

Meditation on the Inevitability of Death

This is a meditation on the first "root" or main point of the 9-point meditation on death: that death is inevitable and cannot be avoided. The other two root points are: that the time of death is uncertain, and that only spiritual practice helps at the time of death. These two roots are covered in separate meditations.

Preparation

Sit in a comfortable position, with your back straight, and let your body relax. Spend some time letting your mind settle down in the present moment; let go of thoughts of the past or the future. Make the decision to keep your mind focused on the meditation-topic for the duration of the meditation session.

Motivation

When your mind is calm and settled in the present, generate a positive motivation for doing the meditation. For example, you can think: "May this meditation help bring about greater peace and happiness for all beings," or: "May this meditation be a cause for me to become enlightened so that I can help all beings become free of suffering and become enlightened as well."

Body of the meditation

(As you contemplate the following points, bring in your own ideas and experiences, as well as stories you have heard or read, to illustrate each point. Try to get a feeling of each point. If at any time during the meditation you experience a strong, intuitive feeling of the point you are examining, stop thinking and hold the feeling with concentration as long as you can. When it fades or your mind gets distracted, return to the contemplation.)

We plan many activities and projects for the coming days, months and years. Although death is the only event that is *certain* to occur, we don't usually think about it or plan for it. Even if the thought of death does arise in our mind, we usually push it away quickly—we don't want to think about death. But it's important to think about and be prepared for it. Contemplate the following three points to get a sense of how death is definitely going to happen to you.

1. Everyone has to die

To generate an experience of death's inevitability, bring to mind people from the past: famous rulers and writers, musicians, philosophers, saints, scientists, criminals, and ordinary people. These people were once alive—they worked, thought and wrote; they loved and fought, enjoyed life and suffered. And finally they died.

Can you think of an example of someone who was born on this earth but who did not die?... No matter how wise, wealthy, powerful or popular a person may be, his or her life must come to an end. The same is true for all other living

creatures. For all the advances in science and medicine, no one has found a cure for death, and no one ever will.

Now bring to mind people you know who have already died.... And think of the people you know who are still alive. Contemplate that each of these people will one day die. And so will you.

There are several billion people on the planet right now, but one hundred years from now, all of these people—with the exception of a few who are now very young — will be gone. You yourself will be dead. Try to experience this fact with your entire being.

2. Your lifespan is decreasing continuously

Time never stands still—it is continuously passing. Seconds become minutes, minutes become hours, hours become days, days become years, and as time is passing in this way, you are travelling closer and closer towards death. Imagine an hour-glass, with the sand running into the bottom. The time you have to live is like these grains of sand, continuously running out...Hold your awareness for a while on the experience of this uninterrupted flow of time carrying you to the end of your life.

Another way to get a sense of your life moving continuously towards death is to imagine being on a train which is always traveling at a steady speed— it never slows down or stops, and there is no way that you can get off. This train is continuously bringing you closer and closer to its destination: the end of your life. Try to really get a sense of this, and check what thoughts and feelings arise in your mind.

3. The amount of time you have for spiritual practice is very small

Since you are getting closer and closer to death all the time, what are you doing to prepare for it?...The best way to prepare for death is doing spiritual practice. This is because the only thing that continues after death is the mind, and spiritual practice is the only thing that truly benefits the mind, preparing it for death and the journey to the next life. But how much time do you actually devote to spiritual practice-- working on decreasing the negative aspects of the mind (such as anger and attachment) and developing the positive aspects of the mind (such as kindness and wisdom), and behaving in ways that are beneficial to others?

Calculate how you spend your time: In an average day, how many hours do you sleep? How many hours do you work? How many hours do you spend preparing food, eating and socializing? How much time do you spend feeling depressed, frustrated, bored, angry, resentful, jealous, lazy or critical? And how much time

do you spend consciously trying to improve your state of mind, or doing beneficial things such as helping others, or spiritual study or meditation?

Do these calculations honestly. Assess your life in this practical way to see clearly just how much of your time is spent doing things that truly benefit yourself and others, and that will be helpful for your mind at the time of death and in the next life.

By meditating on these three points, you should be able to develop the determination to use your life wisely and mindfully.

Dedication

Conclude the meditation with the optimistic thought that you have every possibility to make your life meaningful, beneficial and positive, and in this way you will be able to die with peace of mind. Remember the motivation you had at the beginning of the meditation and dedicate the merit of doing the meditation to that same purpose—for the benefit of all beings.