having contaminated aggregates means that we cannot last. We will have to stop functioning. We have to

experience death, whether we like it or not. Whether we wish for or not, death will inevitably come.

So then, if we only wish to not experience death, the question is raised: Can we avoid death? The answer is no. No-one seems to be able to prevent death by any means whatsoever. There's no-one who can prevent death. But what can be prevented; what can be achieved is losing the fear of death at the time of death. That is something we can achieve. The preparation to be fearless at the time of death; to voluntarily accept death, is something we need to engage in now. Now is the time. Not later at the time of death itself. but now!

The contemplation or meditation of death prescribed in the Buddhist teachings, is prescribed with the underlying basis of an acceptance that there is a future life; a continuation of our mental continuum. The basis of the practice of meditation on death and impermanence is the acceptance that it is a preparation for our future life. Meditating on death and impermanence now, is a preparation not only for death itself, but for what comes after death. It is a preparation for our future lives.

It is said that the result of meditating on death and impermanence is that that we will aspire to engage in the further practise of abiding by what is called the law of karma. This means to engage in virtuous activity and avoid engaging in non-virtuous activities and non-virtuous actions. That is the real preparation for future life.

So someone who is able to spend their life in the conduct of virtuous deeds and refraining from negative deeds, is fully prepared to experience death at a time of death, and they are prepared for their next life. Someone who spends their entire life with such conduct is said to be joyful and happy at the time of death because they know what is in store for them. They know that they are going to a better future. According to the Buddhist explanations, what survives us after death is the mental continuum that we generally identify as 'a self'. It is that 'self' that goes on to the future after life.

Having understood or accepted that, one considers what contributes to the well-being of the self, and what is it that contributes to the harm of the self. We all naturally experience what contributes to well-being of the self as a happy mind, and a peaceful mind. We all strive for happiness. That is something that we commonly agree on and wish for. And what contributes to our well-being is happiness. What contributes to our discomfort is the misery of the sufferings we experience. So the practice of accumulating virtue or engaging in positive deeds is what contributes to all happiness. Accumulating positive deeds is a way to secure happiness for the self. We call that process accumulating the causes for happiness.

Those practices and causes become our best companion to assist us in the journey to our next life. The imprints or the potentials that we have created from the positive deeds we have done, and refraining from negative deeds, are what come with us to assist us in our future life. What we call the imprints, or the potentials that we have created from the positive deeds and refraining from negative deeds, become the best companions at the crucial time of death and beyond death.

Meanwhile, engaging in positive deeds and refraining from negative deeds means that we gain an immediate result. By refraining from negative deeds, we actually experience a world of calmness and a peaceful state of mind at this very time of our life. It is, of course, not an easy task because we find our mind has a natural tendency to follow the delusions of negative states of mind. We are more inclined to follow the minds of desire, anger, pride, competitiveness and jealousy. Unfortunately, those negative states of mind are what are most likely influence us. They seem to be more powerful within ourselves.

But with the right conditions and as we put some effort in, it is possible to overcome these negative states of mind and slowly work with the positive potential within ourselves. Thus it is possible to develop the mind of detachment or non-attachment; the minds of non-harmfulness and non-hatefulness. It is possible to develop less pride and less jealousy. These are all positive states of mind that we can develop.

Even though that is something which right now seems to be way beyond our perception and understanding, we can relate to our everyday life experience to shed some light on what the experience of death, and what comes afterwards, may be like. Take an example of going to bed each evening? When we go to bed, if the last thing that we have before going to sleep is a very agitated mind full of anger, you may notice that the next morning, you wake up with a mind that is heavy and disturbed. Conversely, if when you go to bed your mind was relatively clear and you have a positive state of mind, it is most likely that when you wake up, you wake up with a fresh, clear, relatively more positive mind. Basically, the experience of death is similar to the last thing that we have in our mind before sleep. The last state of mind is what then carries on and contributes to the existence of our next life.

So our current daily practice of meditation is basically preparing for the crucial moment when we experience death. The main purpose of the practice is so that it can assist us at that crucial moment at the time of death. If, at the time of death, we can use the practice we have engaged in during our life, to settle down our mind and make it free from fear and disturbing thoughts, then that clear mind of death will assist us to have a good rebirth.

For religious-minded people who practise their religion faithfully, it is good to develop strong faith towards their guide, or supreme focus in their religion; for the Buddhist that would be the Buddha and all enlightened beings, and for Christians that would be God, for a Muslim it would be Allah, and so forth, whatever religion a person follows means they have their own particular object of refuge. And bringing those objects to mind and generating strong faith in them at that time of death means that one is naturally drawn to the focus of the Supreme Being, which will help the mind maintain focus and really assist us at time of death.

Faith plays a very big role in assisting us at the time of death. For example, from the Buddhist point of view, having total reliance on enlightened beings such as the Buddha. By letting go of one's own ego, or focus on the self, and allowing oneself to be under the care and

guidance of the Buddha, mentally being in a state where one has a complete conviction in the ability and the power of the Buddha to save us, by thinking: "You are my guide. You are the one who knows what is best for me and thus I place myself under your protection and care". That sort of attitude can really help to free us from all kinds of anxiety and fears.

Pain can, of course, be experienced on the physical level, especially when our mind is not well-trained and when our attitude is vulnerable. Then, physical pain can contribute to mental pain which can add to our trauma. One might become completely immersed in a state of depression and real pain. Whereas, if the positive attitude that we mentioned earlier allows us to maintain a positive frame of mind, then even if one did experience physical pain, it would not influence us to have mental pain or depression.

There are five particular sufferings associated with the suffering of death:

Firstly, one is separated from objects that are fine and attractive. Secondly, one is separated from close relatives who are fine and attractive. Thirdly, one is separated from friends and companions who are fine and attractive. Fourthly, one is deprived of the body which is fine and attractive. So at the time of death, as one dies, one experiences trouble, pain and anguish.

As indicated in the text, the first four sufferings are connected to the experience of being separated from what we call fine and attractive objects, close relatives, companions and one's body. What this clearly indicates is that as suffering arises, the intensity of the suffering is dependent on how much attachment one had to these things.

The fifth suffering is not something that is necessarily experienced by everyone who dies. Some may have that experience of physical pain and anguish, while others may not. But if one has strong attachment to the four objects mentioned earlier, then one could experience the suffering of realising that one will be separated from them. And that is something that we can experience even now when we are separated from material objects that we really like. If we are deprived of those objects, how much suffering do we experience right now?

It is a similar situation with close relatives and companions, and so forth. If we are separated from them, we experience suffering because of the attachment we have towards them. So it is important that we practise now to develop non-attachment towards these objects. And as we develop non-attachment, or lessening our attachment towards these objects, it will of course help to be not attached to these objects at the time of death and to not experience those sufferings in relation to death. Even now the result of practising non-attachment will be less suffering.

As we all know, the suffering of separation can be very strong, and very deep. So as we prepare for death, it is good to remind ourselves to prepare now. One should not be excessively attached to these objects and by training our mind right now in this way, at the time of death it will be easier for us to develop non-attachment to

these objects. And thus, the mind would be much calmer and more relaxed which, as a consequence, will assist us at the time of death for our next life. So it is really important that we train our mind right now in preparation for the time of death.

In relation to developing non-attachment to material objects, I personally feel that the practise of writing a will is very useful because as one writes one's will it means that one is preparing to leave one's material objects to someone else. One is already preparing to be non-attached to these things. If one summons the courage to actually think about writing a will, it indicates that one's material objects are already being dedicated to someone else, and it helps the mind to develop non-attachment to one's material objects.

For those who have children, writing a will also helps the children's minds because they will know that there is something in store for them and they won't have to worry later on. We hope, however, that knowledge doesn't contribute to the children waiting upon your death! (*laughter*).

Before we conclude, let us again take some time for meditation. This time as we focus inwardly, withdrawing our mind from all external distractions, and focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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