

BASED ON THE TALK

Recollection of Death

Edited by

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“Heedfulness is the way to Deathless.

Heedlessness is the way to death.

The Heedful die not.

The Heedless are as if dead already.”

These are the words of the Buddha from the *Dhammapada*. Those who are heedful die not. Why? The heedful do meritorious deeds. They give and are charitable and they keep the moral precepts. They practice the training of morality (*Sīla*), the training of concentration (*Samādhi*) and the training of insight (*Paññā*). Once meditators successfully develop concentration, they proceed to the practice of insight meditation (*Vipassanā*), to see things as they really are. When their insight-knowledge matures, the supramundane Path and Fruition Knowledge arises. The Path Knowledge eradicates defilements step-by-step without remainder. They see Nibbāna, the Deathless. So the Buddha said, ‘Heedfulness is the way to Deathless.’ It is also said, ‘The heedful die not.’ This does not mean that

they will not grow old or die. It means that because of the fourth Path (*Arahant Path*) and Fruition Knowledge they are no longer subject to rebirth. Therefore whether they are physically alive or dead, because they are no longer subject to birth and death, they are considered not to die.

On the contrary, those who are heedless are as if dead already. Why? They do not think about giving, nor do they think about keeping the moral precepts or practicing the three trainings: the training of morality (*Sīla*), the training of concentration (*Samādhi*) and the training of insight (*Paññā*). The purpose of practicing these trainings is to know and see the Four Noble Truths — the Noble Truth of Suffering, the Noble Truth of Origin of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering and the Noble Truth of the Way leading to the Cessation of Suffering, and to abandon attachment to sensuality, becoming, wrong view and ignorance. Because they do not practice these three trainings they do not see things as they really are. Without seeing things as they really are, attachment to sensuality, becoming, wrong view and ignorance arises and with it rebirth – again and again. That’s why the Buddha said, ‘heedlessness is the way to death’ and ‘the heedless are as if dead already.’ According to the commentary, one who is heedless cannot be liberated from rebirth. When he is reborn, he must grow old and die. So, if we don’t want to die again and again, be heedful.

Tonight I will talk about the subject of death. Whenever we talk about death, we have to talk about birth too. But before I begin to talk about meditation on death, I want to point out that human behavior in the face of birth and death is, indeed, very strange. Why? At birth, when a child is born crying, people smile. Their faces shine with

happy delighted expressions. But at death, when someone's last hour arrives, people cry. Their facial expressions convey sorrow and grief. These two behaviors strike me as very odd. When someone is born crying, people smile, but when someone is awaiting his last hour, people cry.

Actually, instead of only being happy and smiling at the birth of a new infant, we ought to also give careful consideration to what awaits that child. Why? Because he comes into a world that is a mass of suffering, he, too, will suffer. Like all humans beings, that newborn baby is bound for dukkha, not for sukha. Like them he, too, will also be the cause of much dukkha for both himself and others.

That small baby will also experience the many different types of suffering that we ourselves have experienced in this life. He was born and is, therefore, subject to sickness. Because he was born he is subject to aging. Because he was born he is subject to worry. Because he was born he is subject to sorrow. Because he was born he is subject to grief. Because he was born he is subject to fear. Because he was born he cannot escape death. These are lamentable conditions. Furthermore, because of ignorance, he may continue to accumulate more and more unwholesome deeds throughout the duration of his life. Most people amass a stockpile of unwholesome deeds over the course of a lifetime. If he does, he may fall into one of the four woeful states upon dying. So, a compelling case can be made for saying that 'birth keeps one in bondage.'

Upon reflection we see that birth brings along with it much suffering and pain. But people don't like to admit this. Parents spend their lives trying to provide for their

children's welfare. They wear themselves out for their children. Day-by-day their bodies become older and older, weaker and weaker. Finally, one day they die. Birth leads to death. It is inescapable. Our ending is guaranteed by our beginning. No one can avoid death.

This is the *Dukkha* that follows birth. This is the *Dukkha* born of birth. It is natural for people to be pleased by the arrival of a baby. Nevertheless, birth is pleasing, in large part, only because people don't see or acknowledge the inherent *Dukkha* that exists in it.

Even though people know that humans are mortal, they do not want to experience their own mortality. Some people even think just to see a dead-body is inauspicious, so they try to avoid all such occasions. I have students who have actually never seen a dead body, at any time in their lives. When I teach them the meditation practice that is a recollection of death, I encounter difficulty. Why? Because, in order to practice recollection of death, they need to take a dead body as their meditation object. When I give them the instruction, what do they say? "I never saw a dead body in my life." Some say, "In my country seeing a dead body is considered inauspicious." So, even though death is as much a part of life as birth, they have no direct experience with ever having seen a dead body. So, when I teach them the 'Recollection of Death meditation', I have to search for photos of corpses to show them. Only then are they able to take a dead body as their meditation object.

In contrast, whenever I see a corpse I consider it an auspicious occasion. Why? It gives me the motivation to reflect on my own death. When I look at a dead body I

feel that I'm seeing something undeniably real. It gives me an opportunity to think about the true nature of the body. This has been my experience ever since I was a young boy. Whenever I saw a dead body it made me think! Whenever I set eyes on the ugly repulsive complexion of a dead body, I also looked at my own complexion and felt as if it changed. I knew my life would end; that I, too, would die. Even then, at that young age, I felt that life was futile. A compelling sense of urgency arose in me. But because I was still very young, I didn't know what to do about the contradictory feelings of futility and urgency. As I grew older, they became an important part of my practice.

So, we can say that seeing a dead body is really an auspicious occasion. It is, in fact, an opportunity to reflect deeply for those who have wise attention, but is lost on those who don't have wise attention. Seeing a dead body is an opportunity for liberation. In the Buddha's time he had many disciples who, because of seeing a dead body and meditating on death, were able to make an end of suffering.

So, seeing a dead body is truly an opportunity for our liberation.

I want to share my experience with all of you. One of the main causes leading to my ordination was seeing a dead body. The mother of one of my students had been ill for a long time. I was one of her care-givers. While she seemed to improve from day-to-day and it appeared as though she would recover, after some time her condition declined and in the end she died. At that time, I wasn't thinking about my own death. I was totally focused on trying to build up my life. I was working to earn money. I

was working to amass wealth. It was easy not to think about my death when I was so hard at work collecting 'things' to inflate and improve my life. But when she died it was a wake-up call. A sense of urgency arose in me.

We had taken very good care of her, providing her with the most excellent medicines, good food and good accommodation. But nothing could save her. When her time ripened, she died. Even though we gave her the best and most expensive medicine and she appeared to be getting better, in the end her condition unexpectedly changed and she died. She was still young. Her death took me by surprise and gave rise to a feeling of urgency in me.

I understood then that one day my life would also end. I, too, would die. But, of course, I didn't know when I would die, where I would die and how I would die. I wondered: 'How long will I live?' I didn't know. I reflected: "Death is certain. Life is uncertain. I will surely die. My life will end in death. But I don't know when and where I will die." I considered the possibility that I could fall into one of the four woeful realms. Just the thought frightened me. I certainly knew that I wanted to be free from suffering in the four woeful realms. The question of 'how' then filled my mind. I realized that I needed to change my way of living while I still had the time and opportunity to do what I needed to do. I realized that changes were needed *now*, before I die." At that time, the sense of urgency that filled me was overwhelming. It was so strong; I didn't want to do anything but practice meditation. Not long afterwards, I found myself in robes.

This personal story illustrates why seeing a dead body is really an auspicious occasion. It is a wake-up call, a teach-

ing that points to liberation, to freedom from suffering. If we see with wise attention, we will be inspired to do good things and to practice with determination and diligence.

Whenever we see a newborn baby we know that between his or her birth and death that human being will come into contact with a lot of expected and unexpected, desirable and undesirable things. Although we are happy to see birth, most of us do not want to think about meeting death. But, if the truth be told, seeing a dead body is an advantage to someone who reflects well on it. If we talk about death, we must talk about causes of death, as well. Some die when they are young. Some die when they are old. Why? The Buddha explains why in the *Abhidhammā*. There are four causes:

1. Some die due to the expiration of their life span (*Āyukkhaya-marana*).
2. Some die due to the expiration of their reproductive Kammic force (*Kammakkhaya-marana*).
3. Some die due to the expiration of both reproductive Kammic force and life-span (*Ubhayakkhaya-marana*).
4. Some die due to destructive-Kamma (*Upacchedaka-marana*). They may die in an accident. Their life-span still remains and their Kammic force still remains, but because of destructive Kamma they are destroyed and they die.

We all remember how shocked and frightened people were because of the giant **tsunami** that not long ago killed so many people. Thousands upon thousands were either injured or swept away in that natural disaster. Even today we don't really know how many people were affected

by the destructive force of that 'killer wave,' – young and old alike, rich and poor. It was a colossal tragedy, the result of destructive Kamma, in Pāḷi, *Upacchedaka-marana*, the fourth cause of Death.

Everyone dies because of one of these four causes. Some die because of expiration of their life-span, some die of expiration of reproductive kammic force, some die of the expiration of both, and some die of destructive Kamma.

I want to tell you a story. This story is from the *Sāyutta Nikāya*. In the Buddha's time there was a Deva, Subrahmā, who was happily abiding in the Deva world with a retinue of one thousand female devas. In this story, Subrahmā was sitting under a tree, in the Nandana Grove, among five hundred female devas. The other five hundred had climbed up the tree. They were singing and throwing flowers down from the tree. Those female devas who remained under the tree with Subrahmā gathered up the flowers and made wreaths of them for him. His companions were all happily singing and dancing. But suddenly, the devas up in the tree stopped singing. There was silence. Subrahmā wondered what happened. He looked up and saw that the tree was empty.

Five hundred of Subrahmā's female companions had simply vanished.

The desire to know where they went arose in his mind. When he looked for them with his divine eye, he discovered that they had suddenly died but were immediately reborn in the *Avīci* hell. It is a very terrible hell. Five hundred female Devas from his retinue who were happily singing and throwing flowers down from the tree suddenly

died and fell into that terrible hell.

As you know separation from those whom we love is suffering. No less so for Devas; Subrahmā felt very, very sad. He suffered very much. He felt intense grief. At the same time, heedful attention arose in him. He examined his own life-span and saw that he himself, along with the remaining five hundred female Devas were due to die in seven days and that they also would take rebirth in the same hell.

Let me ask you a question. What do you think? Which grief would be greater, the grief that arose in the young Deva's mind when he was separated from those original five hundred devas whom he loved, or the grief that arose in him when he saw that he and his remaining retinue were going to suffer in the same hell soon?

For sure, the stronger grief would be that which arose in him for himself and his remaining retinue when he saw the coming terrible suffering that they all were also headed towards. Before, he suffered for those whom he loved and lost. Now, he suffered for himself. Intense grief arose in his mind. The fear of suffering in hell is so deep-seated and terrifying that a sense of urgency immediately arose in him.

Driven by this sense of urgency and in absolute fear, Subrahmā went to see the Buddha and asked for comfort and help. In the presence of the Buddha, he recited this verse:

“Always frightened is this mind,
The mind is always agitated
About unarisen problems

And about arisen ones.

If there exists release from fear,

Being asked, pleased declare it to me.”

Even though devas are normally very happy, Subrahmā was now anxious and terrified. His fear was so dreadful and continuous that he uttered the words ‘*always frightened is this mind, the mind is always agitated.*’ He was concerned about both arisen problems and unarisen ones. In this case, the arisen problem was the sudden death and shocking destination of the five hundred female devas from his retinue. The unarisen one was even more problematic – his own imminent death and descent into hell along with the rest of his remaining retinue. Motivated by a sense of urgency, he asked the Buddha to make known the way to release.

The Buddha answered as follows:

“Not apart from enlightenment and austerity

(*i.e.*, duthaṅga¹ practices),

Not apart from restraint of the sense faculties,

Not apart from relinquishing all,

Do I see any safety for living beings?”

The Buddha instructed Subrahmā that meditation practice is a source of comfort. So strong was the deva's sense of urgency that, having heard it, he and his retinue penetrated the Buddha's meaning and at that moment they attained stream-entry; they became Sotāpannas. They were all completely freed from suffering in the four woe-

¹ - It is an ascetic practice undertaken in order to perfect those special qualities of fewness of wishes, contentment, etc., by which virtue is cleansed.

ful states. Path Knowledge removed the defilements that would subject them to suffering in any one of those states. How wonderful it is!

Here we all need to think about the chances of being reborn in one of the four woeful realms compared to being reborn in one of the happy realms. You may remember, in an earlier talk I quoted from a Sutta wherein the Buddha asked a group of his monks which is greater, the little bit of soil on the tip of his fingernail or the soil of the great earth. Their answer, of course, was the soil of the great earth. According to the Buddha, just as the soil of the great earth is more than the soil on the tip of his fingernail, many more people are likely to fall into one of the four woeful realms when they die rather than being reborn in one of the happy realms.

Saü sāra is without a discoverable beginning. For uncountable lifetimes we have all been amassing both unwholesome deeds and wholesome deeds. Unfortunately, most of us accumulate more unwholesome deeds during our lifetimes than wholesome ones. If we don't practice meditation before we pass away, if we don't prepare for death while there is still time to do so, we can't penetrate the Dhamma as it really is and, therefore, we too, just like those five hundred female Devas, may fall into one of the four woeful states upon our deaths. .

Subrahmā and his remaining retinue of Devas foresaw that they would suffer in the hell unless they changed their way of living. Urgency arose in them. In the same way if we knew that we would die in seven days and suffer in hell, would we change our way of living, would we focus on meditation practice in order to be free from such

a destiny?

The Buddha pointed out to his monks that the way to deathless is brought forth through mindfulness on death. He said:

“Monks, Mindfulness of death, if developed and cultivated, brings great fruit and benefit: it merges in the Deathless, ends in Deathless. Therefore, monks, you should develop mindfulness of death.”

If we reflect on death every day, every morning, every evening, and every night; heedfulness will arise and right attitude will follow.

Without mindfulness of one's own certain death, people become heedless. If people really accepted that they too would sooner or later depart this life, they would be more heedful and not be so proud and full of self-importance. It's more likely that they would be humble; that they would live humbly.

If they reflected on their death everyday they would be gentle. Their minds would incline towards wholesome actions rather than unwholesome actions. They would mostly choose to do wholesome actions. So we see that suffering from greed, hatred, jealousy and stinginess can be solved by reflecting on death, particularly one's own death.

There is another story from the *Dhammapada* in which the Buddha talked about a young woman, a certain weaver's daughter, who developed mindfulness on death. This practice brought her great fruit and benefit.

One day, when the Blessed One came to Ālavī, the people of Ālavī invited the Buddha to a meal and offered him alms. At the end of the meal the Buddha gave a talk

saying, “Practice meditation on death, saying to yourselves, ‘Uncertain is my life. Certain is my death. I shall surely die. My life will end in death. Life is unstable. Death is sure. Death! Death ! And Death.’”

According to the Buddha, those who have not practiced meditation on death tremble and fear when their last hour comes. They die confused, often screaming in terror, much like a man without a stick is stricken with fear when he unexpectedly stumbles upon a snake on his path. Those who practice meditation on death have no cause to fear when their last hour arrives. They are like a steadfast man who seeing a snake, even at a distance, takes it up with his stick and throws it away. If we reflect on death while there is still time to do so – each day, every morning and every evening, we will gain great benefit which we will be glad about later. Therefore practice meditation on death.

Meditation on death can be developed by bringing to mind a corpse that we have seen. Here at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery we teach Mindfulness of Breathing to develop absorption concentration up to fourth jhāna. This is taught as a lead up to the practice of repulsiveness meditation. When the light produced by absorption concentration is bright and clear, we instruct meditators to take, as their meditation object, the most repulsive corpse of the same sex that they can ever remember seeing. Then, with the assistance of the light of concentration, they are instructed to visualize that corpse so that it is exactly as they saw it previously. Calmly concentrating their mind on it, they are to note it as, ‘repulsive, repulsive’ (*Patikkūla, Patikkūla*).

When the mind stays constantly on that object for one

or two hours, the first jhāna can be attained.

According to the *Mahasatipatthāna Sutta* and the *Visuddhimagga* Commentary, to practice meditation on death we must re-establish the first jhāna with the repulsiveness of a corpse, and with that external corpse as the object of meditation, we should then reflect: ‘This body of mine is also of a nature to die. Indeed, it will die just like this one. It cannot avoid becoming like this.’ By keeping the mind concentrated and mindful on our own mortality, we also find that the sense of urgency (*Saṃvega*) develops. When that urgency is present, it is possible to see one’s own body in the place of that repulsive corpse. Then perceiving that the life-faculty has been cut off in that image of their own body, meditators should concentrate on the absence of the life-faculty with one of the following thoughts:

1. My death is certain; my life is uncertain.

(*maranāṃ me dhuvaṃ, jīvitaṃ me adhuvaṃ*),

2. I shall certainly die (*maranāṃ me bhavissati*),

3. My life will end in death (*maranapariyosanaṃ me jīvitaṃ*),

4. Death, death (*maranāṃ, maranāṃ*).

We should choose one and note it in any language. Simply continue to concentrate on the image of the absence of the life-faculty in the image of our own corpse until the jhāna factors arise. It should be noted, however, that with this meditation subject we can only attain access concentration.

Back to the story: With the exception of one young woman, all those who heard the Buddha’s talk remained as wrapped up in their worldly duties as before. Only the

weaver's daughter, a mere sixteen years of age, said to herself, "Marvelous indeed is the speech of the Buddha; it behooves me to practice meditation on death. It tells me that I ought to practice...." And, she did nothing else but practice meditation on death, day and night, for the next three years.

One day, as the Buddha surveyed the world at early dawn, he perceived the young weaver's daughter had entered the Net of his Knowledge. When he saw her, he pondered within himself, "What will happen?" He became aware of the following: "From the day when this young woman heard my discourse on the Law, she has practiced meditation on death for three years. I will now go to and ask this young woman four questions. On each of the four points, she will answer me correctly and I will congratulate her. I will then recite the stanza, '*Blind is this world.*' At the end of the recitation, she will become a stream-enterer. Because of her, my discourse will be profitable to the many as well." So the Blessed One, with his retinue of five hundred monks, departed from Jetavana, and in due course arrived at Aggālava monastery.

When the people of Ālavī heard that the Buddha had come, they went to the monastery and invited him to be their guest. The young weaver's daughter also heard that he had come, and her heart was filled with joy at the thought, "Our father, our master, our teacher, one whose face is like the full moon, the mighty Gotama Buddha has come." And she reflected, "Now, for the first time in three years, I can go to see the Buddha. The hue and color of his body is as the hue and color of gold. Now I can go to hear him teach the Dhamma, containing within it all sweetness."

As she was thinking about this, her father was leaving for his workshop and said to her, "Daughter, a garment for a customer is on the loom, and a span of it is yet incomplete. I must finish it today. Quickly refill the shuttle and bring it to me." The young woman thought, "I wish to hear the Buddha teach the Dhamma, but my father has given me a job to do. Shall I go to hear the Buddha teach the Dhamma or shall I refill the shuttle and carry it to my father first?" This thought then occurred to her, "If I fail to bring my father the shuttle, he will strike me and beat me. Therefore, I will refill the shuttle first and give it to him, then I will go to hear the Buddha teach the Dhamma." So she sat down on a stool and refilled the shuttle.

The people of Ālavī waited upon the Buddha and offered him food. When the meal was over they took his bowl and stood waiting to hear him speak. But the Buddha only said, "I made this journey of thirty miles for the sake of a certain young woman, but she has not yet had the opportunity to be present. When she finds the opportunity to be present, I will give the talk." Having said this, the Buddha remained silent. So did those who came to hear him remain silent. (When the Buddha is silent, neither men nor gods dare utter a sound.)

After the weaver's daughter had refilled the shuttle, she put it in her shuttle-basket and set out in the direction of her father's workshop. On her way there she stopped in the outer circle of the worshippers gathered around the Blessed One and stood gazing at the Buddha. The Buddha lifted up his head and gazed at her. By gazing at her she knew, "The Buddha, sitting in this group of people, signifies by gazing at me that he wants me to come for-

ward. His sole desire is I come into his very presence.” So she set her shuttle-basket on the ground and stepped into the presence of the Buddha.

(Why did the Buddha gaze at her? The following thought arose in him, “If this young lady goes hence, she will die as an ordinary one, and uncertain will be her future state. But if she comes to me, she will establish the first Path and Fruition, and her future state will be certain, for she will be born in the World of the Tusita gods.”)

Having approached the Buddha and paid him respect, the young woman sat in silence in the middle of the worshipers gathered around the Blessed One. The Buddha then asked her four questions.

1. “Young lady, where did you come from?” “I know not, Venerable Sir.”
2. “Where will you go?” “I know not, Venerable Sir.”
3. “Don’t you know?” “I know, Venerable Sir.”
4. “Do you really know?” “I know not, Venerable Sir.”

Many people were offended and said, “Look at her, this daughter of a weaver talks as she pleases with the Supreme Enlightened One.

When he asked her, ‘Where did you come from?’ she should have answered, ‘From the weaver’s house.’

And when he asked her, ‘Where will you go?’ she should have answered, ‘To the weaver’s workshop.’”

But, the Buddha put the multitude into silence. He continued questioning her, as follows: “Young lady when

I asked you, “Where did you come from?” Why did you say, “I know not.” She answered, “Venerable Sir, you yourself knew that I had come from the house of my father, the weaver. So when you asked me, ‘Where did you come from?’ I knew very well that the meaning was, ‘From what past existence did I come here? It was because of this that I answered I know not.’ Then the Buddha said to her, “Well said, well said, young lady! You have correctly answered the question I asked you.”

The Buddha congratulated her, and asked her yet another question, “When I asked you, “Where will you go?” Why did you say, “I know not.” She answered, “Venerable Sir, you yourself knew that I was on my way to my father’s workshop with my shuttle-basket in hand. So when you asked me, ‘Where will you go?’ I understood it to mean, where I will be reborn. But I don’t know where I shall be reborn when I pass away from this present existence so I answered that I know not.” Again the Buddha said to her, “Well said, well said, young lady! You have correctly answered the question I asked you.”

The Buddha congratulated her a second time and asked her yet another question, “When I asked you, ‘Don’t you know?’ why did you say, ‘I know?’” “Venerable Sir, I do know that one day I shall surely die and, therefore, I could respond that ‘I know.’” The Buddha once again said to her, “Well said, well said, young lady! You have correctly answered the question I asked you.”

The Buddha congratulated her a third time, and asked her one final question, “When I asked you, ‘Do you really know?’ why did you say to me, ‘I know not?’” “Venerable Sir, I only know that I shall surely die. I do not know at

what time I shall die, whether in the night or during the day or early in the morning. Therefore, I said ‘I know not’.” The Buddha said to her again, “Well said, well said, young lady! You have correctly answered the question I asked you.”

The Buddha congratulated her a fourth time, and having done so, addressed the group of people assembled as follows” “So many of you have failed to understand the words she spoke. You were offended. Those who do not possess the Eye of Understanding, they are blind. But those who possess the Eye of Understanding, they see.” Having stated this, he recited the following Stanza:

“Blind is this world; few are there here that see;

As few go to heaven as birds escape from a net.”

At the end of the talk the young weaver’s daughter attained the first Path and Fruition Knowledge. She became a Sotāpanna because she had practiced meditation on death for 3 years. As you all heard, even though there were a lot of people who listened to the Buddha’s original talk, they all – with the exception of the young weaver’s daughter – remained wrapped-up in their worldly duties, attending to business as usual.

When the Buddha came back to the Ālavī and asked his four questions, the only one who understood was that young woman. What should we think? We should think about perfections. The weaver’s daughter was someone who had already practiced meditation in her past life. Because of this when the Buddha surveyed the world at early dawn, she appeared in the eye of the Buddha.

It was for her sake that the Buddha went to Ālavī. It

was for her sake, that he taught the practice of ‘meditation on death.’ The young weaver’s daughter appreciated this teaching very much. She liked it very much. Among the devotees, she alone took the teaching and put it into practice. After hearing the Buddha’s teaching, she practiced ‘meditation on death’ day and night for 3 years.

Today some of my students in this very monastery are inclined to practice recollection on death. If they really emphasize this meditation practice, a sense of urgency arises in their mind. They know that one day, sooner or later, they too will die. This understanding gives rise to a sense of urgency and they become heedful, always trying to be mindful of their meditation object.

Even if you cannot practice recollection of death systematically by entering into jhāna concentration, you all can reflect on death like this: ‘This morning I may die. Today I may die. Tonight I may die.’ If you reflect like this again and again every day, you will become heedful. You will become established in goodness. You will not waste your time. You will always pay attention to your meditation object, if you simply remember to reflect on death. When you give emphasis to this meditation practice, a sense of urgency will arise in your mind. Then, when you are instructed to practice serenity and insight meditation step-by-step systematically by the teacher, and, if your past perfections and present effort are strong enough, then when your insight matures, at that time Path and Fruition Knowledge will arise.

Nowadays people have not cultivated their perfections to the same high level as the people who were alive in the Buddha’s time. At that time, there were many who attained

the supreme states of *Sotāpanna*, *Sakadāgami*, *Anāgāmi* and *Arahant* after merely listening to the Buddha speak. Nowadays though, such people would indeed be hard to find. Practically speaking, this means that today laypeople and monastics alike cannot attain Path and Fruition Knowledge after merely listening to a Dhamma talk. Today, people need to practice systematically, step-by-step.

When I was in Singapore one layman asked me this question: ‘Is it necessary to practice in such a systematic way?’ He said to me, “In the Buddha’s time many people attained noblehood after merely listening to a very short Dhamma talk. Did they practice in such a systematic, step-by-step way? Is it necessary to practice *Sīla* (the training of morality), *Samādhi* (the training of concentration) and *Paññā* (the training of insight) systematically? The answer is “yes”. I explained to him that we are not like the people who lived in the time of the Buddha. We are living today, and this is an age wherein we need to be practical and practice systematically.’

Even here at Pa-Auk some of my students have asked me, ‘Is it necessary to practice *Rūpa*? No one besides Pa-Auk teachers teach it. The one who asked me this question is smiling. He is practicing *Rūpa* meditation now.

The answer is again “yes”. Nowadays please don’t expect to see Nibbāna without following step-by-step systematic instructions.

One day, I will give a more detailed explanation about this. What I want to point out for the purposes of this talk is that the young woman in our story, after hearing the Buddha’s teaching, actually followed his advice. From that day onwards, she practiced meditation on death for the

next three years. When the Buddha returned to Ālavi afterwards, it was for her sake. He gave his talk there for the sake of her attainment and for the benefit of the many.

When you are in the presence of a living Buddha, he will teach you directly. If you have already perfected your pāramis, the Buddha can teach you the most suitable meditation object for you to attain Nibbāna quickly. But now you are not in the presence of the Buddha but rather you are in my presence. I can only instruct meditation practice step-by-step, systematically, following the original teachings of the Buddha. Nowadays, it is very important to follow the instructions and practice systematically, day-by-day. By doing so, even if you cannot now attain Nibbāna, in the future your practice will be beneficial and will help you to attain Nibbāna, to see the Deathless.

After the weaver’s daughter heard the stanza “**Blind is this world ...**” recited by the Buddha, she attained stream-entry and became a Sotāpanna.

She then took up her shuttle-basket and proceeded to her father’s workshop. When she arrived, he was asleep despite the fact that he was sitting upright at his loom. His daughter didn’t notice that he was asleep when she handed him the shuttle-basket. As she did so, the basket hit the tip of the loom and fell with a clatter, making a loud sound. Her father awoke suddenly and accidentally pulled the shuttle. The tip of the shuttle struck his daughter in her breast. She died there and was immediately re-born in the world of the Tusita gods. Her father looked at her, as she lay there, her whole body spotted with blood. He knew that she was dead.

His grief was intense. With eyes filled with tears he went

to see the Buddha and told him what had happened. He appealed to the Blessed One, “Venerable Sir, comfort me, extinguish my grief.” The Buddha comforted him, saying, “Grieve not my disciple, for in the round of existences without conceivable beginning, you have shed, over the death of your daughter, tears more abundant than the waters contained in the four great oceans.” Upon hearing this he was comforted, his grief reduced, and he requested the Buddha to admit him into the Order and allow him to ordain. The weaver practiced diligently and not long afterwards he too attained Arahantship. Because of practicing meditation on death, his daughter attained Sotāpanna and he attained Arahantship. Meditation on death brought them both great benefit and led to their liberation.

So every day we should reflect and meditate on death. We should diligently and systematically practice recollection of death.

One day we will surely die.

The day we were born, we were crying while others smiled.

But on the day of our death, others will be crying.

Should we participate with those who are crying on that day? We should not.

If we practice diligently and become noble ones, we will not depart this life crying. We will die smiling.

So,

May you all practice recollection of death.

May you all be heedful.

May you all attain Nibbāna, the Deathless, in this very

life.

May all of us strive diligently for liberation.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!