

12

(Chakka) Maraṇasati Sutta 2

Or Dutiya (Chakka) Maraṇa-s, sati Sutta

The Second (Sixes) Discourse on the Mindfulness of Death | A 6.20

Theme: The mindfulness of death night and day facilitates awakening

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2013, 2015

1 Introduction

1.1 The (Chakka) Maraṇasati Sutta 2 (A 6.20) is a briefer version of **the (Aṭṭhaka) Maraṇasati Sutta 2** (A 8.74), which lists 8 ways in which a meditator (or any of us) could die. Hence, we should not waste any effort or time in practising for the attaining of liberation.

1.2 The (Chakka) Maraṇasati Sutta 2 gives the following 6 key ways in which we, meditating alone or in the forest, could die:

- (1) we could be stung by a snake, a scorpion, or a centipede;
- (2) we could stumble and fall;
- (3) our food might not agree with us;
- (4) our bile might act up (liver problem);
- (5) our phlegm might act up (lung problem);
- (6) sharp winds in us might act up (muscular or nervous problem);

1.2 The (Aṭṭhaka) Maraṇasati Sutta 2 gives the same 6 key conditions for death, and adds the following as the last two conditions, that is

- (7) we could be attacked by other people; or
- (8) we could be attacked by non-humans (eg wild animals, or unknown causes).

1.3 Hence, we should not waste any effort or time—night [§§4-12] or day [§§13-20]—in practising the mindfulness of death for the attaining of liberation.

— — —

The Second (Sixes) Discourse on The Mindfulness of Death

A 6.20

The Buddha exhorts the monks

1 At one time, the Blessed One was staying in the brick house¹ at Nādika [Ñātika].²

2 There, the Blessed One addressed the monks, “Bhikshus!”

“Bhante!” the monks replied to the Blessed One in assent.

3 “Bhikshus, **the mindfulness of death**, when cultivated, grown, is of great fruit, great benefit, plunging towards nirvana, whose goal is nirvana.”³

¹ **The brick house** (*giṇṇjak’āvasatha*) is mentioned in **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,2.5/2:91 + 2.10/2:96), SD 9; **Jana,vasabha S** (D 18,1/2:200), SD 62.3; **Cūḷa Go,siṅga S** (M 31,1/1:205), SD 41.11; V 1:232. It is specially mentioned because generally other buildings are made of wood (MA 2:235).

² **Nādikā** or **Ñātikā** (according to Buddhaghosa, two villages of the same name on the same river bank) was on the highroad between Kuṭṭigāmaka and Vaiśālī (V 1:230 ff; D 2:90 f, 200; M 1:205). The Buddha’s instructions to Ānanda given here are also recorded in the Saṃyutta, which has **Ñātika** as the place-name (S 5:356 ff.). Comys to both the Dīgha and the Saṃyutta confirm it as “Ñātika,” explaining that “There were two villages close by the same pond, inhabited by the sons of two brothers. Thus, both of them were called Ñātika (‘of the relatives’)” (DA 2:543; SA 2:74).

³ *Maraṇa-s, sati bhikkhave bhāvitā bahulī, katā maha-p, phalā hoti mahānisaṃsā amat’ogadhā amata, pariyoṣānā.* Significantly, the mindfulness of death, properly done, can lead to the attaining of nirvana: see [§3].

Night reflection

4 How, bhikshus, is *the mindfulness of death*, when cultivated, grown, of great fruit, great benefit, plunging towards nirvana, whose goal is nirvana?

5 Here, bhikshus, when day has ended and night has fallen,⁴ a monk reflects thus:⁵

‘Many are the causes of [conditions for] my death!

bahukā kho me paccayā maraṇassa

- (1) A snake might sting me, or
a scorpion might sting me, or
a centipede might sting me.

*ahi vā maṃ ḍaṃseyya
vicchiko vā maṃ ḍaṃseyya
sata,paḍī vā maṃ ḍaṃseyya*

REFRAIN:

This would be the death of me,
this would be an obstacle for me!

*tena me assa kāla,kiriyā
so mama ’ssa antarāyo*

- 6 (2) I might stumble and fall, or
(3) my food might not agree with me, or
(4) my bile might act up, or
(5) my phlegm might act up, or
(6) sharp winds in me might act up.

*upakkhalitvā vā papateyyaṃ,
bhattaṃ vā me bhuttaṃ vyāpajjeyya
pittaṃ vā me kuppeyya
semhaṃ vā me kuppeyya
satthakā vā me vātā kuppeyyuṃ*

REFRAIN:

This would be the death of me,⁷ or
would be an obstacle to me!’

*tena me assa kāla,kiriyā
so mama assa antarāyo ’ti.*

Self-review: Death in the night

7 Bhikshus, it should be reflected by this monk, thus:

‘Are there in me bad unwholesome states that are unabandoned, that would be an obstacle should I die in the night?’⁸

8 If, bhikshus, a monk reflecting in this way, knows thus:

‘There *are* in me bad unwholesome states that have not been abandoned, that would be an obstacle should I die in the night.’

9 Then, bhikshus, that monk should work on the abandoning of just those bad unwholesome states, with extraordinary enthusiasm and effort and industry and great perseverance and relentlessness and mindfulness and clear comprehension.⁹

10 PARABLE OF THE BURNING HEAD. Bhikshus, just as one whose turban is ablaze, or whose head is ablaze, would act with extraordinary enthusiasm and effort and industry and great perseverance and relentlessness and mindfulness and clear comprehension to put out the fire on that turban or that head,¹⁰

even so, bhikshus, *that monk should work on the abandoning of just those bad [321] unwholesome states, with extraordinary enthusiasm and effort and industry and great perseverance and relentlessness and mindfulness and clear comprehension.*

⁴ *Patihitāya* or *paṭihitāya* is past part of *patidahati* (Skt *pratidadhāti*: SED sv *prati-dhā*, “to commence, begin, approach”). Comy glosses it as “has reached” (*paṭipannāya*, AA 3:352). This is a rare form, found only in A 6.20 and A 8.74. It is found neither in PED nor in CPD.

⁵ *Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu divase nikkhante rattiyaṃ patihitāya* [Be *patihitāya*; Be:Ka *patigatāya*; Ce *pahītāya*; Ee Se *paṭihitāya*] *iti paṭisañcikkhati*. On *patihitāya* or *paṭihitāya*, see prec n.

⁶ In practical reflection, we can, if we wish, add the refrain after each of the other 5 lines. Quoted at Vism 8.26.2 @ SD 48.14.

⁷ “The death of me,” usu idiomatic, alluding to something disastrous, eg, “This task will be the death of me!” Here, however, it is to be taken literally.

⁸ *Atthi nu kho me pāpakā akusalā dhammā appahīnā, ye me assu rattiṃ kālaṃ karontassa antarāyāyāti.*

⁹ *Tena bhikkhave bhikkhunā tesam yeva pāpakānaṃ akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ pahānāya adhimatto chando ca vāyāmo ca ussāho ca ussoḥhī ca appaṭivānī ca sati ca sampajaññaṃ ca karaṇīyaṃ.*

¹⁰ This parable recurs at **Cela S** (S 56.34), regarding the urgency of realizing the 4 noble truths (S 56.34/5:441).

Self-review: Inner purification

11 If, bhikshus, a monk reflecting in this way, knows thus:

‘There are *no* bad unwholesome states in me that are unabandoned, that would be an obstacle should I die in the night.’

12 Then, bhikshus, he should dwell in that very zeal and joy, training night and day in wholesome states.¹¹

Day reflection

13 Here, bhikshus, when night has ended and day has dawned, a monk reflects thus:

‘Many are the causes of my death [the conditions for my death]!’

(1) A snake might sting me, or a scorpion might sting me, or a centipede might sting me.

That would be the death of me, this would an obstacle for me!

14 *(2) I might stumble and fall, or*

(3) my food might not agree with me, or

(4) my bile might act up, or

(5) my phlegm might act up, or

(6) sharp winds in me might act up.

This would be the death of me, or this would be an obstacle to me!’

Self-review: Death in the day

15 Bhikshus, it should be reflected by this monk, thus:

‘Are there in me bad unwholesome states that are unabandoned, that would be an obstacle should I die in the day?’¹²

16 If, bhikshus, a monk reflecting in this way, knows thus:

‘There *are* in me bad unwholesome states that have not been abandoned, that would be an obstacle should I die in the day.’

17 *Then, bhikshus, that monk should work on the abandoning of just those bad unwholesome states, with extraordinary enthusiasm and effort and industry and great perseverance and relentlessness and mindfulness and clear comprehension.*

18 PARABLE OF THE BURNING HEAD. *Bhikshus, just as one whose turban is ablaze, or whose head is ablaze, would act with extraordinary enthusiasm and effort and industry and great perseverance and relentlessness and mindfulness and clear comprehension to put out the fire on that turban or that head,*

even so, bhikshus, that monk should work on the abandoning of just those bad unwholesome states, with extraordinary enthusiasm and effort and industry and great perseverance and relentlessness and mindfulness and clear comprehension.

Self-review: Inner purification

19 If, bhikshus, a monk reflecting in this way, knows thus:

‘There are *no* bad unwholesome states in me [322] that are unabandoned, that would be an obstacle should I die in the day.’

20 Then, bhikshus, he should dwell in that very zeal and joy, training night and day in wholesome states.

21 Thus, bhikshus, the mindfulness of death, when cultivated, grown, is of great fruit, great benefit, plunging towards nirvana, whose goal is nirvana.

— evaṃ — 141217 141222 141227r 150515 160108

¹¹ *Tena bhikkhave bhikkhunā ten’eva pīti, pāmojjena vihātabbam aho, rattānusikkhinā kusalesu dhammesu.*

¹² *Atthi nu kho me pāpakā akusalā dhammā appahīnā, ye me assu rattim kalam karontassa antarāyāyāti.*