

# 普觉awaken



知心、解心、证心

心有三种状态

被茶杯控制的皇帝

A Teaching on Death and Impermanence

Dying Naturally: The Beginning of a New Life

Dr Lai Chiu-Nan shares how she and her other sisters received their mum's love and gift, even after her death

How Should One Prepare for a Loved One's Death

The Lovesick King

## 生死的意义

生死问题是人类一个永恒的课题，自有人类以来就一直追问：人生从何来？死往何去？如何看待生死？如何才能超脱生死？

## A Buddhist Reflection on Death



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The Dharma Propagation Division in Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery works tirelessly in all areas to benefit all sentient beings. We do our best to skilfully bring the Dharma home to each and everyone.

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Do you yearn for words of timeless truth that talk straight into your heart? Looking for means to overcome your problems, difficulties and the challenges you face in life? Everyone wants to be happy and free of problems. The free Dharma books, CDs, DVDs and magazine published by the monastery tell you simply and clearly how you can achieve happiness in this life and the next... Get them from the monastery, Awareness Place Well-Being Centre at Bras Basah Complex #03-39 or visit [www.kmspks.org/publication](http://www.kmspks.org/publication). May the Dharma bring light to your life!

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*inVibes* is a light Dharma and music podcast site for those who seek ancient wisdom and wish to integrate it into their daily lives... *inVibes* hopes to keep you resonant with the Dharma wherever you are. Dedicate a prayer to someone you care or transform yourself.

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From yoga, taiji, art therapy to workshops on vegetarian home-cooking, elderly care-giving, detoxification, managing mood and enriching relationships, it is a holistic place of welcome and activities dedicated to the lifelong learning of The Art of Happy Living!

To find out more, visit [www.awarenessplace.com](http://www.awarenessplace.com) or call 6336 5067 (11.30am - 6.00pm Daily. Closed on Public Holidays)



## Editor's Note

As we come to the end of 2010 and immerse ourselves in yet another round of festive celebration of partying and feasting, pause and take a deep breath. Think about how you would like to face death. Would you like to die with courage and equanimity? With dignity and a smile? People generally do not like to talk about death, especially on festive occasions. It's as if not talking about it will make it go away. But I think it is good and wise to reflect often on death and impermanence. More so on festive occasions and New Year's Day, because each passing year brings us one year closer to our graves.

Ordinary beings seek sensual pleasures throughout their lives – delicious food and drinks, exquisite clothes and accessories, pleasant company, music and dance, sweet-smelling toiletries and soft beds etc. Yet when the time comes for us to die, these offer no protection (back cover). Contemplating on death, we can take stock of our life, reassess and see whether we are heading in the right direction of wisdom and compassion.

The Buddha advised us to contemplate often on death. It is by understanding death that we understand the purpose of life (pg 63). Right from birth, we are embarking on a journey towards death, every second of the day. Dying alone will happen sooner or later, it's only a matter of time. Even if you are the most powerful person on earth, you can't stall death (pg 60). However much effort you put into maintaining this body, there is no way to keep it, eventually, it will degenerate and vanish (pg 40).

Not understanding that the body and mind are but a combination of several components, we fail to comprehend that there is no person who dies, only a process of dying (pg 49). We grieve at the loss of our loved ones, not seeing that we have actually suffered bereavement countless times in countless lives (pg 57).

Yet death on earth is the beginning of a new life, and the death of a loved one could bring much insight to the living ones left behind. On page 44, Dr Lai shares the dying process of her mum, and how she and her other sisters received their mum's love and gift, even after her death (pg 44). Elsewhere in this issue, learn useful tips from Ven. Thubten Chodron on how to prepare for the death of a loved one (pg 52), or read page 62 for other useful books on understanding death and embracing life.

When we appreciate the beauty and preciousness of one's life (pg 61), we come to understand that what truly matters is the goodness we bring to this world (pg 55) through practising the Dharma to cultivate bodhicitta, compassion and wisdom. Indeed, "the karmic deeds of one's existence are the only force we can rely on at death" (pg 54 & 56). Through practising the Dharma, our happiness, inner peace and fearlessness grow in life as our spiritual cultivation grows (pg 37).

Perhaps then, we can leave this world with a smile and a tranquil mind, knowing we have tried our best for our lives to be a blessing and a source of happiness to all.



Yours in the Dharma,  
Sister Esther Thien

**Metta Meditation (English)\***

Date/Time : 12, 19, 26 Sept & 3 Oct, Sun, 3pm – 4.30pm  
 Fee : \$30 (4 lessons)  
 Instructor : Venerable Chuan Ren

**The Heart of 'The Heart Sutra' (3rd Run)\***

Date/Time : 26 Oct – 30 Nov, Tue, 7.30pm – 9.30pm  
 Fee : \$30 (6 sessions)  
 Instructor : Shen Shi'an, MA (Buddhist Studies)  
 Details : The Heart Sutra (Xin Jing) is the most concise yet popular sutra in the world, which encapsulates the essence of the perfection of wisdom. Beyond the teaching of emptiness, participants will learn about its deeper truths (in English with the aid of Chinese terms), and how to recite it in Chinese.

**Simple Detox Workshop (Mandarin)\***

简易排毒工作坊(华语教授)  
 Date/Time : 10 Sept, Fri, 8.30am – 5pm  
 Fee : \$80 (1 full day)  
 Instructor : Mr. Wong Kew Yew (Bach. Biotech), dedicated to public education including interviews and cooking demos on Radio FM 95.8

**Vegetarian Spreads (English)\***

Date/Time : 10 & 17 Oct, Sun, 3pm – 5pm  
 Fee : \$30 (2 sessions) + \$6 ingredients fee  
 Instructor : Mr. Wong Kew Yew

**The Basics of Healthy Vegetarian Diet (Mandarin)\***

健康素食饮食基本知识  
 Date/Time : 5 & 12 Oct, Tue, 7.30pm – 9.30pm  
 Fee : \$30 (2 sessions)  
 Instructor : Mr. Wong Kew Yew

**Sharing Sessions for Home Caregivers of Elderly (English)\***

Date/Time : 7, 14, 21 Nov, Sun, 3pm – 6pm  
 Fee : \$40 (3 sessions)  
 Instructor : Staff Nurse Mr. Seow Khiam Hong

**Yoga for General\***

Date/Time : (1) 6 Nov 2010 – 22 Jan 2011, Sat,  
 9.15am – 10.45am  
 (2) 13 Sept – 15 Nov, Mon, 7.30pm – 9pm  
 Fee : \$160 (10 lessons)  
 Instructor : Ms. Helen Goh, Certified Yoga Instructor

**Lunch-time Yoga\***

Date/Time : 7 Sept – 9 Nov, Tue, 12.30pm – 1.10pm /  
 1.10pm – 1.50pm  
 Fee : \$140 (10 sessions includes 1 free organic take-away every session)  
 Instructor : Ms. Ong Ju Lee, diploma in teaching the Science and Art of Yoga

**Afternoon Yoga for Golden Years\***

Date/Time : 7 Sept – 9 Nov, Tue, 3pm – 4.30pm  
 Fee : \$120 (10 lessons)  
 Instructor : Ms. Ong Ju Lee

**Yoga for General\***

Date/Time : (1) 7 Sept – 9 Nov, Tue, 10.30am – 12.00pm  
 (2) 8 Sept – 10 Nov, Wed, 7.30pm – 9.00pm  
 Fee : \$160 (10 lessons)  
 Instructor : Ms. Ong Ju Lee

**Children's Art\***

Date/Time : 13 Nov 2010 – 12 Feb 2011, Sat,  
 2.30pm – 4.30pm  
 Fee : \$50 (12 sessions)  
 Instructor : Mr. Soh Chin Bee, graduate from Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts

\* Venue : Awareness Place Well-Being Centre,  
 Bras Basah Complex #03-39  
 Details : Please visit [www.awarenessplace.com](http://www.awarenessplace.com),  
 email [sem@kmspk.org](mailto:sem@kmspk.org) or call 6336 5067 to register or  
 enquire.

**Basic Vipassana (Insight) Meditation Class**

Date/Time : 20 Aug – 5 Nov, Fri, 7.30pm – 9.30pm  
 Venue : 4th floor, Ven Hong Choon Memorial Hall  
 Offering : \$30  
 For more information, please call 6849 5300

**Relaxation Meditation Course**

Date/Time : 15 Aug – 17 Oct, Sun, 2.30pm – 4pm  
 Venue : 4th floor, Ven Hong Choon Memorial Hall  
 Offering : \$20  
 Details : For more information, please call 6849 5300

**Dharma Talk by Ven Dr Guang Xing**

Date/Time : (1) 30 Oct, Sat, 7.30pm – 9.30pm  
 (2) 31 Oct, Sun, 7.30pm – 9.30pm  
 Venue : 2nd floor, Pagoda of Ten Thousand Buddhas  
 Details : Free admission. For more information, please  
 call 6849 5300

**English Buddhism Course**

**Year 1 Module 3**  
 Date/Time : 19 Sept – 14 Nov, Sun, 2.00pm – 3.30pm  
 Venue : Dharma Hall

**Year 2 Module 3**  
 Date/Time : 13 Sept – 15 Nov, Mon, 7.30pm – 9.00pm  
 Venue : 1st floor, Ven Hong Choon Memorial Hall

**Year 3 Module 3**  
 Date/Time : 16 Sept – 18 Nov, Thurs, 7.30pm – 9pm  
 Venue : 1st floor, Ven Hong Choon Memorial Hall

Fee : \$30 per Module  
 Details : For more information, please call 6849 5300

**Medicine Buddha Sutra Recitation (Chinese)**

Date/Time : Every Sat, 7.45pm  
 Venue : 2nd Level, Pagoda of Ten Thousand Buddhas

**Pureland Sutra Recitation (Chinese)**

Date/Time : Every Sun, 9.00am  
 Venue : Hall of Great Compassion

**Diamond Sutra Recitation (Chinese)**

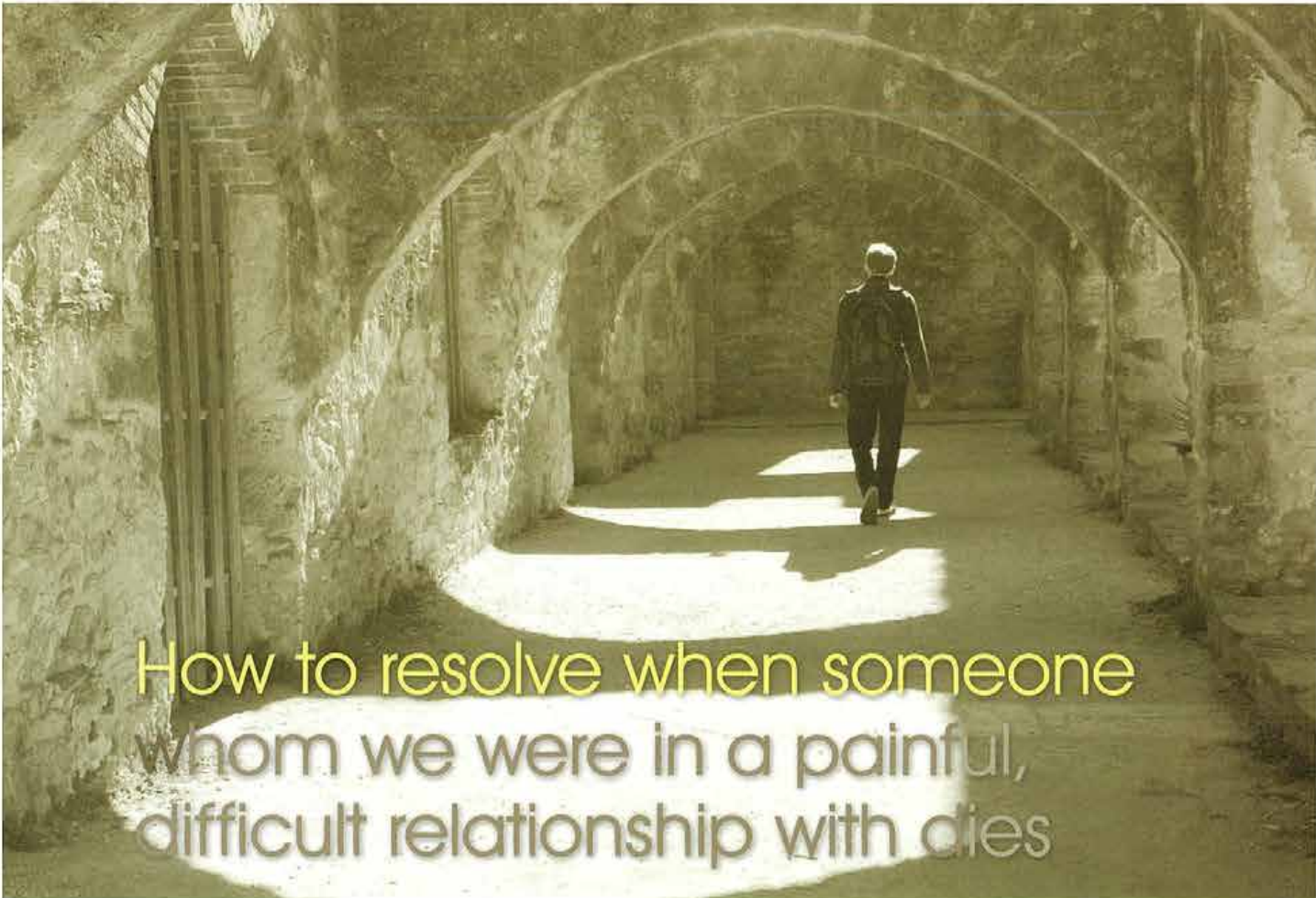
Date/Time : Every Sun, 2.00pm  
 Venue : Hall of Great Compassion

**The Great Compassion Puja (Chinese)**

Date/Time : Every 27th of the lunar month, 10.00am  
 Venue : Hall of Great Compassion

**Recitation of 25th Chapter of the Lotus Sutra (Pu Men Pin)**

Date/Time : Every Fri, 8.00pm  
 Venue : Hall of Great Compassion  
 Details : For more information, please call 6849 5300



## How to resolve when someone whom we were in a painful, difficult relationship with dies

**Q:** How does the grieving process work when we lose someone with whom we were in a painful or complicated relationship?

— Anonymous

**A:** Recognise that the person acted in harmful ways because he or she was confused, unhappy and miserable. The person didn't know how to create happiness, and so the actions he or she did in an attempt to relieve his or her suffering caused more suffering instead of bringing happiness. That person was not an evil person who was trying to harm us. He or she was simply overwhelmed by his or her own confusion and pain. In the same way, we, too, are caught in the cycle of existence under the influence of ignorance, anger and attachment, wanting happiness but not knowing the causes of happiness, or being mistaken about the causes of happiness.

We, too, have acted in ways that at the time we had thought were good, but years later, we realised

we were mistaken. Knowing this from our own experience, we can understand the other person's confusion.

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When someone acts in an abusive way, we should distance ourselves from him. That doesn't mean you have to hate him. We can still have feelings of kindness and compassion, but we don't have to stay in an abusive situation.

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In this way, we forgive and generate compassion towards the person. Letting go of anger we have towards others is important, whether that person is dead or alive. 🐾

— Ven. Thubten Chodron

[www.thubtenchodron.org](http://www.thubtenchodron.org)  
[www.sravasti.org](http://www.sravasti.org)

# Learning “What is Happiness?” at the Buddhist Conference 2554

**Singapore** – In this modern age, happiness seems elusive to many. Some feel they can truly be happy only if they have high-paying jobs. However, Buddhism teaches us that happiness can be achieved in the Here and Now in our daily lives. *The Buddhist Conference 2554*, which will be held on 23 October 2010 at the Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery, aims to allow more to see from that perspective.


Happiness begins with our cultivation in the family. Balancing spiritual cultivation without neglecting our family members or responsibilities is possible. Even with our various roles to play in the family — as a daughter, wife, mother or grandmother or son, husband, father or grandfather — we can express *metta* (loving-kindness), develop patience and tolerance towards our family members.

At work, we can apply the Noble Eightfold path in every single moment, to watch our actions and minimise harsh words. When dealing with difficult people, we practise holding thoughts of compassion and *metta*. With Right View, we understand each and everyone of us has our own delusions, and we

shouldn't hurt others more with our harsh speech and angry actions.

Buddhists may sometimes also find it hard to balance ambition and professionalism with the Dharma teachings. But ambition, professionalism and the Dharma, are not mutually exclusive. Buddhists can still be professional and have lofty ambitions, as long as their deeds, words and thoughts are guided by clear ethics, integrity and wholesome motivations. Happiness can also result from knowing that one is practising right livelihood.

Cultivating in this manner, we can transform whatever we face in our daily lives into the path to enlightenment. With the development of mindfulness (to watch our thoughts), and inner discipline (to continue practising in the face of obstacles), our happiness and inner peace grow as we aspire to benefit others and ourselves.

To find out more, visit [www.BuddhistConference.sg](http://www.BuddhistConference.sg). Tickets are available from Sistic, at S\$38 or S\$132 for a group of four. 

## Will They Grieve? Will They Rejoice?

BY | Toh Sze Gee

A day will come  
when you will be featured in the newspapers  
without you having to arrange for it:  
Under the obituary section.

Without you having to make the slightest effort,  
you will earn a title,  
which will be prefixed to your name:  
The late so-and-so.

Without you having to sit for any examination,  
you will be conferred your ultimate certificate:  
The death certificate.  
(You will take it lying down, I'm afraid.)

At that time, will the people  
whom your life once revolved around be grieving?  
Or will they rejoice?

To know the answer today,  
you won't need a fortune-teller.  
All you have to do is take an honest look:  
“Now, am I living my life well?”



*Turmeric is one of nature's most powerful healers. It is a natural antiseptic, antibacterial and anti-inflammatory agent, and is also a natural painkiller and liver detoxifier. Recent research has proven turmeric to be beneficial in preventing cancer and Alzheimer's disease. In addition, it can speed up wound healing, and help treat depression, arthritis and rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis and other inflammatory skin conditions.*

## Dry Curry Vegetarian Chicken 干咖喱鸡



### Ingredients:

Potatoes 600g (skinned, cut into pieces), vegetarian chicken 4 (cut into pieces), curry powder 2tbsp, green peas (frozen) 2tbsp, carrot 1 pc (cut into small pieces), grated coconut 1 (add 1 bowl of water to get milk)

### Pounded ingredients:

Galangal (lengkuas) 2", lemon grass 2, Candlenuts (Buah Keras) 4, turmeric 1", dried chilli 12

### Method:

1. Fry the potatoes and vegetarian chicken and set aside.
2. With 4 tbsp of oil, fry the pounded ingredients. Add curry powder and fry until fragrant.
3. Add in (1), carrot and green peas. Season with salt and sugar (1 tsp each).
4. Add in coconut milk and cook till gravy turns thick and dry.

### 材料:

马铃薯600克(去皮切块)、素鸡4条(切块)、咖喱粉2汤匙、青豆(冰冻)2汤匙、红萝卜1条(切小块)、椰丝(1个椰子分量,加1碗水取椰浆)

### 香料:

蓝姜约2寸、香茅2条、腊豆4粒、黄姜约1寸、辣椒干12条

### 做法:

1. 把马铃薯和素鸡炸熟,起锅备用。
2. 油4汤匙,爆香香料,加入咖喱粉炒香。
3. 加入(1.)、红萝卜及青豆,调入盐和糖各一茶匙。
4. 倒入椰浆煮至浓稠。

## Vegetarian Mee Goreng 素炒印度面



Photos: © Anuttara Enterprises Pte Ltd

### Ingredients:

Yellow noodle 1.2kg, bean sprout 300g, red chilli 2, curry powder 1tbsp, cai xin 200g (sectioned), green peas 2tbsp, tomatoes 2 (cut into pieces), potatoes 3 (cooked, skinned, cut into pieces)

### Seasoning:

Tomato sauce 5tbsp, chilli sauce 2tbsp, sugar 1/2tbsp

### Method:

1. With a little oil, fry the curry powder.
2. Add in all the ingredients (except red chilli) and seasoning, fry till fragrant. Transfer to serving dish and garnish with shredded red chilli. Ready to serve.

### 材料:

黄面1.2公斤、豆芽300克、辣椒2条(切丝)、咖喱粉1汤匙、菜心200克(切小段)、青豆2汤匙、番茄2个(切块)、马铃薯3个(煮熟去皮切块)

### 调味料:

番茄酱5汤匙、辣椒酱2汤匙、糖1/2汤匙

### 做法:

1. 用少许的油将咖喱粉炒香。
2. 除了辣椒丝外,把所有材料及调味料倒入翻炒至香,即可盛碟,并以辣椒丝点缀。



# Rock a-bye Baby: Promotes Relaxation, Body Awareness and Attention

By Susan Kaiser Greenland, author of *The Mindful Child*, and Founder of the Inner Kids Foundation which developed the Inner Kids mindful awareness programme for children, teens and families.

**T**ake as much time as is pleasurable for you and your child. If either of you begin to get restless, bring the activity to a logical stopping point.

With your child lying on his or her back with arms and legs stretched and flat on the floor (or mattress), lead him or her through a simple body scan starting with the head and moving down the body through to the toes.

Here are some suggestions for what you might say:

- See if you can focus on how the back of your head feels against the floor. Now your shoulders, your upper back, your middle back, your arms, your middle, your rear, your upper legs, your lower legs, the back of your feet . . .
- Boy, I feel more relaxed just watching you relax. Do you feel more relaxed too?
- I can see your body quiet down and relax. Is your mind quieting down and relaxing too?
- You can put a stuffed animal, or a pillow, or your child's hands on his or her tummy to help your child focus on the feeling of movement of the breath and ask:
  - Feel how your breath moves your hands up and down? (Or the stuffed animal or pillow?)
  - Breathing in, our bodies relax; breathing out, our thoughts quiet down. Breathing in, we relax; breathing out, we quiet down and feel calm.

Young children often like to pretend that the stuffed animal on their belly is real and imagine rocking it to sleep by giving it a gentle 'up-and-down' ride on his or her tummy. You can play along too and say:

- It looks like your stuffed animal has fallen asleep! Or,
- Your stuffed animal looks so happy and relaxed. Do you feel happy and relaxed too?



**T**oday's teaching is on the topic of death and impermanence. Hopefully, it would be of some help to your practice.

I hope that all of you, in this life, the next life and in all your lives, will gain more and more confidence in terms of attaining liberation. Yesterday, I told you that relying on your teacher is one method to attain liberation. The second method is to practise the Dharma diligently. After the teachings and pith instructions have been obtained, one must rely on one's own efforts to practise, that is the most important. It is not that one can just hand all the responsibility over to the Triple Gem and the teacher and everything will be alright. Thus, the Buddha said that liberation depends on oneself. At the time of dying, we will come to appreciate that liberation can only depend on oneself, there is no way one can rely on others.

# A Teaching on Death and Impermanence

BY | Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche



When you came to this human world, you came alone. When it is time to leave, you will leave alone. On the day of death, you would not be able to bring either family, relatives, friends, wealth... all these have been proven from history: our grandfather, grandmother, parents... when it was their time to leave, they left alone, and we will follow in their footsteps. Dying alone is only a matter of time, sooner or later it will happen. Since we know that death will definitely come, and death brings such suffering of fear, why do we not then place emphasis on death? Why are we not practising the Dharma diligently? Why are we still not making great efforts? Only if one is mentally unsound, would one fail to consider this question. Someone who is normal will surely consider how he or she will accomplish the matter of liberation when death comes upon him or her.

In this world, there are many people who are much more intelligent and capable than us in terms of worldly mundane affairs. They spend a lot of time and energy managing their careers and exerting a great deal of effort at work. However after their death, some fall into the three lower realms. All of you should consider why it is that people of such ability and intellect are unable to attain liberation. What caused this to happen? How should one who is a Buddhist behave? I'm not saying that you should not eat, dress or work in jobs, but we can still spend fifty percent of our time and energy on worldly matters, and another fifty percent on the issue of attaining liberation. If one is able to accomplish this, one is a good practitioner. If you put about eighty to one hundred percent of your time and energy into worldly affairs, and just invest twenty percent or less into pursuing liberation, then the merit you accumulate will not be enough to attain liberation. This is just like a weighing scale. Whichever side is heavier, the balance will dip in its favour and the lighter side will dangle upwards. The law of cause and effect is likewise. I hope sincerely that your practice will improve.

Tomorrow, I will leave this place. That is impermanence! You should all remember, one day you would all leave this place too. Sooner or later, one will leave this world. On the day that you leave this world, it is not certain that your Teacher will be by your side, or that the Dharma will be before you. If we do not have great merit, we can't foretell the manner in which we will die. Maybe it would be death due to poisoning, or a car accident, or a fall, or when we go to sleep, we do not wake up anymore and die in our sleep. It could be that someone murders you or that you commit suicide...

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all kinds of karma could perpetuate your death and it could happen anytime, (Editor: read pg 55) so you should all be prepared with the Dharma practice and employ it at the moment of facing death.

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The best method to face death would be to apply bodhicitta and the wisdom of emptiness. How much one has been able to absorb of the Dharma that one has learnt becomes very important. If one has been studying or researching in a very deep and vast way, but yet unable to absorb much, then it is irrelevant whether one is a layperson or ordained, and unimportant whether one has been practising for many years. That's because on this day of death, one does not possess much confidence in one's mind. One also does not know where one will be going in the next life. This is called practising blindly. When one practises without any motivation, direction and without any confidence, that is 'blind practice'. Therefore, we should definitely look for our spiritual teacher, take the initiative to rely on him, and request the Dharma from him in a proper way. Without the spiritual teacher guiding you, practice will never succeed. If one has a spiritual teacher, then one can just peacefully practise the Dharma, without any doubts. If you have faith in the teacher and in the Dharma, then you will definitely be advancing (on the path).

Although I am now here together with all of you, it is not possible for us to be together every day. Death could come any time. Every day, on television and in newspapers, there is constant news of death. What we hear and see everywhere is the message of death. Death will befall us sooner or later, so why are we

not considering the question of death? In terms of eating and dressing right now, we will not starve or freeze to death. But if we do not put our energy into practice, in the end, we would still starve to death or die of cold, that is definite. When you are lying on bed waiting for death, unable to eat, isn't that dying of starvation? Your whole life, you have been trying to earn money, make a fortune, but in the end, if you have to die of hunger, that would be a great pity. When we are dying, we can't even swallow one mouthful of water, the body will slowly disintegrate, and our bodily strength will gradually fade away. This is how we will die slowly of hunger. Please think about this carefully. We have been enduring so much suffering and stress, pouring so much effort into maintaining this human body, but in the end, there is no way to keep it, it will finally degenerate and vanish. All appearances are impermanent. Once we understand impermanence, then even if one is unable to accomplish the other practices, just this understanding would be of immense help to us in facing death. At the very least, you have some comprehension of death, it is no longer so frightening to you. Just like what we are practising now in terms of the teachings on *bardo* (intermediate state). After death, when one enters the *bardo*, we would at least have some comprehension about what is going on, knowing that 'this is *bardo*'. In our mind, we would have this kind of recognition.

Today, one of my close Dharma brothers at Yachen, Xie Er Bo, a very fat lama whom many people are acquainted with just passed away. Today I have also received four other telephone calls reporting the death of someone. One said, "My parents died", another said, "My child died" and yet another relayed that his grandfather died. After another seventy or eighty years, all of us here would be dead. So don't think too much. Your thinking functions like a busy city of the mind. From the point of view of mental afflictions, following our worldly plans will never ever bring success. In the midst of carrying out our plans, we will die. After death, our next destination is also unknown. Our grandfather and grandmother, where did they go after their deaths? Which world are they in right now? What kind of suffering are they undergoing? We can't hear their names now, and we can't even imagine which direction they have gone to in their new world. After a few decades, we will be just like them. If we do not practise the Dharma, at the

time of death, we can only watch helplessly as we leave behind everything in this world, this is great suffering indeed! Therefore, in our daily lives, as long as there is enough to eat and wear; life is stable; going out is convenient, that should be enough. We should not crave for too much. Apart from these, we should put our efforts into practising the Dharma. Try to benefit sentient beings, only this is truly beneficial. Although Dharma practitioners will also die, the way we die is not the same. If we know the method for facing death, it will be a great help for our future life.

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**So my most important advice to all of you today is, “Don’t forget death, if you forget death, your practice will definitely not improve.”**

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You must constantly contemplate the impermanence of life. By doing so, renunciation and bodhicitta will arise easily. In order to deal with death in a more confident manner, there is only one way: practise diligently. Other than this, there is no other means. Putting your effort into practice is also the way to be liberated from samsara’s suffering and to save sentient beings. So you should try to make the correct choice.

In this cycle of samsara, we have died countless times. (Editor: read pg 58) If we were to become an animal in our next life, it would be very miserable. If you go and look at the ocean parks, at the bottom of the ocean, those creatures there are undergoing suffering. You don’t have to rely on visualisation, it is possible to just witness it with your own eyes. At the wet-markets, slaughter houses, animals are going through all kinds of pain of death. Imagine it for a while, if you were a pig, or fish or frog, or a hungry-ghost... what would you do then? How are you to pass your days? All these animals were once humans, but because during their human lives, they did not practise the Dharma and having created negative karma, they fell into the animal realm. Now, I’m really begging all of you, please do make good use of your time to practise the Dharma, because you will definitely part from your spiritual teacher and leave this world one day. You will leave your families and friends, that is definite. You need not doubt this, it will happen, it is certain. This teaching is to remind all of you that death will come, impermanence will arrive, we will all die. What am I here for? I am here

to remind all of you in advance. Death is on the way, you should make preparations. I am here to bring you this message, because I am afraid that you will forget about death in the midst of your busy lives.

Think of the massive earthquake in Sichuan in 2008. At that time, the situation was horrific! When the earthquake happened, a person ran down from the 18th floor to the first storey and ran to somewhere several hundreds of kilometres away to hide. He did not care about his children or family, he only wished to save himself. At the time of facing death, the fear is just like that. All sentient beings regard their own lives as the most precious and protect it fiercely. At the most crucial moment, you will definitely abandon all relatives and friends. Even if the entire planet’s wealth were to be presented to you, you would not agree to exchange your life for it. Life is one’s most valuable possession. But many people do not know how to love themselves. They only know how to eat and dress well. But this is something that even animals know how to do. Humans have the ability to think and judge. So if you truly love your life, use the Dharma to love life. This is the ultimate way, it is the wise way, and one can use the Dharma to liberate from samsara’s sufferings and help sentient beings. Those who deeply contemplate the sufferings of samsara, are truly the people who love themselves.

Please think about it. If you die tomorrow, where would you go? Is there anyone who can answer me that he or she will definitely go to such-and-such a place? Is there such confidence? If one does not possess such confidence, what should one do? Death is coming quickly, we are already forty or fifty years old, we don’t have many years left. I’m not trying to frighten you, this is the truth. Just reflect, you have already lived fifty or sixty years. Time has passed by in a flash, and this human life is almost used up. If one does not practise the Dharma in one’s remaining time, who is going to liberate one? If one does not love oneself, who is going to love one? Although it is said that the blessings of the Triple Gem and spiritual teachers are inconceivable, if one did not have faith, this causal link cannot be established. Now, you have obtained a precious human life with its opportunities and freedoms, you have met spiritual

teachers and the Dharma, this is such a rare chance, please do not just throw it away, please appreciate your good fortune and put in your greatest efforts!

All of you want to practise the Dharma diligently, so it is imperative to remind yourself that death is approaching. Death will come, we should remember this at all times. My incredibly kind spiritual teacher, Lama Achuk Rinpoche does not frequently teach us all kinds of pith instructions. Instead everyday, he speaks to us about death and impermanence, so that we can practise the teachings of death and impermanence every day. All of you must remember this. The more a person feels in his heart the fear of death, the more fervently this person will wish to find the instructions for liberation. Those people whose minds are constantly reminded of death and impermanence, will definitely progress in their practice. They will not regress from their faith in their teachers.

Today, we are together and happy, there is great joy and it is a rare occurrence. In these three or four years, I have not passed away, all of you are still alive, and we were able to meet up since yesterday. It is truly not easy for all this to happen! But one day, we will have to part. Not parting is impossible. Due to the operation of the law of cause and effect, everyone's karmic connection is different. In another hour or two, we will all leave this place. When is the next time we are able to gather like this again? This is something very difficult to know for sure! When would you be able to see me again is also uncertain. Death and impermanence may come suddenly and we will be caught totally unprepared.

A person is constantly changing everyday. The next time we meet, would there be any changes in your level of practice? Please have some compassion on yourself! You should have some love for yourself! I know the pain and suffering in samsara, all of you have also felt it to some extent, but who will have so much love and compassion to tell you these things? Who would repeat these in front of you over and over again? Even if I were to say it, you will not listen. You will say, "What right do you have to tell me this?" This is the way of the common people.

So remember death. Everyday, you should put this into your practice. Every hour, you should practise this. Practise diligently, with great efforts, practise it repeatedly, again and again.

So contemplate seriously, and put your effort into practice. Always ask your spiritual teacher if you have any questions in your practice. He is the one who helps you to resolve any queries or doubts on your practice. Those who are young should make even greater efforts. Even if you are young, you



Photos: Samuel Lim

should be diligent because death has no correlation with age. It is not that death will only come when one is old. Even if a baby were born just yesterday, he could die today. Such cases do happen. Everyone should practise well. There is nothing complicated about practising. It is very simple: don't forget death. Everyday one has to put death and impermanence into practice, then your renunciation, bodhicitta and faith in the Triple Gem and spiritual teacher will naturally grow and then one can start to look for a way.

All of you must practise well! Make efforts! The teacher can give you the method of practice, but one must practise it incessantly, put in the hard work without lapses. Liberation does not happen by itself spontaneously, it depends on one's own efforts and hard work. 🙏

**B**irth and death are the beginning and end of life on earth. On the timescale of our infinite life, it may only be a flash, but nevertheless it is a very precious and rare opportunity for learning and spiritual development. The birth experience shapes our view of life, relationships and health. The death experience influences our life after death and our future life. We do not remember our birth but according to Dr. Rudolf Steiner we will clearly remember our death. From the perspective of life in the spiritual world, death on earth is the beginning of a new life. How one is born in the spiritual world has great significance.

Because of this, the ancient civilisations and religions have treated death with great importance and respect. During the dying process and after death, there are special prayers, send-offs, blessings and farewells.

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### How one views death, and how one cares for the dead have profound impact on the one who is leaving, the living ones left behind, and on the entire society.

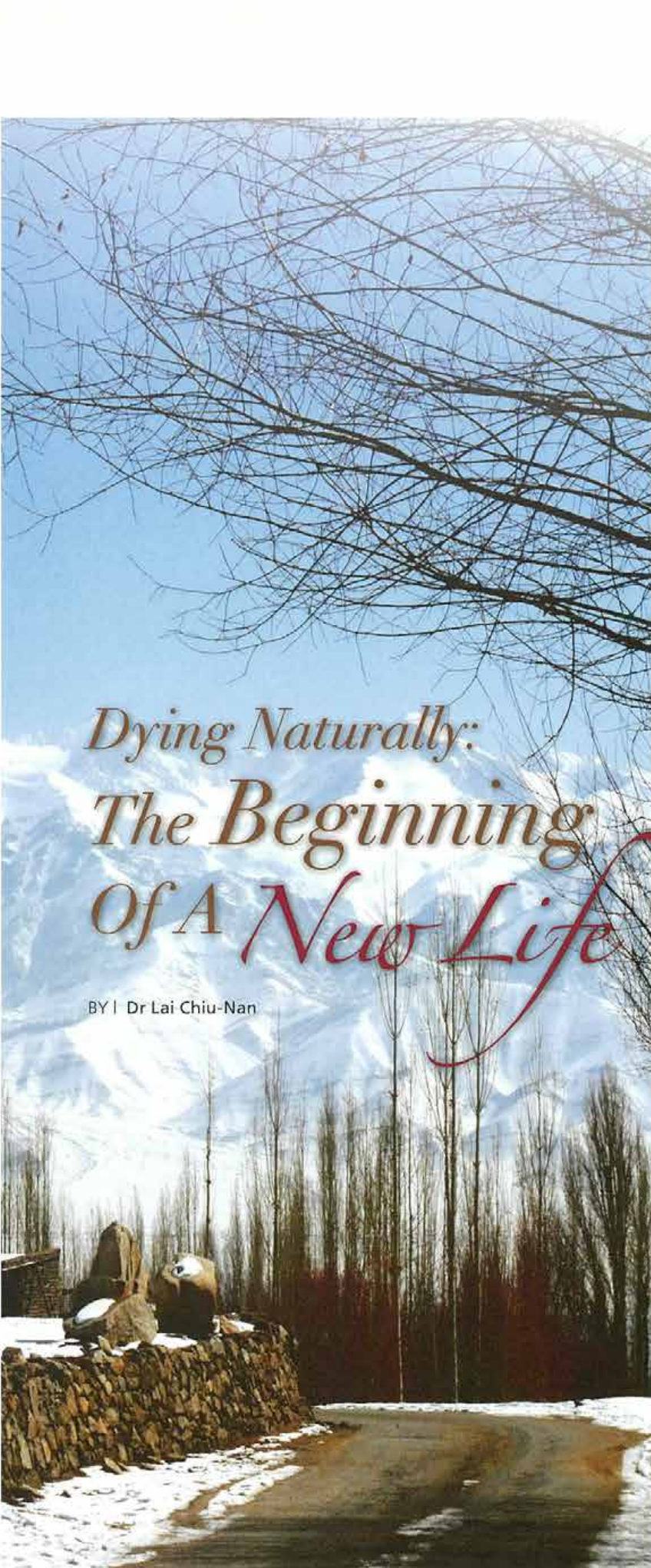
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I grew up in a “nuclear” family, that is, far away from the older generations of grandparents. As a child I never experienced the death of a family member. The death of my father more than three years ago had a profound impact on me. His communications with us after death opened up a whole new horizon. I feel that during the last few years I received help from my father, and have discovered many new areas of knowledge. Dr. Steiner emphasised that the invisible spiritual world and our material world are really one world. The two are inseparable. We receive help from those who have passed on, usually through the unconscious. Often, various ideas and inspirations to action come from the spiritual world. Communications between the two sides are important. Those who have passed on need our love and spiritual support, while we need their guidance, accumulated experience and wisdom.

At the beginning of this year after suffering from a stroke for eleven days, Mum passed away from this world. All six daughters accompanied her during this dying process. We stayed at her side offering prayers before her death, and cared for her body after her death. Her body was cremated four days later. We came to know about the Crestone End of Life Project (CEOLP), and with their help mum was cremated at an outdoor cremation site surrounded by snow-capped mountains. This experience inspired me to know more about this community group and write about how families can care for their own dead. Because we maintained contact with mum by having her body at home for four days before cremation, we received her love and her gifts. Each daughter experienced something unique and special. Later when I researched about American families who cared for their own dead, I came to know that this is a common experience, and one that is very different from the experiences of people who immediately send the body of deceased to a funeral home.

Many non-profit groups that help families to care for their own dead have encountered many moving stories in the course of helping the families. Some of these groups are influenced by Dr. Steiner's work. According to Dr. Steiner, founder of Anthroposophy, it takes three days for the higher bodies (etheric,





# *Dying Naturally: The Beginning Of A New Life*

BY | Dr Lai Chiu-Nan

astral and ego bodies) to completely disengage from the physical body after a person stops breathing. During this period, the departing consciousness reviews the life just left behind and says farewell to loved ones. This is a very sacred period where the two worlds can meet. The prayers made by the family members will help the one departing. The “dead” completely sees the inner thoughts and actions of those around. Because the higher bodies have not left, the body will not immediately decompose. Also the facial expressions can still be changed.

An Anthroposophical doctor noticed that often the facial expressions of those who suffered before death due to illness become very peaceful one day after death. I have heard of a case in which a person died in the hospital, whose facial expression became very peaceful afterwards. However, after the body was taken to the funeral home and embalmed, the expression and colour deteriorated. When my uncle’s wife died in Hunan, some suggested cremation right away. My aunt insisted that the body be put in a coffin and taken home to the village. Three days later, when her child rushed home and cried upon opening the coffin, blood came out of the mouth of this aunt who had just died. The tradition in China since ancient times is to mourn the body for three days. The body is kept at home for at least three days before cremation or burial. The Catholics in the old days also observed the three-day “wake” or watching over the body and praying for three days. A spiritual teacher in India received complaints from those who were cremated too soon after their death, a course of action that made them uncomfortable.

In modern America, the dead are turned over to funeral homes. Those who die in the hospital are removed immediately and sent to the morgue. They are cremated in the hospital crematorium or sent to the funeral home. Sometimes family

Photos: Tony

members arrive to find only a box of ashes. Funeral homes generally use chemicals to embalm the body. The ones most commonly used are formaldehyde and phenol. The blood vessels are injected with these chemicals. The contents and fluids of the intestines and organs are first punctured and sucked out, then replaced with these chemicals. This only slows down the decomposition so that during the funeral, the body looks as if it is asleep. After burial, the body will decompose. The embalming process injures the workers in the funeral homes, increasing the risk of cancers of the lymph, brain and large intestine. The use of these chemicals also pollutes the water and the environment. The embalmed body cannot be worked on by the higher bodies, resulting in a wax museum appearance.

Almost two years after Mum developed a congestive heart problem, we began making mental preparation for her eventual death. The remaining time with her was precious and we helped her to make preparations. Every evening before she fell asleep, my sisters and I would take turns to recite the compassion mantra of Avalokiteshvara. *Om Mani Padme Hung* was the prayer that she wished to have recited at the time of her death. We also reminded her to do her daily prayers and make water bowl offerings. When the weather was warm, my sisters took her to walk around the stupa near her home.

Weeks before her stroke, she looked particularly at peace. Every evening she would thank us for taking care of her. She also talked about "going home". After her stroke, we played sacred chants daily for almost 24 hours: Compassion mantra, Vajra Cutter Sutra,

Sanghata Sutra, etc. We also recited the Compassion mantra near her. Three days before her passing, I was reciting the Compassion mantra next to her when suddenly she opened her eyes very wide. Her eyes were bright and dark just like how they looked like in her younger days, and full of joy. My sisters all came to her bedside. She looked at each of us for some time. After her stroke, she had rarely opened her eyes. That evening, she communicated her love and joy to us through her eyes. We were all elated, thinking that she was going to get well.

The next day her blood pressure started to drop. When it continued to drop the day after, we made preparations for her passing. We set up an altar next to her bed. We placed a relic of Shakyamuni Buddha over her head. We also placed Buddhist texts such as the *Graduated Path to Enlightenment* at the head of the bed, planting the seed for her eventual mastering of the sacred knowledge. We also put blessed water and a blessed pill in her mouth. At least one daughter was around, staying with her at night. Whenever mum's breathing became laboured, the sister who was accompanying her would call the rest of us. We would do some energy work and recite *Om Mani Padme Hung* or the Medicine Buddha mantra. When her breathing became easy and calm again, we would then go back to sleep.

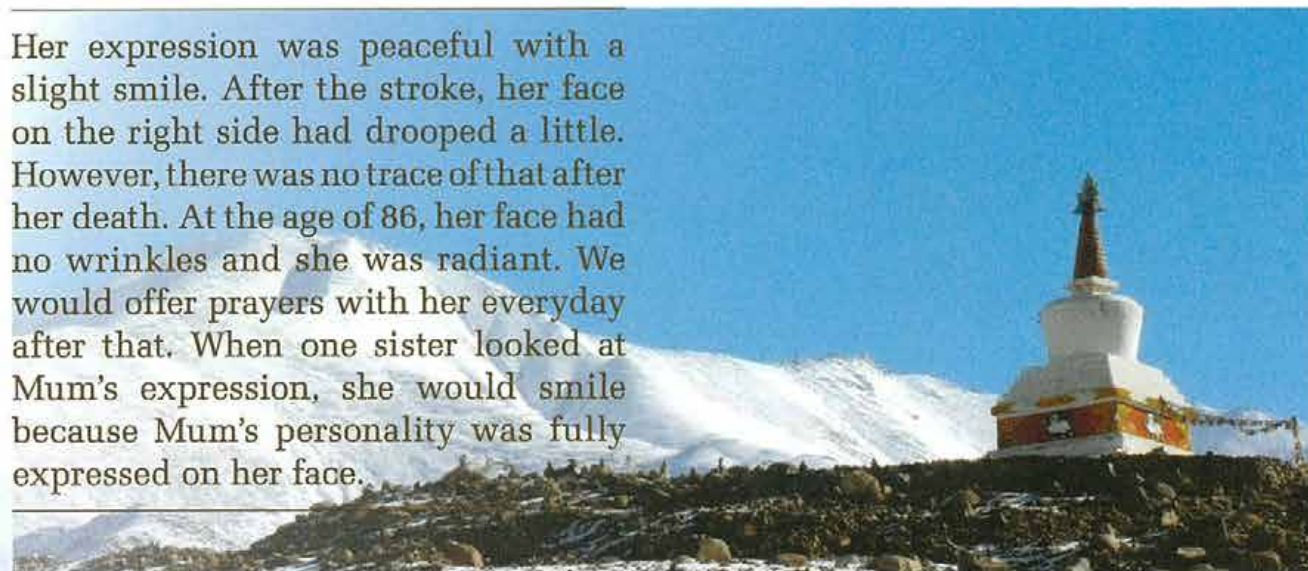
On the day of her passing I sat next to her to do her daily prayers. Before completing the recitation of the Sanghata Sutra, I switched to her favourite long mantra of Great Compassion. Halfway through, her soft breathing stopped. I held back my tears and completed reciting the mantra. All my sisters gathered around to recite *Om Mani Padme Hung*



and the Medicine Buddha mantra. About an hour before, our spiritual teacher had told us that mum would pass away within several hours and advised us not to give her intravenous fluid that day. He also instructed us to recite certain mantras and dedication prayers. Before her consciousness departed, we were to recite the mantra of purification and visualise white light purifying the negativities of body, speech and mind.

Three hours after she had stopped breathing, one sister checked the heart chakra with a pendulum and the pendulum did not spin anymore. Earlier, it was still spinning. At the time when she had stopped breathing, her mouth was slightly open. I could see her bottom teeth. After three hours of chanting and praying, we heard a noise coming from the lower jaw. When we looked next, she had closed her mouth.

Her expression was peaceful with a slight smile. After the stroke, her face on the right side had drooped a little. However, there was no trace of that after her death. At the age of 86, her face had no wrinkles and she was radiant. We would offer prayers with her everyday after that. When one sister looked at Mum's expression, she would smile because Mum's personality was fully expressed on her face.



The evening that she had stopped breathing, and we had ascertained that her consciousness had departed the body, we cleansed her body and changed her clothes. Before we touched her, we first pulled the hair on her crown just in case her consciousness had not left yet. Taped to her crown were 10 powerful mantras and a blessing pill. The Crestone End of Life Project (CEOLP) reminded us not to leave any plastic or metal items on the body during the cremation. Clothing should be made of natural fibre. I carefully removed the I.V. tube from her wrist. That was the only foreign object on her body after the stroke. That same afternoon I contacted Stephanie, one of the main coordinators

for the CEOLP. The volunteers went into action right away preparing for the cremation four days later. The outdoor cremation site was covered with snow and it took six to seven volunteers to clear the site. They put up the fences; notified the fire station and other offices; and prepared the actual wood pyre. All together about twenty people were involved. They also asked if we needed help with the ceremony and taking care of the body. A carpenter made a Palenque to transport the body. We cut juniper branches to be placed over the body. Julia from the group came the next morning to help me fill out the death certificate. She signed the form on the line for funeral director. The doctor who saw Mum after her stroke also signed the form. Then the form was faxed to the county offices at Del Norte. They faxed back the disposition form required for the day of the cremation.

When I was not busy with the paper work, I prayed at the bedside of my Mum. One day when I opened the door to her room, I saw my fifth sister sitting there quietly in the rocking chair. She told me that last summer when she came to spend a few weeks with mum, they would listen to her favourite Buddhist songs at dusk. She had just shared that music with Mum before I came in.

Saying farewell at home allows each person to have the time and space to say goodbye and accept the reality of the passing of a dear one. It also allowed neighbours and friends to pay their last respects. A friend from Denver brought many flowers.

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The night before the cremation, each of us offered a rose to Mum, and thanked her for all that she had given us. During this period we clearly felt the presence of Mum's consciousness outside her body.

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Singapore*

The morning before the day of cremation I "heard" Mum saying, "I am leaving; take care of yourself."

On the morning of cremation, I "heard" her say, "Cremation is good, cremation is good." That day I also knew that I must write about the work of CEOLP for other communities.

At eight in the morning Stephanie, Julia and the driver of a small truck came to transport Mum's body to the cremation site. The other sisters were already there to set up the outdoor altar and CD player for chants. Mum's daughters and sons-in-law carried the body to the pyre. The pyre was built of two low walls with a metal grate in the middle. Piles of wood were placed below, and drenched with kerosene. Above the body we piled juniper branches and more wood. Then we sprinkled flowers above that. The juniper branches gave off fragrance when burned and also covered the body. Stephanie first offered a prayer, and then the fourth sister lit the fire. We recited the prayers that we had been doing everyday since Mum's passing: refuge, the six-syllable Compassion mantra, mantra of Medicine Buddha, "Prayer To Be Born In The Land of Bliss," and the King of Prayers. Community members who knew Mum and volunteers who were helping out joined family and a few friends from afar for the ceremony. The abbot of the Dragon Zen Mountain Centre, who donated the cremation site, was also there. We could

feel the warmth and support from everyone. Three hours later at the completion, people actually felt uplifted. One person felt the sky was filled with the Buddha of Compassion during the recitation of the long Compassion Mantra. One friend who had never considered cremation before thought he would want cremation after this experience. Another friend from Denver said this is how she would like to go. She felt the presence of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

The morning after the cremation, I met with Wayne to collect Mum's ashes. As we were collecting the ashes, I started my interview. He has helped in four to five cremations. He joined this group as a volunteer because he knew the person who built this pyre. He is a meditator with no family members living nearby. He felt being part of this group was one of the most helpful spiritual practices that he did. One day when it is his time to die, he knows that this group will take care of his body according to his wishes.

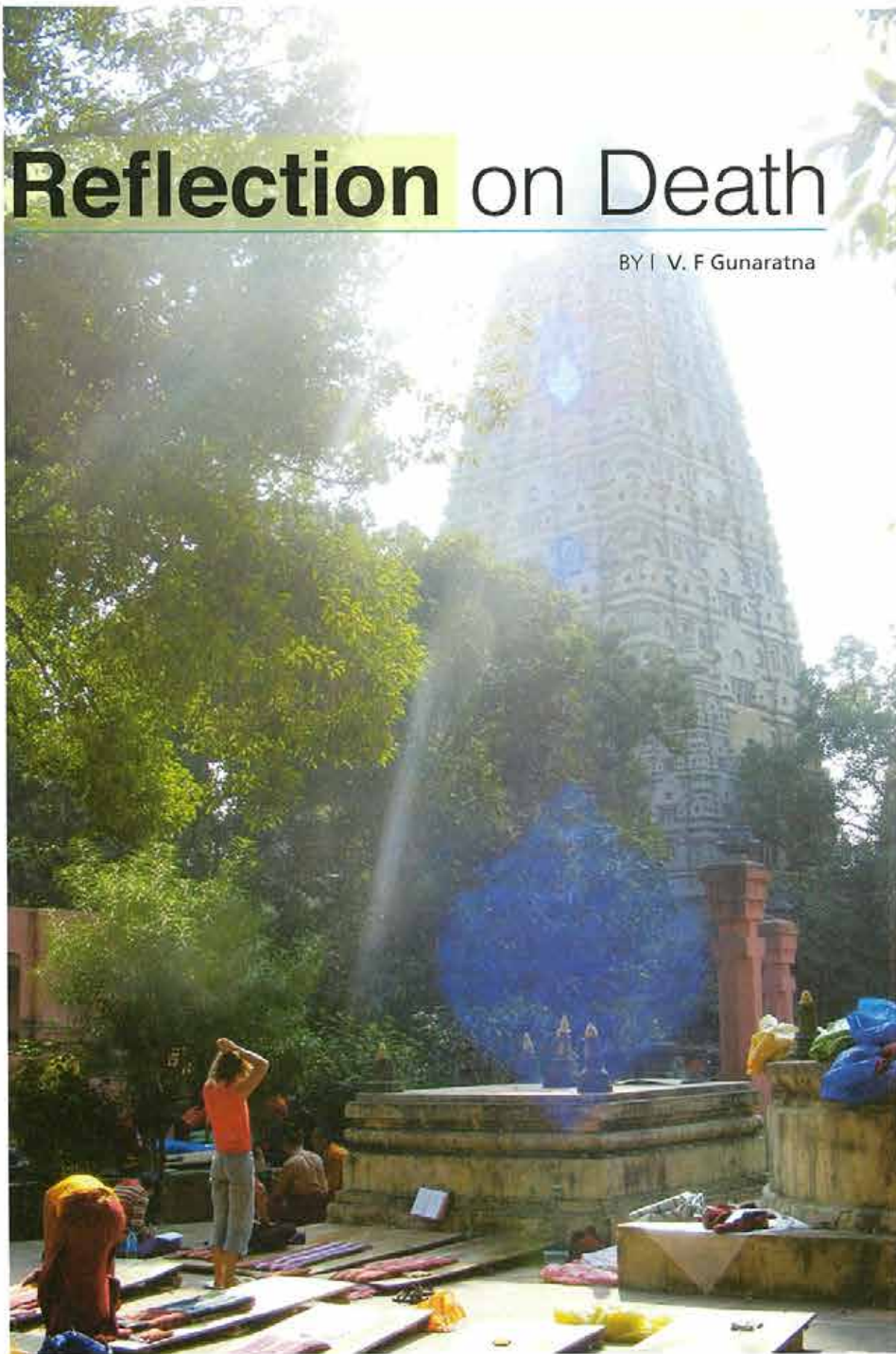
Holding Mum's ashes, looking out to the snowy peaks at the distance, I know I have begun another phase of my journey. Thank you, mother. May your life and death continue to benefit more lives. Thank you for lifting me up to another level. ♡

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# A Buddhist Reflection on Death

BY | V. F. Gunaratna

Another approach to the understanding of death is through an understanding of the law of aggregates or *Sankharas* which states that everything is a combination of things and does not exist by itself as an independent entity. “Sankhara” is a Pali term used for an aggregation, a combination, or an assemblage. The word is derived from the prefix *san* meaning “together” and the root *kar* meaning “to make.” The two together mean “made together” or “constructed together” or “combined together.” “All things in this world,” says the Buddha, “are aggregates or combinations.” That is to say, they do not exist by themselves, but are composed of several things. Any one thing, be it a mighty mountain or a minute mustard seed, is a combination of several things. These things are themselves combinations of several other things. Nothing is a unity, nothing is an entity, large or small. Neither is the sun nor moon an entity, nor is the smallest grain of sand an entity. Each of them is a *Sankhara*, a combination of several things.



Things seem to be entities owing to the fallibility of our senses — our faculties of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting, and even thinking. Science has accepted the position that our senses are not infallible guides to us. A permanent entity is only a concept, only a name. It does not exist in reality. In the famous dialogues between King Milinda and Thera Nagasena, the latter wishing to explain to the King this law of aggregates, enquired of the King how he came there, whether on foot or by riding. The King replied that he came in a chariot.

“Your Majesty,” said Nagasena, “if you came in a chariot, declare to me the chariot. Is the pole the chariot?”

“Truly not,” said the King.  
“Is the axle the chariot?” asked Nagasena.  
“Truly not,” said the King.  
“Is the chariot-body the chariot?”  
“Truly not,” said the King.  
“Is the yoke the chariot?”  
“Truly not,” said the King.  
“Are the reins the chariot?”  
“Truly not,” said the King.  
“Is the goading stick the chariot?”  
“Truly not,” said the King.  
“Where then, Oh King,” asked Nagasena, “is this chariot in which you say you came? You are a mighty king of all the continent of India and yet speak a lie when you say there is no chariot.”

In this way by sheer analysis, by breaking up what is signified by a chariot into its various component parts, Nagasena was able to convince the King that a chariot as such does not exist, but only its component parts exist. So much so that the King was able to answer thus: "Venerable Nagasena, I speak no lie. The word 'chariot' is but a figure of speech, a term, an appellation, a convenient designation for pole, axle, wheels, chariot-body and banner staff."

Similarly, "human being," "man," "I," are mere names and terms, not corresponding to anything that is really and actually existing. In the ultimate sense there exist only changing energies. The term "Sankhara" however refers not only to matter and properties of matter known as "corporeality" (*rupa*), but also to the mind and properties of mind known as "mentality" (*nama*). Hence, the mind is as much a combination or aggregate as the body.

When it is said the mind is a combination of several thoughts, it is not meant that these several thoughts exist together simultaneously as do the different parts of the chariot. What is meant is a succession of thoughts, an unending sequence of thoughts, now a thought of hatred, thereafter a thought of sorrow, thereafter a thought of duty near at hand and thereafter again the original thought of hatred etc., etc., in endless succession. Each thought arises, stays a while and passes on. The three stages of being are found here also — *uppada*, *thiti*, *bhanga* — arising, remaining and passing away.

Thoughts arise, one following the other with such a rapidity of succession that the illusion of a permanent thing called "the mind" is created; but really there is no permanent thing but only a flow of thoughts. The rapid succession of thoughts is compared to the flow of water in a river (*nadi soto viya*), one drop following another in rapid succession that we seem to see a permanent entity in this flow. But this is an illusion. Similarly, there is no such permanent entity as the mind. It is only a succession of thoughts, a stream of thoughts that arise and pass away.

If I say that I crossed a river this morning and re-crossed it in the evening, is my statement true regarding what I crossed and what I re-crossed? Was it what I crossed in the morning that I crossed in the evening? Is it not one set of water that I crossed

in the morning, and a different set of water that I crossed in the evening? Which of the two is the river, or are there two rivers, a morning river and an evening river? Had I re-crossed at mid-day, then there would also be a mid-day river. Asking oneself such questions one would see that every hour, every minute it is a different river. Where then is a permanent thing called 'river'? Is it the river bed or the banks?

You will now realise that there is nothing to which you can point to and say, "This is the river." "River" exists only as a name. It is a convenient and conventional mode of expression (*vohara vacana*) for a continuous unending flow of drops of water. Just such is the mind. It is a continuous stream of thoughts. Can you point to any one thought that is passing through the mind and say, "This truly is my mind, my permanent mind?" A thought of anger towards a person may arise in me. If that thought is my permanent mind, how come then at a later occasion a thought of love towards the same person can arise in me? If that too is my permanent mind, then there are two opposing permanent minds.

Questioning along these lines one comes to the inevitable conclusion that there is no such thing as a permanent mind; it is only a convenient expression (*vohara vacana*) for an incessant and variegated stream of thoughts that arise and pass away. "Mind" does not exist in reality. It exists only in name as an expression for a succession of thoughts. Chariot — river — body and mind — these are all combinations. By themselves and apart from these combinations they do not exist. There is nothing intrinsically stable in them, nothing corresponding to reality, nothing permanent, no eternally abiding substratum or soul.

Thus if body is only a name for a combination of changing factors and the mind is likewise only a name for a succession of thoughts, the psycho-physical combination called "man" is not an entity except by way of conventional speech. So when we say a chariot moves or a man walks it is correct only figuratively or conventionally. Actually and really, in the ultimate sense there is only a movement, there is only walking. Hence has it been said in the *Visuddhi Magga*:

"There is no doer but the deed

There is no experiencer but the experience.  
Constituent parts alone roll on.  
This is the true and correct view.”

Now, how does this cold and relentless analysis of mind and body become relevant to the question of death? The relevance is this.

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**When analysis reveals that there is no person but only a process, that there is no doer but only a deed, we arrive at the conclusion that there is no person who dies, but that there is only a process of dying.**

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Moving is a process, walking is a process, so dying is also a process. Just as there is no hidden agent behind the process of moving or walking, so, there is no hidden agent behind the process of dying.

If only we are capable of keeping more and more to this abhidhammic view of things, we will be less and less attached to things, we will commit less the folly of identifying ourselves with our actions. Thus we shall gradually arrive at a stage when we grasp the view, so difficult to comprehend, that all life is just a process. It is one of the grandest realisations that can descend on deluded man. It is so illuminating, so enlightening. It is indeed a revelation. With the appearance of such a realisation there is a disappearance of all worries and fears regarding death. That is a logical sequence. Just as with the appearance of light darkness must disappear, even so the light of knowledge dispels the darkness of ignorance, fear and worry. With realisation, with knowledge, these fears and worries will be shown as being empty and unfounded.

It is so very easy to keep on declaring this. What is difficult is to comprehend this. Why is it so difficult? Because we are so accustomed to thinking in a groove, because we are so accustomed to overlooking the fallacies in our thinking, because we are so accustomed to wrong landmarks and wrong routes in our mental journeys, we are reluctant to cut out a new path. It is us who deny ourselves the benefits of *samma ditthi* (Right views). The inveterate habit of identifying ourselves with our actions is the breeding ground of that inviting

belief that there is some subtle “ego” behind all our actions and thoughts. This is the arch mischief-maker that misleads us. We fail to realise that the ego-feeling within us is nothing more than the plain and simple stream of consciousness that is changing always and is never the same for two consecutive moments. As Professor James said, “The thoughts themselves are the thinkers.”

In our ignorance we hug the belief that this ego-consciousness is the indication of the presence of some subtle elusive soul. It is just the mind's reaction to objects. When we walk we fail to realise that it is just the process of walking and nothing else. We hug the fallacy that there is something within us that directs the walking. When we think, we hug the fallacy that there is something within us that thinks. We fail to realise that it is just the process of thinking and nothing else. Nothing short of profound meditation, along the lines indicated in the *Satipatthana Sutta* can cure us of our “*miccha ditthi*” (false belief). The day we are able, by such meditation, to rid ourselves of these cherished false beliefs against which the Buddha has warned us times without number — beliefs which warp our judgment and cloud our vision of things — shall we be able to develop that clarity of vision which alone can show us things as they actually are. Then only will the realisation dawn on us that there is no one who suffers dying, but there is only a dying process just as much as living is also a process.

If one can train oneself to reflect along these lines, it must necessarily mean that one is gradually giving up the undesirable and inveterate habit of identifying oneself with one's bodily and mental processes and that one is gradually replacing that habit by a frequent contemplation on *anatta* (*n'etan mama*, this does not belong to me). Such contemplation will result in a gradual relaxation of our tight grip on our “fond ego.” When one thus ceases to hug the ego-delusion, the stage is reached when there is complete detachment of the mind from such allurements. Then shall one be able to, cheerfully and unafraid, face the phenomenon of death with fortitude and calm. ☞

An excerpt from “Buddhist Reflections on Death”, by V. F. Gunaratna. ©1982 Buddhist Publication Society. *The Wheel* Publication No. 102/103 (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1982). *Access to Insight edition* ©1994–2010, John T. Bullitt



## How Should One Prepare For A Loved One's Death?

### *In the weeks or months before the person dies*

- Express your positive feelings for your loved one. Tell the person you love him or her (write a letter if you can't speak with the person directly). Don't wait until he or she is no longer around to discover and express your affection and love.
- Encourage the person to share his or her love and kindness with others. Help your loved one remember all the love and kindness that he or she has given and received from others during his or her lifetime.
- Encourage the person to remember the beneficial things he or she did in his or her life.
- If the person expresses regrets, listen with acceptance and kindness.
- Clear up your relationship with the dying loved one. If you need to forgive the person or apologise to him or her, do that. If the person apologises to you, accept when he or she makes amends.
- Encourage the person to forgive whomever he or she needs to forgive and to apologise to whomever he or she needs to apologise to.
- Encourage the person to give away his or her possessions in a spirit of generosity. In that way, the person will accumulate great merit which he or she should dedicate to have a good rebirth and to attain liberation and enlightenment.
- Encourage family members to do kind things to help the dying family member.
- Discuss about end-of-life issues — “living will”,

the amount of medication to ease pain, religious services, burial or cremation, donations to make in their name, distribution of possessions, and so forth — if and when the person is willing to do so.

- Let go of your own agenda, of what you want the dying person to talk about or how you want the person to die. Listen to him or her with your heart. Talk about what he or she wants to talk about, not what you think he or she should talk about.
- Let your dying loved one tell you how much (if any) pain medication he or she needs. Since the person is terminally ill, there is no need to worry about addiction. On the other hand, avoid sedating the person more than is needed. Try to keep his or her mind as clear as possible without the person being in excessive pain.
- Get in touch with your own issues about death, and use your Dharma practice to help you work with the dying person.

### *At the time of death*

- Make the room as quiet and peaceful as possible.
- Be peaceful and calm. Avoid crying in the room. Ask all those who are upset to step outside the room so that the room can remain peaceful for the sake of the person who is dying.
- Mentally give your dying loved one a heartfelt hug and let the person know of your love for him or her, but do not cling or encourage the person to cling.

- If it seems necessary, remind the person that his or her children and other family members will be all right after he or she passes away.
- If the person is of another faith, talk to him or her in the language of that faith — use words, symbols and concepts with which the person is familiar. Encourage the person to have faith and to generate a kind heart towards others. If he or she is not religious, talk about compassion or loving-kindness. That will help his or her mind to be calm and peaceful.
- Recite mantras or say prayers for the person, quietly or aloud, depending on what is appropriate, as he or she is dying.
- Don't do anything to bring up distress; for example, don't speak of old hurts.
- Often the person who is about to die will wait until family members have left the room and he or she is either alone or with someone who is not family before passing away. Don't feel that you did something wrong or have abandoned the person if he or she dies while you are not there.
- Remember: you can't prevent anyone from dying.
- Trust the person in his or her process and be supportive.
- Tell surrounding family members that we are fond of the dying person and that we love him or her. Say thank you to the person.

### After death

- If it is possible, allow the body to be untouched for three days after breathing has stopped in order to give time for the consciousness to leave the body. This usually needs to be pre-arranged with the hospital or family. Do not touch the body during this time. If the body starts to smell or if you see fluid oozing from the nostrils, it indicates that the consciousness has left and the body may be moved even before three days have transpired. If it is not possible to leave the body untouched for that long (it often isn't), then leave it untouched for as long as possible.
- After the person has died, touch his or her crown (top of the head) when you first touch the body, and say, "Go to pureland" or "Take a precious human rebirth". Or, according to the person's faith, say, "Go to heaven" or "Go to a safe place".
- Dedicate merit for the person to have a precious human rebirth: "May you have all conducive circumstances to practise the path to enlightenment." Pray that the deceased's

transition to the next life is free from fear or anxiety. Express in words or in your thoughts all the good wishes you have for the deceased.

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### After a dear one dies, it is very beneficial for people who are close to him or her to do prayers and meditations on that person's behalf.

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These are described below. It is also helpful to offer his or her possessions to charities. In that way, their possessions will be used by people who need them, such as the poor, needy and ill. We can then rejoice that other people benefit from having use of those things and dedicate the merit from generosity, for our loved one's good rebirth, liberation and enlightenment. This is an excellent way to benefit the ones we love. People also make monetary offerings to temples, monasteries, spiritual masters and Dharma centres on behalf of a loved one. Since holy beings are considered a "field of merit" due to their virtue, great merit is created from offering to them. You may also request the monasteries or Dharma centres to do meditations and prayers for the deceased person.

Here's a condensed meditation and prayer you can do after a dear one dies:

Visualise Chenrezig (Guanyin Bodhisattva) above your head. Visualise your dear one in front of you, with another Chenrezig on the person's head. As you recite the mantra, visualise much light and nectar from Chenrezig flowing into him or her, completely purifying all obscurations, negativities, distress, afflictions, disturbing emotions, fear etc, and bringing all enlightened qualities — love, compassion, generosity, wisdom etc. Then imagine Chenrezig melting into light and that the light goes into the person's heart centre (at the middle of their chest). Visualise that their mind and Chenrezig's mind of wisdom and compassion become non-dual.

Conclude the meditation by dedicating for the happiness and enlightenment of all sentient beings and especially praying for the deceased. You may recite verses written by the great masters or you may express your wonderful good wishes in your own words as you send the person onto his or her next life with love. You may aspire and pray:

May XXX have a precious human life. May he or she be born in a place with abundant food, clothing, medicine and shelter. May he or she have good friends, meet fully qualified Mahayana spiritual teachers who will stimulate his or her good qualities and guide him or her along the path to enlightenment. May his or her kind heart, talents and skills manifest readily in his or her next life and may he or she use them to benefit all beings. May he or she gain the realisation of equanimity, love, compassion and joy. May he or she realise the ultimate nature of reality. May all his or her future lives, wherever he or she is born, be useful and beneficial for all sentient beings.

May he or she have all conducive circumstances for practice, generate the three principal aspects of the path (the determination to be free, the altruistic intention and correct view of the emptiness of inherent existence), and quickly become a Buddha. Through my Dharma practice, may I benefit this person, leading him or her on the path to

enlightenment. By my practice becoming stronger and purer, may I be able to teach this person the Dharma in future lives.

If you wish, recite *The Extraordinary Aspiration of the Practice of Samantabhadra* for the person. You could also do the Medicine Buddha practice. Since family and friends have a strong connection with the person, their practice of meditation and dedications for the person is important. If you can do these on the 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th, 35th, 42nd and 49th days after the person's death, it is especially good. (Note: the day the person dies counts as Day 1, so if she dies on a Monday, the 7th, 14th, and so on days will be on Sundays.)

Editor: For more information on preparing for death and helping the dying, read *Dealing with Life's Issues – A Buddhist Perspective* by Ven. Thubten Chodron, published by the monastery or visit [www.thubtenchodron.org](http://www.thubtenchodron.org)



## Understanding Death...

Recently my husband suffered an accident and I found myself at the gate of a hospital operating theatre signing "High Risk" forms giving the surgeons permission to do their job. The words, 'Morbidity', 'Mortality', 'Fatality' jumped off the page at me. Impermanence grabbed me as I fully realised that there was really something out of our control, the phenomena of death. "Now it's up to his luck", the surgeon said.

**In that moment I saw that the karmic deeds of one's existence are the only force we can rely on at death... and in life.**

Better think about it sooner rather than later. — Mrs Susan M. Griffith-Jones, 37, Author



**M**y best friend died recently. He had a brain aneurysm that burst and was in a coma for a couple of days. At first, I was fairly stunned and shocked. Bill was in good shape and didn't smoke or drink. I'm glad that he didn't suffer, that his death was quick and relatively painless. My heart aches for his wife and family. I cried the first couple of days and since then it's been getting better day by day.

I have known Bill for nearly forty years. We became good friends in the 80s, and when I was arrested in 1990, he was one of the very few people who didn't abandon me. His friendship was truly rare and special and I will miss him for the rest of my life.

But in the days after he died, while I was deep in reflection and remembrance, I was able to see through the loss and grief. He wouldn't want people crying over his death, so I put that behind me.

The thing that stands out clearly to me is that death is simply a part of life. When the time comes and someone you love dies, it is just the natural progression of life.

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**Instead of being all bummed-out about him being gone, I have found solace in the fact that this good and decent human being was an important part of my life for many years. Instead of being upset that he's gone, I'm very thankful that I had the opportunity to know him.**

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Friends like him are so few and far between. Chances are I will never know another man of his ilk and that's okay.



BY I. B.F.

## *Facing Death*

I knew him, and he died knowing that I loved him and valued his friendship, because I used to tell him and his wife how much they meant to me. That was a lesson I learned after my dad died. I have never told my dad how much I loved him, and I didn't have the chance to when he died. That messed me up for a long time. So now I tell the people I love and who are important to me what I feel for them. There is no ambiguity. I like it that way. And since I've come to prison I'm better at disclosing my feelings to the people important to me. ♡

*Editor: B.F. is in his thirteenth year of a twenty-year prison sentence.*



## the lovesick king

ADAPTED BY | Esther Thien

Once upon a time, there lived a king who loved his queen very dearly. Queen Ubbari was charming, graceful, and as beautiful as a fresh rosebud. When the queen died, the king was plunged into deep grief. He had the body laid in a coffin, embalmed with oil and ointment, and kept beneath their marital bed. And on this bed he lay, going without food, weeping and wailing.

His parents, relatives, friends, royal subjects and priests came to comfort him, telling him not to grieve since it is the natural law that all things pass away. But, still in sorrow, he lay until seven days had passed.

Now at that time, there was an ascetic with supernatural powers who lived at the foot of the Himalayas. With his supernatural vision, he scanned around India and saw the king mourning. Straightaway, he thought of helping him. By his miraculous power, he flew in the air until he came to the king's park. He descended from the sky and sat down on the ceremonial stone, like a golden image.

A young priest entered the park, greeted the ascetic and sat down. The ascetic then struck a conversation with the young priest. "Is the king a just ruler?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir, the king is just," replied the young priest. "But his queen had just passed away, and he is in deep misery. It has been seven days since he's grief-stricken. Can you free the king from his great sorrow?"

"If the king comes to me and asks me, I can show him where his queen has been reborn, and let her talk to him," answered the holy man.

"Oh, holy one, please stay here and I will take the king to see you." The young priest hastened his steps until he was in the king's presence and he quickly recounted the incident and urged the king to visit the ascetic.

The king was overjoyed at the thought of seeing his beloved queen once more. Riding in his chariot, he came to the park, greeted the holy man and sat down before asking, "Is it true, holy one, that you know where my queen has been reborn?"

"Yes, I do, my lord king. So enamoured was she of her own beauty that she failed to live a virtuous and wholesome life. She is now a little dung worm in this very park," replied the ascetic.

"I don't believe you!" exclaimed the king in disbelief.

“Then I will show her to you, and make her speak.”

With his powers, the ascetic made two dung worms appear. Pointing at one of the two, the holy man said, “This is your queen Ubbari, O king! She is following her husband, the other dung worm.”

As the king was still incredulous, the ascetic by his power gave that dung worm speech.

“What was your name in your former life?” asked the ascetic.

“My name was Ubbari,” answered the dung worm in a human voice. “I was the queen of King Assaka.”

“Who do you love best now – King Assaka or this present dung worm of a husband?” asked the ascetic again.


“Oh holy one, that was my former life. What is the king to me now? I would even sacrifice King

Assaka’s life in honour of my present husband, the dung worm.”

In a poetic verse, the dung worm continued, “Once with the great king Assaka, who was my husband dear, loving and beloved, I walked about this garden here.”

“But now new sorrows and new joys have made old ones flee, and far dearer than Assaka is this dung worm who is here with me.”

When the king heard this, he was awakened on the spot. At once, he instructed the queen’s body to be removed underneath the bed and washed his hair. After bidding the ascetic farewell, he went back to his palace in the city. He married another queen and ruled his kingdom in righteousness.

The holy man, having freed the king from his sorrow, returned to the Himalayas. 

*Adapted from The Jataka Tales, Story 207*

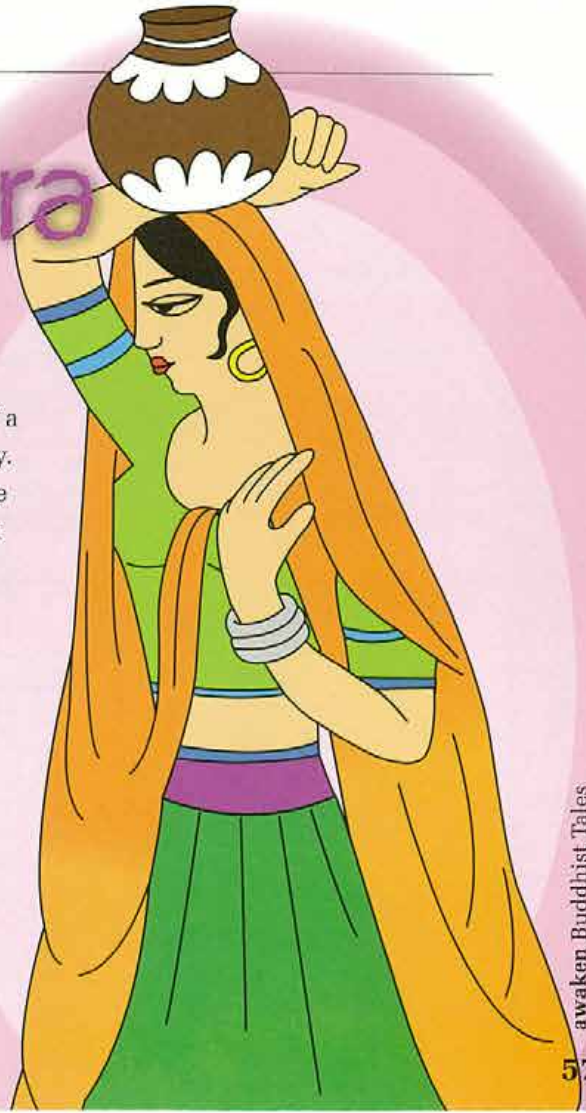
ADAPTED BY | Esther Thien

## the story of patacara

**L**ong ago, there lived a young lady by the name of Patacara. She was the daughter of a very wealthy family at Shravasti in the Kingdom of Kosala. She was such a stunning beauty that, at the age of sixteen, her parents had to confine her to the top floor of a seven-storey tower surrounded by guards to keep her suitors at bay. Despite this, she fell in love with one of the guards, and when she heard that her parents had arranged to marry her off to a young man from the same social class as her, she eloped with her lover.

Now married and living in a village far away, the two soon found life difficult as they had little to live on. Her husband farmed while Patacara did all the menial household chores which formerly had been done by her parents’ servants.

When she became pregnant, Patacara pleaded her husband to accompany her back to her parents’ home to give birth, as was the custom of her time. But her husband was reluctant, for he felt her parents would surely torture or imprison him. Unable to convince him, she set off alone for her parents’ house. When the husband found her gone, fearing for her safety, he joined her.



But before they could reach their destination, the baby was born. And so they turned back and resumed their life in the village.

Sometime later, Patacara became pregnant again. Yearning to return to her parents' home for the birth, she set out on the journey with her son in tow when her husband rejected her request once again. Her husband caught up with her but was unable to persuade her to return to the village.

Suddenly, birth pains set in, just as lightning flashed and thunder crashed. Patacara asked her husband to look for shelter. While searching for shelter, a poisonous snake bit him and he died instantly. As the heavy rainstorm raged on, Patacara gave birth to her second son. The next morning, she found her husband lying dead, his body stiff. Distraught, she blamed herself for his death.

Feeling helpless, she hurried on with her two children towards her parents' home. Too weak to cross a river swollen by the heavy storm with both her children, she left the older child on the shore and carried the newborn infant over first. She hid the baby

under some leaves before wading back into the river to fetch her elder child. While she was in midstream, a hawk swooped down and carried off the baby.


In frantic grief, Patacara screamed and waved her hands wildly. Thinking that Patacara was beckoning him to come, the elder son entered the river and was swept off by the swift current.

Having lost her entire family in the span of just two days, she continued with a heavy heart towards her parents' house, alone, weeping and lamenting. On her way, she encountered a man who informed her, much to her grave dismay, that that her parents and brother had been killed after their house collapsed during the storm.

Agony of the most excruciating kind gnawed at Patacara's heart. Unable to accept the sudden loss of all her loved ones and overcome with grief, she went mad. Patacara ran naked through the streets of Shravasti. At that time the Buddha was staying at the Jetavana, Anathapindika's monastery. Disconsolate, she sought refuge in the monastery. Some tried to prevent her from entering but the Buddha stopped them. Going before the Buddha, she prostrated at his feet.

"Sister, regain your mindfulness," said the Buddha. His compassionate words calmed her and she regained control of her mind. After a kind person in the crowd gave her a shawl to cover her body, she described her family tragedies.

"Patacara, be troubled no more. This is not the first time you have wept over the loss of a husband. This is not the first time you have wept over the loss of parents and of brothers. Just as today, so also through this cycle of birth and death, you have wept over the loss of so many countless husbands, countless sons, countless parents and countless brothers, that the tears you have shed are more abundant than the waters of the four oceans," answered the Buddha gently. As the Buddha spoke these words of wisdom and consolation, Patacara's grief lessened until it eventually vanished. Realising that she had lived countless lives, suffered bereavement countless times, and that death occurs again and again, she understood the nature of impermanence in all compounded phenomena.

By the time the Buddha concluded His discourse, she became a stream-enterer (sotapanna), the first stage of arhatood. When her insight was complete some time later, she became an arhat. 



The Merits of Producing Buddhist Teachings and Buddha Images

1. One's light karmic misgivings will dissolve, while heavy ones lighten.
2. One will be protected by devas, and be unharmed by natural and man-made disasters.
3. One will always be free from the suffering of hatred and vengeance.
4. One will be unharmed by yakshas, evil spirits and wild beasts.
5. One's mind will be at peace, free from harm and nightmares.
6. One's complexion will be radiant.
7. One will be full of auspicious energy.
8. One who practises the Dharma wholeheartedly will have adequate living necessities.
9. One's family will be harmonious and be blessed with fortune and wisdom.
10. One who practises what one preaches will be respected and loved by all.
11. One who is dull-minded will gain wisdom.
12. One who is ill will gain health.
13. One who is poor will gain wealth.
14. One will be free of being reborn in the negative realms.
15. One will be able to help others grow in wisdom and gain great merits in doing so.
16. One will always be able to learn the Dharma, till one's wisdom and spiritual penetrations are fully grown and one becomes a Buddha.

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Issue 18

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1. Once upon a time, a young mother named Kisa Gotami lost her only child. The boy was one when he died.

Overcame with grief, she cradled the dead child and went from house to house seeking a medicine that would restore her child to life. Nobody was able to help her.



3. Kisa Gotami went before the Buddha and told Him her sad tale. He listened with patience and compassion before saying gently,



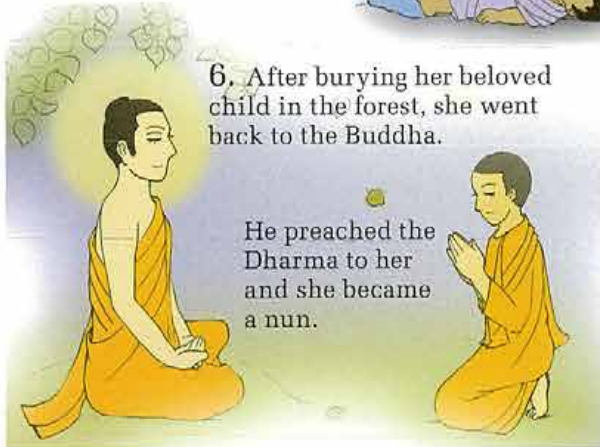
There is only one way to cure your baby. Bring me a handful of mustard seeds from a family which has never lost a child, spouse, parent or relative.

5. As she shared her sorrow with so many others who had also lost a loved one, something struck her. Although she still grieved at the loss of her child, she knew there were many others who had also experienced such a loss and sorrow.

My own sorrow is part of the sorrow of all people. Death of our loved ones is part of the pattern of life for everyone.



6. After burying her beloved child in the forest, she went back to the Buddha.

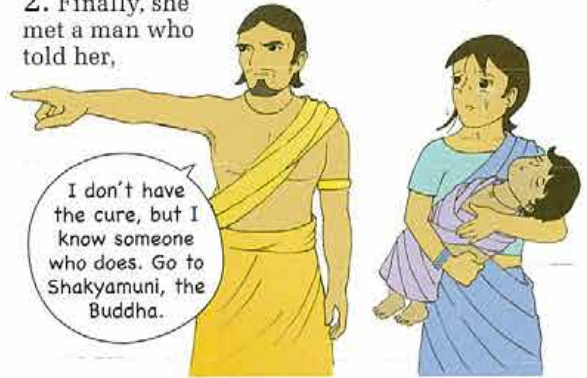


He preached the Dharma to her and she became a nun.

# The Mustard Seed

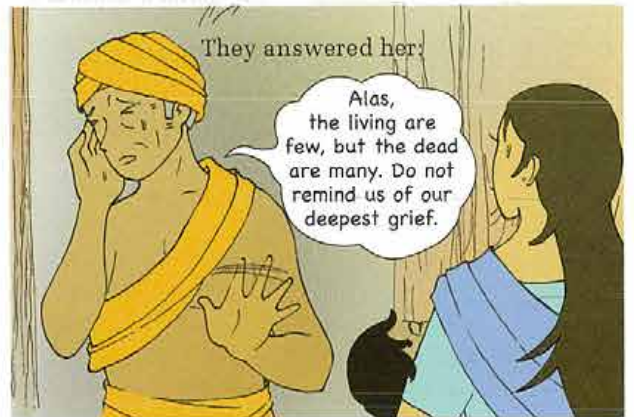
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ILLUSTRATIONS | Bee Li

2. Finally, she met a man who told her,



I don't have the cure, but I know someone who does. Go to Shakyamuni, the Buddha.

4. Going from house to house, she found no household where none had died. Every household had experienced the death of a dearly loved relative – a mother, a father, an uncle, an aunt, a son or a daughter.



They answered her:

Alas, the living are few, but the dead are many. Do not remind us of our deepest grief.

*Life in this world is troubled and brief. There is no means one who is born can avoid dying. After old age, there is death. Such is the nature of living beings. Both the young and old, fools and wise fall into the power of death; all are subjected to death and decay.*

*Nobody can save anyone from death. A father cannot save his son, neither can kinsmen and relatives. Weeping or grieving will not give any person peace of mind. Instead, his pain will be greater. He will make himself sick and pale, yet the dead are not saved by his lamentation. People pass away, and their fate after death will be according to their deeds in life.*

*He who seeks peace should draw out the arrow of lamentation, complaint and grief. Having drawn out the arrow and becoming composed, he will obtain peace of mind. He who has overcome all sorrow will become free from sorrow, and be blessed.*

~ The Buddha

### > Departures

**Directed by:** Yojiro Takita

**Starring:** Masahiro Motoki, Ryoko Hirose

Sometimes funerals are for the living and not so much for the dead. This is one of the simple yet profound observations made by the poetic Japanese movie, *Departures* (2008), winner of 2009's Oscar for best foreign film. Loosely based on Aoki Shinmon's book *Coffinman: The Journal of a Buddhist Mortician*, the film is about a young man Daigo Kobayashi (Masahiro Motoki) who loses his job as a professional cellist and inadvertently takes a job as a coffinman, one who performs the ceremonial dressing, washing, and preparing of corpses in front of mourners.

The salary is high, but Daigo doesn't tell anyone about his job because a job dealing with death is so low caste. On his first assignment, he is beset with nausea at the sight and smell of the collapsed corpse of an old woman. He cleanses himself obsessively in a bathhouse and is overwhelmed by sickness at the sight of chicken meat on his dinner table. Later, Daigo is shunned, first by an old friend, then by his wife, because his job has made him the "defiled" one.

Making this movie, the director was initially worried about the film's reception and did not anticipate commercial success, because death is such a taboo subject. As long as we have blood flowing in our veins and our senses stimulated by the outside world, we are horrified by the idea of a lifeless body. But why is it that we see death with such disgust? Perhaps it is because of our fear of death and our denial of impermanence.

One theme in the movie is about accepting the inevitability of death. As Daigo observes his boss, a quiet old man, performing the job with elegance, tranquility, and great respect for the deceased, he starts to see the dignity in his work. In a scene that takes place in a beautiful greenhouse as snow falls silently outside, the old man lovingly talks about his late wife. "All married couples are separated by death... I dressed her up and sent her away. My very first client." The expression on the old man's face, as he half-closes his eyes to imagine his wife's face, is one of unmistakable joy and sweet melancholy. Daigo is in awe with this unsentimental acceptance of the realities of life and death.

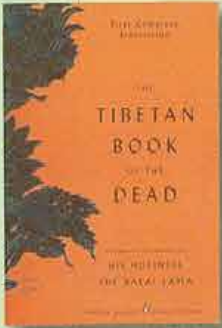
The film also values the lives of animals, but accepts the fact that to live, for some, the lives of animals are consumed. Observe the way sound is enhanced during the scene when the characters are eating chicken wings. We hear the sound of succulent meat tearing and loud slurping. When asked whether or not his meal is tasty, the boss replies: "Sadly so." If we cannot control our own death or the death of others, all we can do is to live each day with gratitude and deep compassion. With the wisdom of understanding cause and effect, and the compassion of not wanting to cause harm to others, we can opt for healthy vegetarian meals to sustain life.

Perhaps then, the most important theme in the movie is the preciousness of life. Faced with the fact of death, trivial issues and unnecessary hatred would pale in comparison and eventually come to an end. Daigo, who has never been able to forgive his father for abandoning him, will finally learn to let go and to embrace his father's love. In this way, death is not the time for excessive pain or unresolved arguments, but rather a time for the contemplation that a beautiful life once existed (Editor: read pg 55), and a time to remind oneself of the beauty of one's own life.



# READ

## Cultivating Compassion and Fearlessness in the Presence of Death



### > **The Tibetan Book of the Dead**

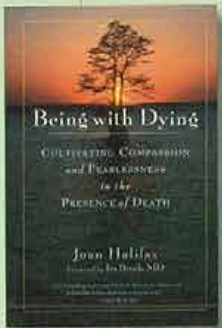
Translated By Gyurme Dorje

Hidden away for many centuries, this ancient treasure text reveals the secrets of enlightened living and life after death. A translation of remarkable clarity and beauty, this book presents fully the insights and intentions of the original work, including detailed and compelling descriptions of the after-death state, practices that can transform our experience of daily life, guidance on helping those who are dying, and an inspirational perspective on coping with bereavement. Priced at S\$35.70 from Awareness Place.

### > **Being with Dying: Cultivating Compassion and Fearlessness in the Presence of Death**

By Joan Halifax

To deny death is to deny life. The sooner we can embrace death and overcome our youthful sense of indestructibility, the more time we have to live completely and fully. This book reflects the 40 years of work Joan Halifax has done helping the dying and their caregivers. Inspired by traditional Buddhist teachings, her work is a source of wisdom for people of all faiths who are charged with a dying person's care or facing their own death. A remarkable gift of practical guidance for living. Get it from Awareness Place for S\$33.95.



# HEARD

## Comforting Music that is Likened to a Warm Summer's Stroll

### > **Time Stands Still**

By Mike Howe

Inspired by the natural beauty of the Welsh national park, this guitar album of 15 original compositions is as warm, comfortable and relaxing as a lazy summer's stroll. Listen for a gentle, unassuming and comforting respite. Buy it from Awareness Place at S\$22.90.



### > **Gentle Spirit**

By Bernward Koch

Another soft and soothing instrumental music album that acts like a salve to the heart. Like a gentle breeze, the 15 tracks in this CD caress and uplift your spirit. Though light, nurturing and gentle, an element of spiritedness can be detected in the music. I especially enjoy track 12. Sip a warm mug of camomile tea as you soak in the relaxing music. Available at Awareness Place for \$22.90.





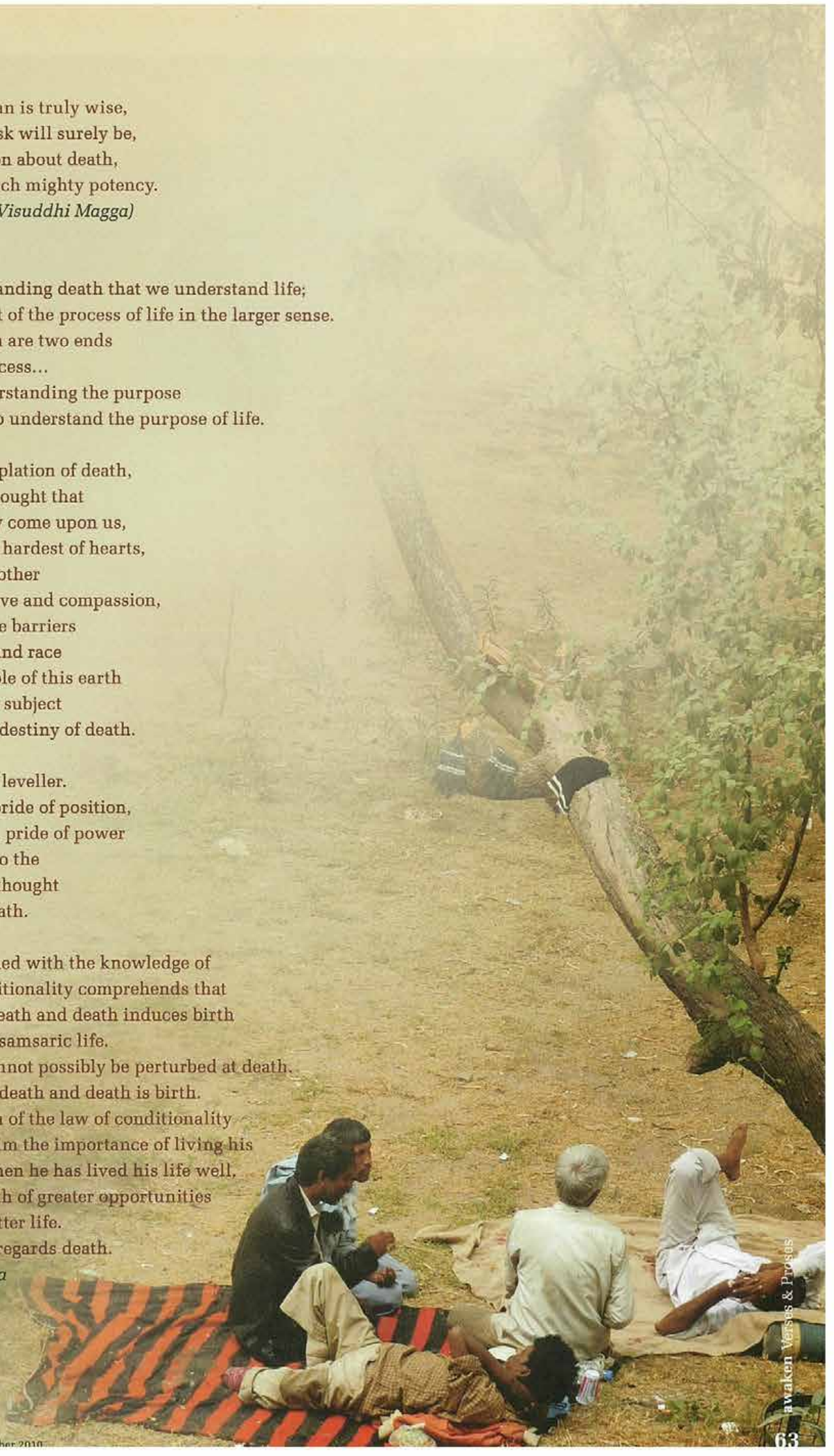
Now when a man is truly wise,  
His constant task will surely be,  
This recollection about death,  
Blessed with such mighty potency.  
– *The Buddha (Visuddhi Magga)*

It is by understanding death that we understand life;  
for death is part of the process of life in the larger sense.  
...life and death are two ends  
of the same process...  
Hence, by understanding the purpose  
of death we also understand the purpose of life.

It is the contemplation of death,  
the intensive thought that  
it will some day come upon us,  
that softens the hardest of hearts,  
binds one to another  
with cords of love and compassion,  
and destroys the barriers  
of caste, creed and race  
among the people of this earth  
all of whom are subject  
to the common destiny of death.

Death is a great leveller.  
Pride of birth, pride of position,  
pride of wealth, pride of power  
must give way to the  
all-consuming thought  
of inevitable death.

The man enriched with the knowledge of  
the law of conditionality comprehends that  
birth induces death and death induces birth  
in the round of samsaric life.  
He therefore cannot possibly be perturbed at death.  
To him birth is death and death is birth.  
An appreciation of the law of conditionality  
will reveal to him the importance of living his  
life well and when he has lived his life well,  
death is the birth of greater opportunities  
to live a still better life.  
That is how he regards death.  
– *V.F. Gunaratna*



**Afflictions:** Another name for negative or disturbing emotions, also known as kleshas. The three main emotional obscurations are passion or attachment; aggression or anger; and ignorance or delusion. The five kleshas are the above three plus pride and envy or jealousy.

**Arhantship:** The stage of having fully eliminated the klesha obscurations. Arhants are accomplished Theravada practitioners who have eliminated the klesha obscurations. One who has destroyed the enemy of dualistic ego-grasping/clinging, and thus accomplished liberation of cyclic existence. They are the fully realised shravakas and pratyekabuddhas.

**Attachment:** Attachments are what keep us turning on the wheel of rebirth. In the Four Noble truths, Buddha Shakyamuni taught that attachment to self is the root cause of suffering; From craving [attachment] springs grief, from craving springs fear; For him who is wholly free from craving, there is no grief, much less fear. (Dhammapada) Becoming enlightened is nothing other than severing all our attachments. What is meant by "attachment"? It is the investing of mental or emotional energy in an "object". We can become attached to people, things, experiential states, and our own thoughts and preconceptions. In Buddhist teachings attachments are usually divided into two general categories: attachments to self and attachments to dharmas. For the seasoned practitioner, even the Dharma must not become an attachment.

**Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva:** Guanyin; the Bodhisattva who personifies the perfect Compassion of all Buddhas, who hears and heeds the cries of the world.

**Bardo:** Refers to the state of existence intermediate between two lives. According to Tibetan tradition, one experiences a variety of phenomena after death and before one's next birth, when one's consciousness is not connected with a physical body. These usually follow a particular sequence of degeneration. For the spiritually advanced, the bardo offers a state of great opportunity for liberation, since transcendental insight may arise with the direct experience of reality, while for others it can become a place of danger as the karmically created hallucinations can impel one into a less than desirable rebirth.

**Bodhicitta:** The aspiration to help all beings attain True Happiness by becoming Buddhas, by being Bodhisattvas.

**Bodhisattva:** One who aspires to save all beings from suffering, while saving oneself.

**Buddha:** An aspect of the Triple Gem - The Awakened or Enlightened One. A Buddha is one who has attained liberation from all suffering, attaining True Happiness, Perfect Wisdom and Perfect Compassion, among all other virtues for the sake of helping all sentient beings. "The Buddha" refers to the historical Shakyamuni or Gautama Buddha, who is the founder of Buddhism in our world.

**Compassion:** The quality that makes us aspire to help others with no selfish intention; the ending of selfishness.

**Dedication of merits:** Sharing one's own merits and virtues with others.

**Dharma:** An aspect of the Triple Gem - the teachings of the Buddha or the general teachings of Buddhism.

**Enlightenment:** The realisation of the reality of all things as they truly are. True Happiness is the result.

**Emptiness:** The truth that all mind and matter are constantly changing, thus being empty of any fixed self.

**Equanimity:** The calm and balanced state of mind of not being affected by attachment or aversion to anything.

**Generosity:** The practice of cultivating unattached and unconditional giving.

**Ignorance:** The quality of lacking Wisdom, not knowing the reality of all things. Same as 'delusion'.

**Impermanence:** All compounded things are constantly changing, as a result or effect of changing causes and conditions. All living and non-living elements are thus subject to decay and renewal.

**Karma:** The moral law of cause and effect which states that what we experience is the result of what we had done, that what we do will result in what we will experience.

**Lama:** Spiritual teacher. An honorary title in Tibetan Buddhism given to one who has completed particular scholastic and yogic training. It is possible to renounce one's monkhood without renouncing one's lama status, for the purposes of marriage.

**Liberation:** State after removing the defilements and karma which cause uncontrolled rebirth in cyclic existence.

**Loving-kindness:** The quality which makes us wish for the happiness and well-being of others. 'Metta' in Pali language.

**Mahayana:** The dominant Buddhist tradition of East Asia that emphasises on the Bodhisattva ideal.

**Mantra:** Prescribed syllables (in Sanskrit) to protect the mind from defilements. They express the essence of specific energies. Recitation of mantras is always done with specific visualisations.

**Meditation:** A practice to habituate ourselves to positive and realistic states of mind.

**Mindfulness:** An aspect of the 'Noble Eightfold Path' - the quality that enables us to remember, and keep our awareness and attention on what is beneficial to one and all in terms of thoughts, speech and actions.

**Merits:** Blessings, positive potential. Imprints on the mindstream of positive actions, leading to future happiness.

**Noble Eightfold Path:** A systematic and complete formula to rid dissatisfaction and attain true happiness and peace by following Perfect Speech, Perfect Action, Perfect Livelihood, Perfect Effort, Perfect Mindfulness, Perfect Meditation, Perfect Understanding, Perfect Thought (pls read Be A Lamp Upon Yourself published by KMSPKS for detailed info).

**Puja:** Ceremony/act of worship, offering.

**Pureland:** A world without defilements created by a Buddha out of Compassion, for sentient beings to seek birth in, to perfect the practice of the Dharma. The best known being Sukhavati Pureland created by Amitabha Buddha.

**Rebirth:** The continual cycle of birth and death.

**Refuge:** In the Buddhist context to take refuge means to accept the Buddha and the Buddhist teachings as the path one wants to take.

**Renunciation:** Determination to be free from all problems and suffering (of cyclic existence), not longer having attachment to the pleasures of cyclic existence which lead to more suffering and defilements. It is inner wisdom.

**Rinpoche:** An honorific used in Tibetan Buddhism to mean "precious one".

**Samsara:** This world of rebirth and suffering. Also known as Saha world

**Sangha:** An aspect of the Triple Gem - the holy community of monks and nuns.

**Sentient Beings:** Living beings with feelings in the six Samsara realms of hells, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, demi-gods and gods.

**Suffering:** The physical and mental feeling of dissatisfaction.

**Sutra (s):** The recorded teachings of the Buddha. Spelt as Sutta in Pali language.

**Threefold Refuge:** Taking refuge in the Triple Gem.

**Triple Gem:** The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

**Venerable:** An honorific addressing of a member of the Sangha.

**Zen:** A school of Buddhism. Also known as Chan.

**Wisdom:** The understanding or discernment based on the direct realisation of the Four Noble Truths, Impermanence, Interdependent Origination, Non-self and Emptiness. The Buddha taught that all things are impermanent, arising and passing away, subject to change, and that knowing this — not in a rational, but empirical manner — is wisdom.