



2021-09-18 Aging, Illness, Death, & Separation - Afternoon Session

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Let's meditate briefly. I'll meditate briefly with you and then you continue meditating while I talk. Okay?

Get comfortably in position. Think thoughts of goodwill. Goodwill is a wish for true happiness as we said; spread it around. Because true happiness comes from within there's no conflict between your true happiness and anyone else's. So when you wish Goodwill for yourself, extend Goodwill for yourself, it's not a selfish thought. It's the main motivation for the practice. Same as when you have goodwill for others to remind yourself that you're looking for happiness that is going to be harmful to no one so you want to develop your own internal resources as a way of finding that happiness. So tell yourself "May I be truly happy. May I understand the causes of true happiness and be willing and able to act on them. Then extend the same thought to others, starting with people close to your heart and then moving on in ever widening circles. And then bring your attention to the breath, it's good to start with some good long, deep in and out breaths to emphasize the feeling of breathing in the body. Find your spot where it's clearest and ask yourself if long breathing is comfortable, start adjusting things. So you find a route that's not too long, not too short, not too heavy, not too light. When it feels just right for the needs of the body and the needs of the mind right now. Of course those needs may change so stay on top of what the body needs and stay on top of what your mind needs right now.

Then as the breath gets comfortable, start surveying through the body. See what feels best for you. Starting down at the navel moving up, front of the torso, through the head, down the shoulders and the arms down the back, out the legs. Go at your own pace; then when you're ready, you can settle down and just be in one spot. Think of your awareness spreading from that spot to fill the whole body like the light of a candle in an otherwise dark room- the flame of the candle is in one spot, but it's light fills the entire room. Try to maintain that centered but enlarged awareness as best you can. If it begins to blur out go back to the survey of the body section by section. And otherwise learn how to stay right there: clear, centered. Then you meditate while I talk.

This afternoon we'll talk about how to approach the issue of death from the perspective of the Buddha's awakening. Remember, that he had three knowledges. First, that death is followed by rebirth. And that we go through many levels of being- or it's possible to go through many levels of being. The second knowledge- he saw that what determines those levels of being is our karmic record, the actions we've done, both in the past and in the present moment. His first interest was in the present moment at death; the choices that the mind makes- whether it has right view or wrong view at that moment. But that led him in the third knowledge to look more carefully at his mind in the present moment, to see what actions were leading to death, aging, birth, becoming, clinging, craving, just going down the list- looking at them simply as actions without paying attention to who was doing the action. It was the principle of action in and of itself.



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He discovered that that was the way to avoid the issue of this dilemma that's created by the fact that both craving for becoming and craving for non becoming can lead simply to more becoming. It was through seeing those actions and learning how to develop this passion for them.

That was what led to his experience of the deathless. The lessons we can learn from that have to do both with preparing for a good rebirth, if we can't totally reach the deathless. But also learning what we can do as we meditate to learn the skills that would be necessary for finding that deathless element. The Buddha recommends mindfulness of death as a meditation practice. That's the context in which he talks about being in the present moment or focusing on the present moment. Present Moment is not good in and of itself, but it's the place where the work has to be done.

And so when he's talking about recollection of death, you're not thinking simply death, death death- you're thinking, given the fact that death can come at anytime, and that the state of my mind at death- and also the karmic record that I've developed up to that point, will have a huge impact on where I'm gonna go. There's work I've got to do. And the work you can do, it falls into two main categories. One is simply the things you can do in order to create good options for rebirth in case you need them at the moment of death. And the other is mastering the skills in the present moment so you understand what are these actions that lead to becoming- that lead to craving? And how can I learn how to deal with them more skillfully, so I don't have to slip off into an unskillful birth at that time. So in terms of the first category, creating good karma in advance to create good options, the most basic list that the Buddha gives of things you have to do is to develop conviction, virtue, generosity, and discernment.

Now conviction we've already talked about. It's basically conviction in the Buddha's awakening, that what he learned in the night of his awakening really is a good guide to how we should look at our lives. I was talking with a Zen teacher one time and he said "You Theravadans- you have faith in your practice, right?" I said yes, "Do have faith in anything more specific than just faith in the Dharma? And I said "Yes, we have faith in the Buddha's awakening. This for us is the central event around which we shape our lives. Then based on that there's a quality of virtue- and virtue is observing the precepts- precepts against killing, stealing, illicit sex, lying and taking intoxicants. A third quality is generosity. When the Buddha was asked where should a gift be given, he said, "where you feel inspired." Generosity is our first taste of free will. We do have choices we have things that we could keep for ourselves. Or we decide that no, we'd rather share them with someone else. You realize that you're not a slave to your cravings. You can step back in your cravings; and think about long term consequences and gradations of pleasure. There's the pleasure of consuming something, but there's also a greater pleasure that comes as you learn how to share what you have- it makes sense. And then finally, with discernment- it's defined as discernment of arising and passing away that is penetrative. And I'd like to talk a little bit about the fact that even though these are said to be qualities that are there to prepare you for good options when the option of rebirth comes, they also shade into the training of the mind. Conviction of course points you aware, if you have conviction in the Buddha's awakening- the main lesson he learned, of course, was the Four Noble Truths- suffering comes from within- comes from our actions, comes from our clinging and craving. To truly have conviction in the Buddha's awakening, you're going to start looking inside observing your mind. Similarly, with



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virtue, when you take on the precepts, the precept is that you are not going to intentionally do any of those things. You cannot break a precept unintentionally. In other words, if you happen to step on a bug, not knowing that it's there. Or if you say something that you think is true, but it turns out that it's not true, neither of those actions will break a precept. So as you take on the precepts, you focus more and more attention on your intentions. At the same time, we have to develop qualities of mindfulness, alertness, ardency. Mindfulness to keep the precepts in mind, alertness to watch what you're doing, as you're doing it, then ardency is to stick with it, even though there will be cases where you will have to make sacrifices in order to maintain your precepts, which- you're willing to put out the effort. Now, these three qualities: ardency, alertness and mindfulness- are qualities that are developed in mindfulness and concentration practice. So you're preparing yourself to meditate as you take on the precepts. With generosity, the Buddha focuses on how the rewards of generosity are not just a matter of the gift you give, or to whom you give it but a lot of it has to do with the motivation with which you give. There's one passage where he talks about different kinds of motivation you might have. And in the very first one, it sounds like he's starting out with a catch 22- he's recommending that one of the rewards of generosity is that you would be reborn a good place. He says one of the lowest motivations for generosity is that I will enjoy this after death- in other words- I'm gonna get this back with interest.

He doesn't say that's a bad motivation. He talked about the different levels of Devas, and how different motivations correspond to different levels of Devalands that you might go to after that. This would be the four great kings, which is not a bad place to be. But he says there are higher motivations and encourages them. The next higher one is simply that giving is good, it's a good thing to be generous. Higher than that is that you have a family custom being generous, and you will maintain your family custom out of respect for your parents and your ancestors. An even higher motivation is seeing that there are people who are not well off, whereas you are well off, it's not right that you don't share- a sense of obligation when you have something that other people don't. A higher motivation is that there have been great gift giving sacrifices in the past and you can give in that same way. A higher motivation still is that it simply makes the mind serene when you're generous. That sense of gratification and joy arise, then finally higher than that is the sense of "this is an ornament of the mind." At that point, you don't need anything anymore from generosity, it's just a good thing to have. So here the practice of generosity makes you more and more sensitive to what's going on- in each of these cases, you're basically talking to yourself about why you're giving. And the Buddha is encouraging you to have some more sensitivity to different motivations that you might have for being generous. As for discernment, it says: penetrative knowledge of arising and passing away. It's not simply watching things coming and going. To be penetrative, the knowledge has to have: One, see what is the origination of these things that are coming and going in the mind- these, whatever it is I'm experiencing, and origination basically means causation. And when the Buddha uses the word origination nine times out of 10 it's origination coming from within- the causes are things that are coming from your own mind. Then beyond that, to be penetrative, good discernment has to see which things that arise should be encouraged to stay and which should not be encouraged to stay.

So you're getting more and more sensitive to what's going on in the mind and the effect that certain mind states will have- learning, encouraging yourself to develop skillful mind states and



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to get rid of unskillful mental states. So even though this would be classified as one of the practices for preparing yourself for a good rebirth in the future, it's also pointing you more and more to your mind in the present moment, this way gives you practicing in getting ready to meditate. Now, in addition to those four qualities: conviction, virtue, generosity, and discernment, there are other lists- in this passage where they're talking about the qualities that would make you a deva, and that list has those four qualities plus learning- that would be learning in the dharma. Back in those days, when you're learning the dhamma, it simply wasn't a matter of reading- which you would find a good passages that you find inspiring- you would memorize them. And this is a practice I would encourage, because you think about what's sloshing around in your mind as a result of having been exposed to TV and internet. One of the monks here at the monastery tells a story about when he was an exchange student down in Mexico. They had a big party the visiting gringos. The Mexican students would sing folk songs, and then they turned to the Americans and said: "Okay- you sing us some American folk songs. The American students looked at one another, and they didn't know any folk songs. So they ended up singing Gilligan's Island and other commercial jingles. So, if that's the kind of stuff you have in your mind, it'd be good to replace it with some good Pāli passages or Pāli passages translated in english, and just learn to memorize and run them over your mind. So that these things are with you when you need them. I know in my own case, after Ajan Fuang passed away that first year at the monastery, it was a difficult year because we had people coming in from outside trying to take over the monastery- create a lot of difficulties. And time and again, I would be thinking about, well, what would Ajaan Fuang do to handle this case, and in his words would come right back to me- one time he said this, another time he said that. That was what kept me going well. So having that in my mind is one of the reasons why I wrote the book "Awareness Itself"- was to keep those things in mind and to share them with other people. So it's good to have good, short dharma passages that you that you can hold in mind as a way of giving you strength and giving you guidance when you need it.

Another one of the practices that leads to good rebirth is the practice of Brahma viharas. Goodwill for all beings, compassion for all beings, empathetic joy for all beings, and equanimity with regard to all beings. And the Buddha says, if you make a constant practice of this, it can have a very high impact on your opportunities to be reborn in the Brahma worlds. Either one, two, four, or even five hundred aeons he says. So that's another way that you can prepare for good options that will be available to you at the moment of death if you develop these skills in advance. Now, as you're developing these skills, remember, as I said earlier, this is going to require a certain amount of effort, this practice- a certain amount of dedication. And you will have to be developing a skillful sense of self around these, so don't be afraid of that sense of self. I don't know how many times I've heard people say, "Well, if you do concentration practice that requires a lot of effort and effort requires a sense of self, but we all know, sense of self is a bad thing." Well, if the sense of self is developed around comparing yourself to other people, yes, that is unskillful. But the sense of self that says, Okay, I'm capable of doing this, I will benefit from it. I am the responsible one who is going to be responsible for my birth, or how I handle aging, illness and death. that sense of self is going to be necessary. So don't be afraid of developing that. As long as you're not on the verge of arahantship- you need a sense of self to motivate yourself to act. So those are some things you can do as preliminaries to prepare good options to be available for you at the moment of death. That there are things you do as you focus in on the present moment in your meditation. Again, you're here- as the Buddha says,



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because there's work to be done. Particularly we want to learn about the steps that are going to be leading to craving- because remember that image the Buddha had- rebirth: it's like a fire being blown from one building to another building. And in those days, they believed that the fire had to feed on something in order to burn, in this case it would feed on the wind carrying it from one building to another. We know winds can be, and we know fires can be in winds. They can spread in all directions and are pretty blind. So you want to be able to learn how to gain some control over your cravings. This is the big focus of learning to meditate in the present moment- getting some control over your cravings.

We'll notice that when the Buddha focuses on meditation, he actually focuses your attention on two of the main factors in sequence that lead up to craving and dependent arising. One is feeling how feeling leads to craving. And the other is fabrication. Remember, fabrication is the first factor that occurs in the list after after ignorance. So for example, when you're developing concentration, you've got the three types of fabrication, you've got the in and out breath as your objects, that's bodily fabrication, directed thought and evaluation as you talk to yourself about the breath and adjust the breath. And then mental fabrication, which will be feelings or perceptions, the feeling of ease that you're trying to create as you focus on the breath, and the perceptions are the mental images that you hold in mind to keep you there. And these are the things that need to be put together in order to get the mind concentration. And as you work with these things, you'll find that you get hands on experience with these different kinds of fabrications so that instead of doing them in ignorance, you'll be doing them in knowledge. That turns them from a cause of suffering into part of the path. Similarly with feeling, feeling is one of those fabrications, it can lead to craving. But if you look at your feelings and learn how to analyze them- like we talked about this morning- so that you get some distance from them, and not feel so totally overwhelmed by them, then you're not so likely to be jumping for whatever craving comes your way. So this is the main focus in the present moment in the practice is focusing on these factors of dependent co-arising, but actually whichever factor you find most congenial to focus on. Some people find name and form, other people find different factors to be good, but in every case, in dependent co-arising as things are happening in the present moment, you're trying to understand cause and effect. So you focus your attention on the present moment you focus on these things as they're happening in and of themselves. Think of the Buddha's formula for mindfulness, you're focusing on the body in and of itself, ardent, alert and mindful putting aside greed and distress in reference to the world- or you're focusing on feelings or mind states. In each case, you're looking at these things in and of themselves actions in the present moment. You're not concerned about what you wanted in world outside. Remember, your sense of the world outside is part of becoming. And as you're being pushed out of one becoming you don't want to say, well, I just want to go to another becoming- whatever shows up. So you have to learn how to focus on this frame of reference- which is the thing in and of itself, the experience in and of itself, without reference to the world outside.

We're doing this because- as the Buddha said, we have to deal with dangers that are coming up. And this is one of the aspects of mindfulness practices often underplayed, they talk about mindfulness being accepting and open. But the Buddha often talks about how there has to be a sense of urgency as you develop your mindfulness as it develops into concentration. Because there are dangers all around you're thinking of the image of the quail, it's caught by the hawk because it wandered in the wrong territory, or the monkey that's been caught because it



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wandered into the wrong territory, it got caught in a monkey trap. There's the image of the gatekeeper at the fortress, has to make sure that no enemies come in- in other words no unskillful states come in. There's the image of your head being on fire and you have to be very mindful to put the fire out. So again and again, when the Buddha is talking about mindfulness, the images that give rise to a sense of urgency here are counteracting dangers. When you apply this to breath meditation, this is one of the one of the types of meditation which gives a lot of emphasis on fabrication. You think about the first tetrad in breath meditation instructions, the Buddha talks about calming bodily fabrication- now bodily fabrication here means your in and out breath. You might ask well, why is he talking about it in such technical terms? Why can't you just say calm the breath? He's trying to get you to see the role of fabrication; the role of your intentions in the way you breathe. Similarly, in the second tetrad when he talks about being sensitive to mental fabrication and calming mental fabrication, you want you to see these processes of fabrication and to learn how to manipulate them- it's in manipulating them that you get awareness and knowledge of them.

I've talked to some people who say, "Well, if you're working on the breath, what are you going to do when you die? You won't be able to be with your breath anymore. But in working on the breath, you're going to become more and more sensitive to these processes of fabrication. That's precisely what the Buddha wants you to look at- not just a vague awareness and to let go of your awareness but simply where is the fabrication going on in your mind right now? Where are your attentions in the mind right now? In what direction are they leading? This is the purpose of breath meditation is to get you sensitive to those things. There's a tradition in the forest tradition says basically that when you're meditating like this, you are preparing. You're learning the skills you're going to need when you when you die. And the Buddha himself seems to say as much- there's a passage where he goes in and sees the monks in the sickward. He says, "Look- approach death mindful and alert." And of course alert means being alert to what you're doing and the results of what you're doing- mindful he defines in terms of the establishment of mindfulness. So as you're trying to get the mind centered like this, these are the instructions where you get into concentration, you're basically learning the skills that you will need as you die. The things that are going to come in at that moment are basically the same problems that you encounter as you meditate. In other words, the hindrances. These are the things that get in the way of mindfulness, that get in the way of concentration, and they get in the way of discernment. Passages where the Buddha talks about mind states that you have to watch out for as you're approaching death- Four out of the five hindrances are mentioned explicitly. Sloth and torpor is the only one that's not mentioned. But because sloth and torpor would obscure your mindfulness and alertness, it's implicit there that this is something to watch out for. So what are the five hindrances? You've got sensual desire, at the moment of death, you're going to be strongly attached to the body and to thoughts of sensual pleasures, this is one problem. Ill will- which might be directed to others for their past bad actions, wanting to see them punished. Remember what the Buddha had to say about the soldier who asked him- "My teachers told me, If I die in battle, I will go to the heaven of those heroes slain in battle, What does the Buddha have to say about this?" The Buddha, in line with the etiquette at the time decided- this is not a topic he wanted to talk about. But this soldier asked him three times, so the Buddha had to answer so he said: "Well, basically, if you're thinking- 'may these beings be destroyed, may these beings be harmed'- if you die at that moment, your mind would go down the hell of those slain in battle. In other words, it's precisely ill will you have for people at that



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time. The other example he gives is of a bandit, sawing you up with that saw, if you have ill will for them, you going to be reborn in a bad place place- a place that wants to get back at them. We have to be careful about ill will because one of the ways in which Ill Will disguises itself is as Justified Anger and desire for justice. You want to see somebody get their 'just desserts' or you see someone who's going unpunished for their misdeeds and you say, "This person really deserves to suffer. That is ill will. The ideal thing would be to take the attitude that the Buddha had toward Aṅgulimāla, even though Aṅgulimāla murdered all those people. Still he had potential for awakening, and he could avoid a lot of suffering by awakening. I think you know the story that after he became a monk, there were a lot of people were still upset about the fact that literally he was getting away with murder. They would throw things at him when he was on his alms round. But that's going to be for their long term harm, because here he was, an arhant. So you have to watch out for your desire to see that justice be done because it can lead you to a bad Rebirth. A rebirth that's based on thoughts of revenge or based on thoughts of wanting to avenge something. It's about rebirth. You don't want to go there. Sloth and torpor is the third hindrance; it obscures your mindfulness and alertness. Worry, in other words, restlessness and anxiety can also be a big hindrance at the moment of death. You'll be worried over the future your loved ones or concerned for any punishments that you may have for your own past misdeeds. These are the two big worries that the Buddha addresses that's something you will want to counteract. And then finally, doubt and uncertainty comes from not seeing the true dharma. In other words, you haven't had an experience of the deathless yet, so there's gonna be some doubt- did the Buddha really know what he's talking about. Until you gain the Dharma Eye, there's still going to be some doubt. So this is one of the things you have to work on- "What can I do to meditate in order to have that experience so I can overcome this doubt?" Now the antidotes for these- of the five the first one that has to be addressed is uncertainty. Because if you don't believe what the Buddha had to say, or are not confident in what he to say, then it's going to be hard to counteract the other hindrances at that moment of death to see them as the big problem facing you.

So the Buddha gives various ways of addressing doubt prior to stream entry. The first one is, what we might call his Buddha's wagers. We all know Pascal's Wager: if there is a God then it's good thing to obey Him; if there is no God, then it doesn't hurt you, you've lost nothing. Well, in the Buddhist sense, he says if you live a skillful life, even if it turns out that there is no such thing as karma, there's no such thing as rebirth, you can hold yourself with a sense of honor that you've lived in a harmless way- by developing skillful qualities in the mind, and by abandoning unskillful ones. Also he says to learn how to watch your own mind and try to make the distinction between what qualities in the mind are skillful, and which ones are unskillful. And then notice when you act on skillful qualities, how does it change your mind? What benefits do you have? In particular, he recommends developing goodwill. Of the very skillful qualities this is probably the quickest one to see- if you have goodwill for others, you're going to behave in a lot more skillful way. And again, you can hold yourself up honorable that you haven't harmed anybody. Even if there are no results of karma, if there's no rebirth. And it gets you confident that yes, you can actually do this because that's the other aspect of doubt. You may believe what the Buddha had to say, but if you say "I can't do this", that's going to really get in the way. But you can see for yourself- goodwill, it's not that hard to develop. If you think about it; the people for whom you have ill will- and you can probably think of a few right off the bat- You say, "Well, what I am after, what I'm going to do when I'm extending goodwill to them is basically say, "May this person see



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the error of their ways and change their ways. So they can find true happiness- now that's something you can wish for anybody. The world would be a lot better place if people can see: "oh, I've been acting in unskillful ways, I should change my ways," without having to think about getting them punished or anything like that. You might say, well, there are certain people I'd like to see hanging in the wind a little bit before they would change their ways. You have to remind yourself, Well, nothing's really gained that way. There's very few people who undergo punishment like that who don't get a sense of being justified or feel that they've been mistreated. Very few people will see the connection between their mistakes and their suffering. So ideally, you should say, "Can they clearly see the error of their ways and learn how to change them".

Another one of the hindrances the Buddha gives instructions for you can read in the readings is how to deal with drowsiness. It starts with when you're meditating, and you find that you're getting drowsy- change the topic of your meditations. If it's the breath, change the way you breathe first. If you find that the breath no- matter how you breathe, you're still getting drowsy, try to give yourself a meditation topic that engages the mind more, you can think of the different parts of the body or think about the bones in your skeleton, start with the bones and the tips of your fingers- where are they right now, relax around them, and move up to the second joint third joint, into the palms of the hands up to the wrist, up to the arm, then start at the toes and work up through the body. Give yourself something more active to do. When I was in Thailand, there was a period when Ajaan Fuang was very sick. And we had a number of months there looking after him. But one by one by one the different monks kept finding other things that they had to do. And so I started taking this monk's period of time in the day- and then that monk's period of time the day. And I ended up with a with a 2am to 8pm shift. And all the other monks had 8pm to 2am. So you can imagine at 3am in the morning after I haven't got much sleep looking after Ajaan Fuang, I'm getting very drowsy. And I found that if I move a spot of my focus as I was focusing on the breath, three breaths in the middle of the chest, Three breaths here, three breaths there, I was able to keep myself awake. So that's one of the ways in which you can counteract drowsiness. Give yourself something more active to think about as you meditate.

As for the remaining three hindrances. These are the ones that come up most often in the Buddha's instructions to people who are dying- for a lot of them, worry comes up first. You're worried over the fate of others for whom you've been responsible. If you think those thoughts yourself, you just say "The time for that is past, there's nothing I can do right now. I've got something else that I have to focus on right now, which is the fact that I'm dying. And I better get my mind focused on that. A couple of incidences there in the readings you read about Nikolas mothers talking to Nikolas Father, "Don't worry about me." she says, "I'm going to be able to look after myself. I know how to sew, I know how to Cardwell, I know how to weave cloth. I can look after the kids- if you are worried that I'm going to take on another husband, don't worry, I'm going to be as faithful to you after you die as I was during your life. It turns out present the husband doesn't die, he goes to see the Buddha, and the Buddha says, "You know you're really lucky that you have her as your teacher and counselor."

So that's one thing you have to think about. If you find someone yourself, you're worried about your past responsibilities- and you realize okay, a human being can take on some of your responsibilities, there's going be a time when you have to let them go. When the time has come, let them go. If you're worried over your past actions and things you've done in the past that were



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unskillful; here's another case where the Buddha has you develop the Brahma viharas. First you remind yourself: Okay, that was unskillful. I know I don't want to make that mistake again. Then you spread goodwill to yourself, so you don't beat yourself up. And then goodwill to all beings. So you remind yourself, okay, I want to make sure I don't harm anybody. And in order to remind yourself of right view, the Buddha says at the moment of death it's good to think of your good actions even as you reflect on your generosity, reflect on your virtue, reflect on the qualities and lead someone to be a deva. Say to yourself "I do have some good to me." You focus on that. This has become a traditional practice throughout Theravada countries that if somebody's dying, the people around them will try to remind them, not of the good times they've had in the past, but of the good things they've done.

Of course, the antidote for ill will is thoughts of goodwill. The antidote to sensuality is the Buddha's contemplations on the drawbacks of sensuality and the drawbacks of the body. Think of all those different images the Buddha gives of sensuality- being like a dog chewing on some bones, where there's no flesh at all. In Ajaan Lee's telling of that particular image, he says, it does have some flavor, which is the flavor of it's own saliva That's a good image to keep in mind, when you find yourself salivating over sensual pleasures- okay, that's it, you're just eating your own saliva. With the drawbacks to the body, you can think about the contemplation of the body and it's 32 parts, or the fact that each of those parts is subject to an illness of some kind, you have an eye- there are eye illnesses, you have a mouth- there are illnesses of the mouth, you have skin- there are skin illnesses. Go down the list. Do you really want to come back to a human body like this? This is where we get into interesting instructions from Mahanama where Mahanama is asking the Buddha, "If somebody's passing away while the Buddha is gone, how do you counsel them?" And the Buddha says, "Okay, once you've gotten sure that they're no longer worried about their parents or their wives, their children, responsibilities they've had in the past, then ask them, "Are you still concerned about leaving your human sensuality?" And if the person says yes- then you say, "Well, you know, the Devas have better sensuality than this, set your mind there instead". So he starts out with the lowest level of the devas and works up and up. So you use sensuality of that kind to pull you away from your attraction to the human realm. Because there are better realms to be in. And finally, you get to the point where you say, "Okay, we get to the Brahma realm, well even in the Brahma realm, they suffer from self identity; it'd be good to let go of your self identity. In other words, stop thinking in terms of self and worlds in that case, and just look at the events in the mind in and of themselves. And it is possible, the Buddha said, that at that moment the person can find release.

So here we see the role of a caregiver is to encourage positive thoughts, and act as a memory aid for those whose memory is gone as death approaches. Now, of course, going to a good destination is a good thing. Much better than going to a bad one. There was a group of people came to see Ajaan Fuang one time, they'd been studying the Abidhamma. They'd heard that he was a good teacher so they came to see him and they asked what he taught. He said, "Look, get into meditation posture and start focusing on your breath." "Oh, no, no, we can't focus on the breath, we're afraid we'll fall into jhāna and be reborn as Bramhas" And he laughed. He said, "Well, being born as a Brahma is not a bad thing, even non-returners are being reborn as Bramhas, and then- being reborn as a Brahma is better than being reborn as a dog. So, going for a good destination is not a bad thing. But you have to remember that going to a good destination, the next time round doesn't guarantee that you're gonna go into a good destination



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after that. So you're not 100% safe. So this is where if you want to go beyond any kind of good destination in samsāra, this is where you have to understand becoming. You need to learn how to observe the steps leading there- this is what dependent co-arising is all about, and learning how to see them in and of themselves. This is where you try to get rid of the narratives or worldviews that tend to come clustering in on you. You notice, of course, when you sit down and meditate. Sometimes it's the narratives of the day, sometimes it's old stuff coming up. I've noticed especially during the pandemic that people say, these memories of childhood come up because there's not much happening in your daily life right now. So you tend to start focusing on things that happened in the past that come up very easily. Well, that's going to come up at the moment of death too.

And so you have to learn how not to go running with those narratives. Because they're going to create a sense of becoming- plus fear around what you become, will become when you have to leave these things. You have to develop the skills that you learn in not giving meaning to pleasures and pains, and the stories you tell yourself around them. In other words, to see these events as separate- events coming and going in the mind. And to see where the appeal is, what's the allure, but also to see their drawbacks, as the Buddha said, the way to develop dispassion for things is to look for the appeal. Why does the mind go for them? Look for the drawbacks. And then when you see that the drawbacks outweigh the allure, that's when you can develop the dispassion that will give you a sense of release. So you overcome clinging, not by trying to see everything as a oneness, you're actually trying to see these events in the mind simply as separate events that are part of the causal path process. You can keep the mind on that level. As the Buddha said, you begin to see that it's just nothing but thoughts of your existence that already exist in the world that occur to you at that time, or thoughts of your non existence don't occur to you, either, or the non-existence of the world. Just simply stress arising, stress passing away you say, "I don't need this, there must be something better." And that's when the mind inclines toward the Deathless. And this is what gives you the freedom from attachment that you would need in order to keep going and keep on being a being. At that moment, when you're freed from attachment, you're also freed from all the limitations that go with attachment.

The Buddha's image is of a fire that's released from attachment to a fuel- remember those days, the theory was that a fire burns because it's feeding on it's fuel. At the same time, it's clinging to the fuel. It's not the case that the fuel is clinging to the fire. So for the fire to be freed, the fire has to let go. In the same way you're not the one who's being trapped by the narratives that you're telling yourself, you're not the one who's being trapped by the pain that's coming up. You're the one that's holding on, it's your clinging, that is trapping you. If you can learn how to let go, that's how you become free. And as the Buddha said, remind yourself that as you let go, you're not going into annihilation- the Deathless, he says, is a good thing. Since if you see that the Deathless is something that wouldn't have any pain or any sense of limitation or any sense of nostalgia or regret has just been erased- that thought, because it's not true. The Deathless is a good thing.

So this is what the teachings are all aimed at, as he said, the Buddha started his quest for the dharma, looking for what would not die. It's because of his quest, because he stuck to it so thoroughly and so consistently, that we have the dharma to practice now. Which means that



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when we think about issues of aging, illness and death- they are not tangential applications of some dharma that's meant to be just for the for the present moment- they're what the dharma is all about. Because these are the the big issues in life. If you want understand how to live your life well, it's good to understand what happens at death. How does the mind handle aging, illness and death so that it doesn't have to suffer. When you can answer those questions, then you've taken care of all the things that would really weigh down the mind. And you've given a good direction to your life. So those are the thoughts I have for this afternoon. And we will open the floor to questions.

Questioner:

Thank you so much Bhante, for your teaching today and your enormous commitment to writing and websites, and all you do. I appreciate it. Thank you for taking my question. I'm an end of life doula. And I have a couple questions around that: one is compassionate choice. When I first began, I was quite black and white about it- I can't support people who make this choice. As I've gone along, I I'm starting to find differences with intention. And I'm wondering what you have to say about that.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Euthanasia?

Questioner:

Well, euthanasia or in California, you can have assistance from a medical person if you meet certain criteria.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Okay, well, from the Buddhist point of view, that's not a skillful approach.

Questioner:

So what if someone makes that choice? And I've been working with them, then do I just say "Sorry, I can't be here. I can't help you?"

Ajaan Thanissaro:

What you say is, "This is something I can't assist you with. I'll get you in touch with somebody who can, but I can't do that."

Questioner:

Okay, thank you. I also wonder what you would say around doing mettā for people who have already died.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Spread them as much metta as you want.

Questioner:

Okay, good. Thanks. Sometimes they tell you not to do that. Why? I don't know but I've heard that before.



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Ajaan Thanissaro:

Well, there's the distinction that when you're dedicating merit, that's something you do to people who have passed away. Because when you're dedicating merit, basically the person to whom it's being dedicated has to express appreciation for it. You can do that with people who are alive, but it's kind of embarrassing to say, "I made some merit for you the other day, and I hope you're happy." Yeah, if there's somebody that you could say that to without embarrassment, and they actually would be happy. Okay, go ahead.

Questioner:

Okay. And then my third question is just around the present moment, in my experience, when I am in a very concentrated state, the present moment, isn't really it's a, it's a movement. So there's no stopping at a moment. And so I am not sure how to be doing it in the present moment. I'm just with what is.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Yeah, exactly. Some people say when you're in the present moment, you're outside of time, but that's not the case time is very much there, you can see it slipping and slipping, slipping away. And so, what you want to do is say okay, given that this is where I am right now in this sort of this flow, okay, to what extent am I contributing to the flow and especially to what extent am I contributing to any, any stress or suffering in the flow?

Questioner:

Thank you. Appreciate that.

Questioner:

So I have a question about the hindrance of worries or anxiousness. I suspect that maybe a glimpse of what I could expect towards death. So my morning meditation is very often thoughts about the day, but in a way there are fears or anxieties, but not anything that's really scary. It's mostly thoughts about angry people that I'm gonna meet, angry phone calls, generally tense, I've got this tense profession. And I know that you're going over what's going to happen to me in the future, it sometimes helps because I can plan or find an idea or solve a problem. So there is allure and I know that there are also drawbacks, because I know it's ruins my morning meditation. Because evening, meditation is easy compared to that- the mornings are difficult to the point that I'm sometimes afraid to sit, because I know I'm gonna waste this hour or half an hour. So can you give me some advice?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Okay, I would say, make a promise with yourself that the last 10 minutes of the meditation, you will think about these issues. And then be very strict with yourself for the remainder of the time that you're not going to think about them. And tell yourself, I'll be able to think about them more clearly because I have meditated and allowed the mind to get quiet. The quiet mind is much better source for insight than a worried mind. So make that promise to yourself. Okay. I'll think about these things, say the last 10 minutes. And then in the meantime: no, no, no, no, no. And this is where you get out your karate chop.

Questioner:



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But they're mostly rubbish. I don't want to think about them at all. Even for 10 minutes,

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Okay, well. It's part of the practice is learning how to prevent unskillful qualities from arising in the future, right? Yeah. Okay. When I want to prepare, I don't want to say anything unskillful to the people that I will meet or the angry phone calls I'm going to receive in the course of the day. So take some time to think about it, think it through. Okay, there must be a skillful way of doing this.

Questioner:

And during the morning session, when you reply that we should treat these voices with goodwill. We're thinking about these kinds of voices or something else because I thought when you talked about intrusive thoughts, this was the kind of voices that you will be that were supposed to treat with goodwill.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

There's a part of you that is, is legitimately worried about making a big error and in the course of the day, right, so have some goodwill for that part. Don't brush it aside, don't mistreat it. Because they will rebel after a while.

Questioner:

It just, it doesn't seem to make any sense this morning, because it's completely gone by afternoon.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

It's just one of those cases where, "I want to survive the day." And when you get when you get to the afternoon say, "Look, I'm pretty close to survival, the morning seems awfully long. The day seems awfully long in the morning. So it's good to say, Okay, humor that voice a little bit. Say okay, you probably know, at least one person who will call you in the course of the day, who might get angry. So think about that in particular, spread goodwill to that person. And also then think, Okay, what would be a skillful way of dealing with this person's way of dealing? And that way, that little voice will probably then give you more time to actually do your meditation for the rest of that 15 minutes.

Questioner:

I'll try, thank you.

Questioner:

Hi Taan Ajaan, thank you very much for teaching today. As always. I want to ask about- back to the issue of karma. And for those of us with sort of performance anxieties, this moment of death, reflection, contemplation can be incredibly daunting. And sometimes I think I get caught in seeing karma as sentencing, versus like a quintessential tool and teaching to be used to help guide me throughout my life, rather than just that moment of death. And I think I even heard, simply based on the the sutras that I've come across, there seems to be a pointed effort, a focus on the heaviness of unskillful actions. And I think it was Ajaan Chah who said, rather than doing



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good, don't do any harm, which seems to suggest the focus of not doing anything unskillful would mean that I was already doing something skillful.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

I think Ajaan Chah was talking to people who'd like to be generous a lot, but are not particularly concerned about observing the precepts. Okay, this is this is a problem that I ran into when I was teaching in Thailand. And other people were happy to be generous, but they didn't want to be bothered with the precepts. And so he's saying, look, you've got to take them seriously. Now, if you find that you're taking them so seriously, that you can't function, back off a little bit. Remember the goodness that you've done?

Questioner:

Okay. So there's just as much weight given by the Buddha in doing skillful as avoiding unskillful...

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Right. I mean, this is why he has you do recollection of your virtue of recollection of your generosity, recollection of the quality of the Devas- these are things you have- focus on those to lift your spirits.

Questioner:

Okay, so just as many opportunities as doing good and focusing on that, versus focusing on what I might get into trouble-wise, right? To look for something skillful. And then do I understand correctly that the kāma that will happen if it's a good rebirth, even the deva realms of the Brahma realms, they could be adversely affected by unskillfulness that we've done? And it would be there to make those positive realms somehow unpleasant...

Ajaan Thanissaro:

...the only places they have is the passage on the Pretas who have palaces. The Hungry Ghosts who have palaces, in other words, they spent half the day in their palace and half the day wandering around outside,

Questioner:

So it's just a strictly positive experience.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

The deva realms are pretty positive. Yes.

Questioner:

Okay. I guess I'm thinking of like the hell realms where the Buddha had that one thought of helping somebody who was being beaten and he left the hell realms immediately. So that shortened his length of stay just by having had past good karma. So I guess it's just it's a complexity then. After your deva realms, you're going to pay for more.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Maybe, which means that if you're in a deva realm, make sure you're determined to practice.



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Questioner:

So you can approach death with that. If you haven't entered the stream with "I want to be in a deva realm practicing." Right, right. Okay. So lastly does the Buddha ever give suggestion of just the strength of practicing his teachings for awakening? Like he does going to the hell realms? Does he ever say if you're doing my teachings, you're going to be pretty sound?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Well, he basically says, if you follow his teachings, you're not creating any of the causes for going to the lower realms, now you may have some past bad karma, which these can erase. But remember the image of the lump of salt in the river? Okay, you can you can mitigate what you've done in the past by developing an expansive mind states.

Questioner:

Okay, great. So, in essence, you know, continue to focus on skillful and not... keep on doing good...then you're gonna do well. Thank you.

Questioner:

Can this be a two for one? So as I've been considering death, and the transition, I've started to sense some fear coming up with claustrophobia. And I was wondering if you could give any recommendations on how to work with that.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Think of a sense of space. I told you that story about Ajaan Fuang's student who was meditating one night, and this voice came through and said "You're going to die." And she couldn't stay anywhere in her body, she couldn't focus. She said it was like a house of fire. Every room she went into was in flame. And then she thought of space. So she took space as her object. And, you know, if she had died at that time, she probably would have become a space deva. Or at least, it took her out of that feeling of everything's kind of closing in on you.

Questioner:

Okay, so as I envision, like losing contact with the sense doors, just maybe focus on cultivating more of an awareness of space then. Thank you.

Questioner:

Thank you. I want to come back to Willie's question about she talked about assisted suicide, and you mentioned euthanasia. But suicide itself- and the decision that person simply doesn't- Well, I won't phrase it that way- But what confuses me is that in the suttas, we see examples of some arahants who end their lives with a knife or what have you. I have not been able to understand how- because you said that's not a skillful way- the assisted suicide.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

The Buddha said the arahant suicide is the only suicide that is not blameworthy. In other words, they do it without any greed, aversion or delusion.

Questioner:



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Right. That's in the canon?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Yeah, I forgot which sutta but it's in one of the suttas.

Questioner:

Okay. Thank you. That clears everything up. Thank you very much.

Questioner:

Thank you. I've been studying in the Thai Forest Tradition for several years, but my teacher has not spoken of their teachings around death and dying. And I'm just wondering if there's some correlation between those teachings and the Tibetan Bardo teachings.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

I think I mentioned my teacher had a number of students who were psychic and they could see different people as they're going through the transition. And each person's transition is going to be very different depending on their past karma. There's some cases where they go through certain stages before they're reborn and other cases it's just like a vacuum cleaner pulls them out and they're someplace else right away. Like that case where the woman saw the dead bodies on the side of the road, but also saw those people standing around, looking kind of lost. Sometimes, I guess for lack of a better word, the "spirit" will be hanging around. In cases like that she would stop, spread goodwill to them, and then they would they move on. Others just go right on. There's a huge near death experience literature in Thailand. And one of the common themes is that there's kind of a police clearing room where there's somebody sitting behind a desk, and they've got the ledger for where you go. And in each case, of course, the sergeant in charge looks at the ledger and says "Oh, It's not this time this person's time yet," But sometimes they get the spirit guide that says, "Well, as long as you're here, do you want to see a little bit of heaven and hell?" "Oh sure that'd be great." So they wander around, and they come back and then they tell their experiences. My favorite one was this one guy was going to this heaven, and all the Devas were dressed in the traditional Thai style dress. So he asked his guide, "Is this is just a heaven for Buddhists, are there no other religions here in heaven?" He says, "Oh we've got plenty of Christians and Muslims and Hindus and whatnot." He says "Well aren't they kind of surprised to see all the devas is wearing Thai clothing like this?" And the guy said, "You see us as you expect to see us."

Ajaan Thanissaro:

So the thing about going through the Bardos- is they don't have that. And there's no set of stages that everybody's going to have to go through. It's going to depend on your karma. Whether it's a very good kind of karma to pull you up right away or whatever. Thank you.

Questioner:

Hi Ajaan Geoff. So, this question might be one of those unanswerable questions. But what is it that gets reborn? Is the karma?

Ajaan Thanissaro:



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Well, this is precisely what the Buddha says he didn't focus on. Right? Okay. He focused more on okay, how does the process happen? Because that's something you can actually do something about. You, if you want to take an identity, you create your identity around what you're attached to. That's what you are, as a being, is your attachments. And so he wants to take attention away from that question. As soon as you say, Well, what am I and you kind of grab onto this, this and this and make that into yourself. So he's trying to get you to get that way of looking at things in terms of simply actions in and of themselves? What am I doing and what is it leading to? So that's where you want to focus. Okay.

Questioner:

Wonderful to see you. Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Thank you for teaching all of us. Thank you. Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu. Bhante, I had a question on the 12 links. And I've heard still two schools of thought and I think both are possibly correct. One is that you can break the links at any point. And the second is that you could break the links at contact with the five sense faculties and then feeling arises, neutral, happy and sad. And then from there, our intention, and then clinging and craving. So if we break it at that point, would it help to contemplate on on anicca, anatta, and dukkha? Impermanence, Not-self, right? And suffering, right?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Right. Okay, basically you can you can break the chain anywhere. There are two passages in the cannon where the Buddha talks about every link in the chain is one where you could possibly make the break. And in each case, he recommends that you look at it in terms of the Four Noble Truths. What is the suffering in around this thing? And then what is the origination of that suffering around this thing? What can we do to stop it? Now one of the ways that you're gonna stop it is to develop dispassion for it. And the way one way to develop dispassion of course, is once you've seen the allure, then you try to look at it in terms of three perceptions- anicca, dukkha, anatta.

Questioner:

And nibbida to develop.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Once you've developed a sense of disenchantment. Yeah.

Questioner:

Okay, bhante. Thank you so much. So wonderful to see you. Thank you. Isabelle?

Questioner:

Thank you, Taan Ajaan it's good to see you. My question is twofold. The first is what kind of chants or thoughts can I send to someone who is dying or who has just died and I'm not with them? And then the second one related is, is that different for someone who has died because of assisted suicide?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Okay- lots of goodwill. Thoughts of goodwill. If you want to chant, there's the chat there's the Karaniya Metta Sutta which is basically about Goodwill. And remember, the Buddha never kept



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his teachings for only those who don't deserve to suffer. In other words, it no matter what you've done in the past, whatever reason you're suffering: may you stop suffering. So it doesn't really matter how they died or whatever you still send off to Goodwill and then dedicate the merit of your practice to that person.

Questioner:

Taan Ajaan thank you for your wonderful talk. I have a question regarding the natural and unnatural death let's say that you're stuck in a natural disaster like earthquake or lightning strikes or car hits you suddenly- How can we prepare for that? How can we still be mindful and alert at times like that?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Basically the Buddha says- there was a there was a similar case like this the suttas where Mahanama comes to see the Buddha and says "What if an elephant strikes me?" That was their version of a car crash- and it was the same sort of thing- just keep your mindfulness- say okay, the time has come you just got to drop things and this is one of the reasons why the the Ajaans encourage you to stay with the breath as much as you can as you go through the day so if anything unexpected comes up- okay, you're down, your ready.

Questioner:

Hello Ajaan. Thank you. Thank you for everything. I saw in the readings you included MN 143. I don't think you talked about it just now- or didn't explicitly talk about it- but in that sutta Sāriputra is talking to Anāpindika and he's is basically walking him through things to let go of- Don't cling to this, don't cling to this. And it's like, I don't cling to the I, don't cling to form, don't cling to eye consciousness and then it goes through contact and feelings and fabrications and jhāna realms. And I'm just wondering if that progression of that list shows up anywhere else? Is that a list that I'm not recognizing?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

That particular list appears

Questioner:

Okay, maybe there's some order to it that it just didn't see.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Well, maybe Sāriputra was reading his mind.

Questioner:

Oh, okay, perfect. Something I didn't think was related to today's topic, but maybe it is. Every night before I fall asleep. As I'm falling asleep, I do some meditation and keeps occurring to me that that might not be often advised against to meditate until you fall asleep? I'm just wondering. Are you saying either way?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

It's perfectly fine. Okay, but also meditate at some other time of the day too so your meditation doesn't always ended sleep?



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Questioner:

Yes. For sure. Thank you.

Questioner:

Oh, yeah. Thank you. And you can again, can you hear me? Okay, thank you Taan Ajaan I show my greatest respect to you for my wife and me for your current talk and the past ones. My English is poor. So I apologize first. I want to report my daily practice first, and I have a short question later. So I listen to your talks every day. And in the morning every time I sit half an hour I listen to your talks-Whole body breathes, very good, very nice. And in the noon, I have nap of half an hour, by that time with fewer awareness, but the refreshment is also good. So after I finished my work, I go to practice some yoga, though the mind is much more restless than the past two, but I still always remind myself that you said, We should try to be aware, just remind, remind, and later, after the yoga, the awareness comes back, the body feels good and the mind quality becomes better. So because of that, because I practiced that day by day- I would like to report that my addiction to gaming is decreasing dramatically. Because before you know, I also practiced but you know, the mind is very weak in the night, so cannot stop- attached to the gaming, though the gaming is very exhausting. But nowadays- because the value judgment system is slowly creative. So when he finds the mind and the body is more high quality. So the mind immediately drops gaming, because it's not worth it. Sometimes I I also hold the the gaming by the Corinthians. So it's it's a bad business. So the mind, I can see it's very sharp, he slowly transferred to the to the good sign. So I was so thankful for your teaching because not very easy. I've tried many years, many teachers and thank you very much Ajaan your teaching for me too. I slowl can see the mind change to the another way. So this is my first report. And the second is, I see sometimes- one question is that I saw sometimes, many times the mind is has a pattern that he was saying, for example, when I get to the weekend, things will become better. If the holiday comes, things become better, like he wants to change the beings. I don't know if I say clearly- for example, if the days are too busy too much suffering- the weekends will be better. For example, also like the holidays will become better- means these days you want to forget now at present. And I found that my mind has that kind of pattern. You want to forget the present. And hold the concept like- later, for example, weekends or the holiday. Is this actually the truth?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Run that question past me again.

Questioner:

So I want to say that I find that many times the mind when the condition is not good, it wanders away, the mind. I think: "If I have the weekend, if the weekend comes, the things will become better than now. I saw many times- if the holiday comes you think all will be better.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

I got your question. Yeah. Well, basically, if it's one way that helps you have some patience and endurance with the difficult situations to remind yourself, okay, things will get better. That's one way of doing it. Not in order to have some patience with what's going on, and endurance. The



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other way, of course, is to remind yourself even though conditions outside are not that good, I can still breathe comfortably in the midst of all this. Right now I can find some pleasure. So you don't have to wait until the holiday or wait until the weekend in order to have a good time. You can say okay, there's some there's still some opportunities for pleasure here, even in a difficult circumstance. Thank you.

Questioner:

So, Taan Ajaan, I had a question. You mentioned goodwill, quite a lot in the first part. So just to check something with you, my understanding is that goodwill is about intention. So that when we're practicing mettā that we should be thinking about the intention to not do harm. So it's about the action, rather than not focusing just on spreading this sense of goodwill.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

You want to do both. Think about how it would really be good to see people happy. As they go about that, well, what can I do to help them? Because they're going to be the ones that will have to create the causes for happiness through their actions. Is there anything that I can help?

Questioner:

So your focus, is it the intention that you focus on when you're practicing?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Focus on the intention and also on on what you hope- The intention aims at happiness. For everybody.

Questioner:

So, another thing connected with that is that: there's a relationship- am I right?- You think there's a relationship between sila which is a kind of protection, and goodwill that share that same aspect of protecting your mind? Is that right?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Right. Right, because they're both they're both have to do with an intention- it's simply that goodwill, is part of the motivation for for observing the precepts. This is one way of being harmless.

Questioner:

So if you want to develop goodwill, further- as much as possible- could you take it as a concentration practice?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Oh, yes, yes. Then again, this would be something that depends on your individual tendencies, some people will find goodwill an easy topic to use as a concentration practice, other people find it a little bit too vague. And they need the body as a grounding. So this will be an individual matter.

Questioner:



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So when I'm practicing goodwill there's a whole sentence which you can say: May all beings be happy, free from suffering animosity, etc. And, but I find that can be a bit laborious.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Then, just shorten it down to one word, which is mettā. Goodwill.

Questioner:

And you can just keep that word in mind? And if there's no feeling, there's still...as long as there's a thought or intention, because sometimes...

Ajaan Thanissaro:

The intention. Yeah, cuz sometimes the feeling doesn't come, so you've got work on the intention. Because those metta phrases, there are a few that are found in the canon, but they're not nearly as elaborate basically: May all beings be happy. And also may they all act in a skillful way. Because that's going to be the causes for their happiness. And then for a concentration practice, shorten it to one word.

Questioner:

There's just a quick question, if that's okay- about the conversation between Śāriputra and Anandapindika? When he goes through all the different stages- aspects or things not to cling to- anywhere or anything. Is that is that a reflection, like a contemplation to reflect on as a practice? Or is it a concentration practice?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

It's basically a discernment practice. Are you attached to this? Okay: let it go. Attached to this? Let it go. Now, hopefully, Anandapindika had his mind concentrated at the time. Because it requires a fair amount of concentration to see clearly what it is you're attached to.

Questioner:

So a bit of both, maybe reflection. Thank you.

Questioner:

Taan Ajaan, just coming back to a question that was asked before, you know how, apparently in the suttas there's like arahants who commit suicide and that's okay? So given that they've got this undisturbed happiness, I'm guessing that the suffering of the body is just easily managed. Why would they want to kill themselves?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Because they see that they're just a burden to other people. Oh, wow. They don't want to be burdensome. Okay.

Questioner:

I had two other quick questions. One is: for a practitioner, I understand at the moment of death, like your intention should be okay- where can I practice the dhamma the best? Let's go there. But if it's someone who is culturally Buddhist, like my dad, who is not a big practitioner and even listening to talks on nibbāna gets him all agitated, and he's like, "No, no, it's not time yet." For a



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person like that, telling him, "okay, so maybe your intention should be somewhere you could practice. You should go for somewhere, aim for somewhere where you where you need to practice doesn't really feel like it's going to be effective because that's not where his mind's at. So what could I tell him to aim for?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Tell him to aim for a state of being which is harmless.

Questioner:

Harmless. Okay. Could I ask him to aim for somewhere where it's a lot of pleasure hoping that it'll be a deva realm?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Well, you never know what pleasure he's going to latch on to at that moment, this looks pretty good. You know, the story of the two friends who are practicing and one of them dies becomes a deva and the other one becomes a fly in the outhouse. So the deva goes down, where's my friend? What happened to him? And he sees that he's a fly down in the outhouse. So he goes down and talks to him- "What are you doing down here?" And the friend says, "What do you mean, down here? I'm in heaven! See- my head is green. I'm an Indra, you know, and food falls out of the sky more than I can eat falls out of the sky every day." So, don't just go for pleasure, go for harmless pleasure.

Questioner:

Okay. Harmless pleasure. And the other question I had was, so I've been falling into this trap of thinking something is good enough and thinking that it's a skillful way of thinking, but it's also quite an easy mask for laziness, and also not going for high expectations for the day. So what I'm doing now is to kind of reflect at the end of the day, okay, well, Did I did I have a good day where I met my expectations? Or did I just say things are good enough and just kind of like, walked off. But the thing is, when I do that reflection is, there's a relentless voice in my mind, that tells me that I could do better. And I don't know how to manage that. Because there's always things I could do better. So do I just keep driving myself? Because that sounds like a lot of pain.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Tell yourself-I will do one one extra thing better every day. Okay, just just throw a little something for good measure.

Questioner:

Okay. awesome. Thank you.

Questioner:

I want to ask about mindfulness of death, because there's part of me that is already doing it. My birthday is coming up on Tuesday, if I live that long, I'm going to be 70. And that's in my mind. But there's another part of my mind is saying, mindfulness of death, that's heavy. And you know, that sounds weird. And if I told my friends when I was doing this Saturday, they'd go "What?!" So



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there's the ambivalence, and I'm just wondering what I can do. I'm not going to tell my friends about it yet, but what can I do to help myself? To help the resistant part? What can I tell it?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Well, basically, remember, mindfulness of death is not just the Death, Death, Death, Death all the time. But thinking I have the opportunity with this breath to do something good. What can I do with it? That's what it's all about.

Questioner:

Thank you very much.

Questioner:

Taan Ajaan. All this talk about the realms, I'm getting a little bit confused about what I should be aiming for. I thought I heard at one point that the human realm was the best realm to practice in and, but sounds like now I was hearing you say going to some other realms like deva or brahma realm might be better, but what should we be aiming for? I don't trust my own judgment. I'm afraid I'm going to pick the wrong one. Because my mind's not very wise all the time.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Don't choose anything below the human realm? Okay.

Questioner:

Is there one realm, that's the best realm? Or does it depend on your condition?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

They say that the realm of the contented devas is a really good way to practice in. They're the ones that are kind of wise about pleasure, and they they're a sort of farseeing Devas and they can see the dangers of being heedless. Ajaan Suwat made a comment to some of his students who have visited from Bangkok one time, he said, "the human realm is going to get pretty bad. Don't come back to the human realm. Try for a deva realm.

Questioner:

I could see that coming. I mean, I can see that coming in. Thank you.

Questioner:

Thank you for your teaching Bhante. My question is a follow up with Rita about the 12 links of dependent origination, Bhante. I don't understand how we can break the cycle at any point because becoming, or say rebirth- it seems like when we say that it's like we have control over the natural cycle of things. I thought that we should break it at ignorance by having wisdom.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Okay, basically it's bringing wisdom to any of the things- you don't just cut with the scissors, you have to cut with knowledge. And so if you bring knowledge of the four noble truths to any of the factors, basically any of the factors up to clinging- once you've hit clinging you're suffering already. So you have to go back and look at the craving because you have to cut it at the



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craving. So anything from fabrication up through craving, you can cut it as long as you bring it bring knowledge to that particular connection.

Questioner:

Ajaan Geoff, I'm afraid your answer to a previous question about the arahants committing suicide because they thought they were too much of a burden. Makes me think of me. I mean, if they are too much of a burden, I must be you know, 5000 times much more of a burden than...

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Their work is done. They just want to go. Your work isn't done yet. I know.

Questioner:

That's why you have to hang around. Work on it.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

So their work is done. And they've earned the luxury of being able to, bow out. I guess. Okay, I haven't earned that yet. Okay, thank you.

Questioner:

Ajaan Geoff. Sorry, no video. I just want to say that, I think with everything we've heard you say today and as we learn about self and not-self, the way out appears to be fabrications, clearing out the mess fabrications we have in our mind in order to end suffering. What for me whenever I try to attempt to, whenever I see that I'm going off track and I try to change the perceptions, and in order to stay with things as they are in and of themselves and not of the world. Because you know, the corporate world ideas come in diffusing things that relate to the Four Noble Truths. I just wondered if you were going to write a dhamma, that we could all plug into our minds to clear all of this. I mean, it's ongoing. And it really appears to be that, just clearing the fabrications, and pinning them down and refining them is the way out. What can I keep in mind, when I sit down to meditate, or even when I'm walking around? And thoughts come into into my head? What can I keep in mind in order to stay in the in what's happening in and of itself. And in order to stay within the parameters of the Four Noble Truths. I think if I had something like that to put me back on track, I'd be able to say Oh, and if this is the case, and this is it, then this is what I need to do. Can you give me some guidance?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Well, this is why the Buddha has the four frames of reference for establishing mindfulness. You choose any one of the four- I'm just going to make this a constant practice of being with the body in and of itself or feelings and of themselves and have my mind keep returning as much as I can. And you bring in issues of the world only when you have to deal with the people in the world or other issues in the world, try to make this your default mode that you're going to go back to- just feelings in in themselves or the body in and of itself. Try to hold that in mind as your frame of reference.

Questioner:

Okay, so that will help stabilize the mind in any one of those frames? Okay, thank you Ajaan Geoff?



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Questioner:

Thank you very much. Thank you Ajaan. For the generosity, this dharma for us. My question: Is having an aspiration to be reborn in a better place like deva realm or Brahma realm constitute as identity view? Thank you,

Ajaan Thanissaro:

They will, as long as you have that sense of identity, yes, I want to be reborn here, I want to be reborn there, there is a sense of identity that goes with that. But as long as you still need a sense of identity in order to function, you're trying to choose a skillful one.

Questioner:

So in that case, in our practice, we shouldn't aim for rebirth in the good realm, but to liberation, right?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Aim at liberation, and but also- I hate to say this, but- hedge your bets. So you do have something prepared just in case I don't make it all the way to arahantship in this lifetime, I'll have some good things to fall back on, good places to practice.

Questioner:

I see. Thank you very much.

Questioner:

Taan Ajaan. That concludes all the questions. I had a few questions, if you don't mind. Okay. Sure, go ahead. So one was the Buddha's wager versus the Pascal's Wager, which you actually brought up, which I thought was very interesting. I was just thinking a little bit about it. And I noticed that Pascal's wager was more for the end goal that he was driving for was that you would adopt a particular belief, a belief in God in that particular case, whereas in the version of the Buddha's wager that you actually presented, If I understand correctly, there are two versions, both of which are connected. One was basically towards skillfulness of actions towards making you more skillful, but the other one is also a set of beliefs: right view, there are four different gradations of right view all the way culminating in view that nibbāna is possible. Both of these are connected, but I often find that people prefer at least most of the times, people seem to be more comfortable with the one which is expressed just in terms of skillful actions, not so comfortable with the one that is expressed in terms of the four gradations of belief in you know, the four different right views. Can you speak a little bit to that? Can clarify what, how we should arrange our mind around this maybe to understand this a little bit?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Well, the idea that there is nibbana, some people find a little bit too daunting, right? If I really believed in nirvāna, it would require more of me. Or if I really believed in rebirth, it would require more of me. Right? It's interesting that this question is being brought up here at the Sati Center.

Questioner:

I do not belong to the Sati Center.



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Ajaan Thanissaro:

No, but under their aegis, because there was one year that I was saying, "there are all these courses where people say, imagine that you have only one year left to live and you get together as a group and you say, what is the date that we're going to assign as our cutoff date. And imagine what it would be like if this were our last year to live" And I said, what you really ought to do is get a group of people together and say, "What if we really believed in rebirth? Let's live our life for one year as if we really believed in rebirth. And a year after that, someone came up to me and he had been at the previous session, and he said, "You know, when you said that, I really resisted it. So I looked into it. Why do I resist this idea?" And he said "It made me realize I would have to live a much better life."

Questioner:

Okay. the other thing that I had was a question- sorry, I'm taking so long. I thought you said somewhere in between that only four of the five hindrances appear the moment of death...

Ajaan Thanissaro:

They can all appear, it's just that in the canon when they mentioned the hindrances that can appear at death they make explicit reference only to four.

Questioner:

Ah, okay. Okay. So even though...

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Sloth and torpor is implicitly there when the Buddha's saying "Be mindful and alert, don't be slothful, Don't be torpid.

Questioner:

Okay. Then the other question that was coming up was remembering the Triple Gem at the moment of death, is that is that of any value because I've been told that remembering the Buddha dharma and sangha is a kind of right view is it's connected with the right view in a way,

Ajaan Thanissaro:

But what's connected is with conviction. And our conviction is Buddha's why is because what? Because we believe that he really was awakened. So that connects with conviction as a quality that's useful to have.

Questioner:

In that particular context is it more useful to actually just think that okay, awakening is possible? Or is it more useful to think that this was the one sage whose teachings are the ones that actually lead to awakening.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Well, you want to have both: Yes, it is possible, and this is the guy who knows the way.

Questioner:



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Okay, both of those are required. Okay. The one question that was coming around about spirits was that, you know, oftentimes I've heard- at least it when whenever talk around spirits actually starts somewhere among my friends or something- dharma friends. Usually the question comes about, is there anything over there? Is there anything there? And sometimes some people say there is nothing there and can't really pinpoint what is there. Can you point out this is the one that is the spirit that is the one is a spirit? I thought of answering that in this way. I thought, why not be saying, "Okay, what is it clinging to? Is there something that it can cling to? And if there is something that it is clinging to- whatever being is there that is actually clinging to it- That would be the sort of...

Ajaan Thanissaro:

What we think what we think of as spirits is actually kind of an interim rebirth. Right? Again, the rebirth comes because of what? It comes because of becoming and becoming happens, because of clinging.

Questioner:

Okay. Last question. One thing that you mentioned was justice- don't bother about it at the moment of death. Okay, that somebody deserves to suffer at the moment of death. You've written an essay also Goodwill over justice?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Wisdom over justice.

Questioner:

Wisdom over Justice, and seems like justice is at loggerheads with nibbāna. Is that a true statement?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Well, again, where it is at loggerheads, you have to choose the wise path, a lot of times where it's not at loggerheads, you to try to arrange things and try to get things to settle down- figure out who made the mistake and how we can correct it. That kind of justice is okay. But there are certain cases where you're going to have to choose either I'm gonna have to go for justice, or I'm gonna have to go for the wise course. Okay. In that case, I've just got to go for the wise course and let this go. That's where equanimity comes in.

Questioner:

And because, to an extent justice does not really hold at the ultimate level when it comes to nibbāna. We're probably lucky in the sense that we can actually get out if...

Ajaan Thanissaro:

If you had to repay for all your mistakes, you would never get out. So you don't have to make everybody else pay for their mistakes either.

Questioner:

Thank you so much.



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There's some questions in the chat.

Questioner:

Would it be unskillful if one is terminally ill- to die without assistance, but choose to stop eating and drinking?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

That's your choice.

Questioner:

Another question: in some cultures in the past an aged or ill person would choose to be left or die or stop eating in order to benefit the family or tribe so as not to be a burden. Is that not greed or craving or is it delusion?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Okay, um basically, it's you're just being leaving yourself out to die at a natural pace. And here again, this is one of those cases where that's your choice. That time when Ajaan Chah and had that operation, which made him non functional and they kept him going on artificial life support- every Ajaan in Thailand told their students "Don't do that to me. When the time comes to go, just let me go."

Questioner:

The other one is: dear Ajaan, Could you please explain more about why the compassionate choice is not a skillful way for death, the patients all have terminal illness and have six months left, if a Buddhist chooses to die, what will be the result of his or her afterlife?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Okay, basically, this is their chance to continue learning how to deal with pain, a lot of useful lessons can be learned that way. Because you don't know- when you go, if you choose to die- a lot of this desire to die is the idea that it will put an end to your suffering- we don't know, you could go to a worse place. As a human being- and if you're a practitioner, you still have the opportunity to practice so go ahead and keep on practicing.

Questioner:

One more question. Is it okay to receive pain during medication like opiates near death? Would it be unskillful in terms of mindfulness?

Ajaan Thanissaro:

You can take doses that don't interfere with your mindfulness. Now, those places where they allow the patients to control the immediate amount of morphine, that they're getting or whatever, they tend to take a lot less than when the nurses come around and give them shots. Because the nurses have to compensate for the fact that not going to be able to give a shot for another 24 hours or whatever. So they tend to overdose the patients. Whereas when you're on the drip, you can control that better and the patients tend to be more mindful and use a lot less of the painkiller.



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Questioner:

I don't see anything else in the stream.

Questioner:

Ajaan, what's a skillful way to help a person who is at the end of their life, did not study the dharma and has a lot of remorse about things they have done. Thank you so much for your teachings.

Ajaan Thanissaro:

Okay, remind them: the best thing you can do about remorse about things you've done is to make up your mind that you recognize that as a mistake and you resolve not to repeat the mistake and then just have lots and lots of lots of goodwill. Develop Goodwill for all beings. In doing research for this particular issue, I kept coming up again again and again how much goodwill plays a role in dealing with illness, goodwill plays a role in dealing with worry, it plays a role in dealing with ill will, plays a role in dealing with uncertainty. It's one of the ways in which you can prepare yourself for a good rebirth. So the practice of goodwill is a very important part of preparing for aging, illness and death. More than I would have expected. Okay, well, I hope this has been helpful.