

Discovering Buddhism: Death, Dying and Rebirth

Course Objectives/learning outcomes:

1. Learn why awareness of death and impermanence is second most powerful antidote to delusion (wisdom of emptiness is number one).
2. Learn and meditate on the benefits of death awareness.
3. Practice meditations on developing death awareness and the process of dying
4. Use this Discovering Buddhism module to prepare for your own death and learn how to support others through the dying process.
5. Through practicing these methods, experience how death awareness enables you to live more fully and fearlessly in the present moment.
6. Use this class as an incentive to get your affairs (will, living will, healthcare power of attorney, guardianship, etc.) in order.

Course leaders: Don Brown and Lennardo DeLaine

Location, time and dates:

Mondays, 7 PM at dojo

June 18 - Don Brown

June 25 - Lennardo DeLaine

July 2 - Don Brown

July 9 - Review & Quiz

July 14 (Saturday) - Practice Day 9-12 noon

Shakyamuni Buddha taught many times the importance of meditating on impermanence and mortality. He mentioned it in the first sermon at Sarnath, and amongst his last words as he was dying.

"Everything, whether stationary or movable, is bound to perish in the end."

Other quotes attributable to the Buddha:

"Of all plowings of a field, the autumn one is the best. Of all footprints, the elephant's footprint is the best. And of all recognitions, the recognitions of impermanence and mortality are the best. They eliminate all attachments of the three realms, ignorance and pride."

"It is also praised as being the hammer that destroys all defilements and misconduct at once, and the great gateway leading to the accomplishment of all virtues at once."

Death, Dying and Impermanence - Homework for Class One

1. Meditate every day during this course if feasible
2. Daily review the disadvantages of not and benefits of remembering death and impermanence. Do analytical meditation of these points.
3. Meditation on subtle impermanence: Do daily meditation on the continuity of consciousness, paying particular attention to moment-to-moment changes in your mind. You may use the noting technique by mentally noting whatever experience (thought, feeling, emotion, etc.) dominates your consciousness at the moment. For example you may have experiences of aversion/anger, boredom, excitement, etc. and you would just note the evolution of that mental state - experiencing its arising, persistence and dissolution.
Conclusion: Our experience/mind is in a constant state of flux - ever changing. There is no point in clinging to anything because nothing lasts.
4. Reading: *Mind of Clear Light - Advice on Living Well and Dying Consciously* by His Holiness the Dalai Lama (also this same book was released earlier as *Advice on Dying*, read pages 39-78.

Disadvantages of Not Remembering Death at All Times

1. You will not remember the Dharma.
2. Even though you remember it you will postpone the practice.
3. You may try to practice but your Dharma practice will not be pure.
4. You will lose your determination to practice Dharma and will eventually drop it altogether.
5. You will continue creating negative actions and become unsuitable for liberation.
6. At the time of death you will feel intense regret at having wasted your precious opportunity.

Advantages of Remembering Death at All Times

1. Your Dharma practice becomes very pure.
2. Your Dharma actions become powerful and effective.
3. Beneficial in the beginning of one's Dharma practice.
4. Beneficial in the middle of one's Dharma practice.
5. Beneficial at the end of one's Dharma practice (no. 3-5, in order to avoid the thought of the eight worldly concerns).
6. In the hour of death you will go with satisfaction, for you know you have spent your life meaningfully.

Meditate like this: Read the points of the disadvantages then contemplate why and how. Do the same with the advantages. Then make a conclusion remembering Milarepa's words: "In horror of death I took to the mountains - again and again I meditated on the uncertainty of the hour of death. Capturing the fortress of the deathless, unending nature of mind, now all fear of death is over and done."