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Maraṇa Sati Kathā

The Talk on the Mindfulness of Death | Vism 8.1-41 = Vism pt 7
 Theme: The theory, practice and benefits of the mindfulness of death
 Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2015

1 Summary and highlights

1.1 This is a study in a spiritual exercise on the mindfulness of death by the best known of early Buddhist commentators, **Buddhaghosa** (flourished c 370-450 CE). It is written from the commentarial viewpoint, but much of it is based on the suttas. This study on the mindfulness of death covers the whole of chapter 8 of his magnum opus, **the Visuddhi, magga**, “the path of purification,” an exegetical encyclopaedia on early Buddhism, including the views of Buddhaghosa and his times.

1.2 [§§1-3] The study opens with a definition of death, and the scope of Buddhaghosa’s study. By death here is meant that of the unawakened, that is, timely death and untimely death. Not included are the passing away of arhats and the metaphorical sense of the death.

1.3 [§§4-7] The study then explains how the meditation should be done for the best effects, and how to avoid the arising of negative emotions. [§8] Eight methods of recollecting death are then listed, and each of them explained in some detail, along with figures and sutta quotes [§§9-41], as follows:

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------|
| (1) by way of facing a murderer; | <i>vadhaka, paccupaṭṭhānato</i> | §§9-13 |
| (2) by the failure of success; | <i>sampatti, vipattito</i> | §§14-15 |
| (3) by inference; | <i>upasaṃharaṇato</i> | §§16-24 |
| (4) by the body being shared by many; | <i>kāya, bahu, sādharmaṇato</i> | §§25-26 |
| (5) by way of life’s frailty; | <i>āyu, dubbalato</i> | §§27-28 |
| (6) by the absence of signs; | <i>animittato</i> | §§29-34 |
| (7) by being limited by time; and | <i>addhāna, paricchato</i> | §§35-38 |
| (8) by the shortness of the moment. | <i>khaṇa, parittato</i> | §§39 |
| Benefits and conclusion | | §§40-41 |

1.4 MINDFULNESS OF DEATH IN PERSPECTIVE

| <u>The 10 recollections (<i>anussati</i>)</u> | <u>Temperament</u> | <u>Stillness level</u> |
|---|---------------------|---|
| 1. recollection of the Buddha | faith | access |
| 2. recollection of the Dharma | | |
| 3. recollection of the Sangha | | |
| 4. recollection of moral virtue | | |
| 5. recollection of charity | | |
| 6. recollection of the gods | | |
| 7. mindfulness of death | intellectual | 1 st dhyana |
| 8. mindfulness of the body | lustful | |
| 9. mindfulness of the breath | delusive/discursive | |
| 10. recollection of peace | intellectual | |
| | | 1 st -4 th dhyana |
| | | access |

1.4.1 The mindfulness of death (*maraṇa-s, sati* or its later form *maraṇānussati*)¹ is one of the 10 well known “recollections” (*anusati*).² They are called “recollections” because we mindfully direct our minds to the meditation, such as the breath, and mindfully breathe in and out. Or, in the case of the mindfulness of death, we recollect it in different ways, again and again, so that a sense of spiritual urgency (*saṁvega*) moves us to keep up our meditation.

1.4.2 On these 10 recollections, the mindfulness of the breath is the key meditation, and is the only one that is able to bring us to the 4th dhyana. The mindfulness of the body can bring us only to the 1st dhyana. The rest are “helping meditations” that can bring us only up to access stillness, that is, just short of dhyana.

1.4.3 The helping meditations, including the mindfulness of death, are suitable and easy for meditators of different temperaments. Those who are faith-inclined would find any of the first 6 recollections as suitable methods to start with. The mindfulness of death is especially suitable for the intellectually inclined. The mindfulness of the body is suitable for the lustful personality. Breath meditation is suitable for most people, but most suitable for the delusive or discursive (those troubled by a lot of thinking). The recollection of peace is suitable for the intellectually inclined.

1.4.4 The mindfulness of death should not be done by itself. It should be balanced with the cultivation of lovingkindness, especially at the end of every session. This balance prevents any chance of feeling morbid or negative due to an imbalanced practice. In fact, whenever we feel that the mindfulness of death is difficult or making us feel negative, we should switch to cultivating lovingkindness.

If, for any reason, we do not feel a liking for the mindfulness of death, we can always switch to any of the meditation methods which is more suitable for us. For effective meditation, we should always begin with a proper teacher to guide us along. We should not experiment with the mindfulness of death on our own, especially without any teacher. The rule of thumb is always practise it with lovingkindness.

2 Rare occasion for recollection

2.1 While we can today relate to most of the methods discussed by Buddhaghosa, most of us would have at least some difficulty with methods (4) and (8). **Method (4)** is a reflection on the body being “shared” or infested by various parasites [§§25-26], well known in Buddhaghosa’s time. In our own time, with higher standards of hygiene and health, we might find his description somewhat quaint, even inapplicable.

2.2 However, this reflection is still helpful for, say, those undergoing national service training or camping outdoors who are afflicted with such difficulties. Such a reflection also helps them to deal with them with mindfulness and care.

¹ While the suttas and older texts use the phrase *maraṇa, sati*, the form *maraṇānussati* is found in Miln 332, Kvu 155 and later works.

² The 10 recollections come in 2 sets: the first 6 are the recollections of the 3 jewels (*buddhānussati*, *dharmānussati*, *saṅghānussati*), of moral virtue (*sīlānussati*), of charity (*cāgānussati*), and of the gods (*devatānussati*) (D 33,2.2(19); A 3.70, 6.10, 11.12), and the last 4 recollections, of death, of the body (*kāya, gata, sati*), of the breath (*ānāpāna, sati*), and of peace (*upasamānussati*) (A 1.16, 20.2). The first are detailed in Vism 7, while the last 4 in Vism 8. For a full list of the 40 meditations, see *Bhāvanā*, SD 15.1 (Fig 8.1).

2.3 There are also occasions, when we do hear of people in poorer nations, or even in our own community, or in less expected circumstances, we ourselves, being afflicted by such parasites. This then would be the proper occasion for such a reflection or recollection,

3 Existence, time and death

3.1 Especially challenging is method (8), the last, given by Buddhaghosa, that is, the “**the shortness of the moment**” [§39], which is based on the Abhidhamma theory of moments (*khaṇa, vāda*), a metaphysical theory not found in the suttas. Buddhaghosa describes our life as being but a “moment” (*khaṇa*), comparing it to the point of contact (or tangent) of a wheel on level ground (or a circle on a plane), “Just as a chariot’s wheel when turning turns only on one spot on its tyre; when remaining still, stands on only one spot, too” [§39.2].³

3.2 The moments here refer to the mind, which is the “life” inhabiting the body, merely an appendage to that life. When the mind ceases, or rather moves out of the body permanently, the body dies. In an interesting sense, the mind never dies, but only keeps moving on, taking up new bodies. It is the physical body that is cast off each time a person dies. [§39.3]

3.3 In Abhidhamma metaphysics, reflecting sutta teachings, only the present exists, as Buddhaghosa puts it in grammatical terms: in the past, the mind only “lived” (past tense), and in the future, it “will live” (future tense); only in the present, it “lives” [§39.4]. This theory, in fact, reflects the key ideas of the four Bhadd’eka, ratta Suttas (M 131-134), all of which make this same statement:

**Let one not pursue⁴ [not dwell on] the past,
nor hold fond hope for the future.**
for the past is gone,⁵
and the future has not yet come.⁶

*Atītaṃ nānvāgameyya
n’appaṭikaṅkhe anāgataṃ;
yad atītaṃ pahīnaṃ taṃ
appattañ ca anāgataṃ.*

Only this present state⁷
(as it arises) one sees that with insight;
invincible, unshakable,⁸
having known that, let one be sure of it.

*paccuppannañ ca yo dhammaṃ,
tattha tattha vipassati;
asaṃhīraṃ asaṅkappaṃ,
taṃ vidvā manubrūhaye.*

(M 131,3), SD 8.9⁹

³ On the Abhidhamma theory of moments, see SD 17.2b (1).

⁴ “Let one...not pursue [not dwell on]” (*anvāgameyya*), pot 3 sg of *anvāgameti* (caus of *anvāgacchati* = *anu + ā-gacchati*), lit “to let come back,” ie to wish something back (CPD), to run after, dwell on. [This tr was suggested by Kumara Bhikkhu of Malaysia, email 17 Aug 2013.]

⁵ Alt tr: “For the past has passed away.”

⁶ Alt tr: “And the future is yet unreached”; poetically, “the future never comes.”

⁷ Comy: One should contemplate each state as it arises by way of the 7 contemplations of insight (ie by way of insight into impermanence, suffering, not-self, revulsion, dispassion, cessation, relinquishment) (MA 5:1 f).

⁸ Comy explains that this is said for the purpose of showing insight (*vipassanā*) and counter-insight (*paṭivipassanā*) [ie, the application of the principles of insight to the act of consciousness that exercises the function of insight, on the basis of which it is possible to attain arhathood: see M 52,4/1:350, 121,11/3:108; also M:ÑB 1333 n1143.] For insight is “**immovable, unshakable**” [following Sn:N 1149] because it is not defeated or shaken [moved] by lust and other defilements (MA 5:2). Elsewhere, “immovable, unshakable” are epithets of Nirvana (**Sn 1149**) or of the liberated mind (**Tha 469**). Here, however, it seems to refer to a stage in the development of insight. The recurrence of the verb *samhīrati* [8, 9] “suggests that the intended meaning is contemplation of the present state without being misled into the adoption of a view of self” (M:ÑB 1343 n1213).

3.4 In §39.4 verse (1) life is defined as “a single mind-moment” (*eka,citta*), that is, the present, the only true reality we can work with in spiritual terms. We can see its impermanence because it “moves quickly by.” The present seems to be there, because of our memory (*sati*) and the inherent continuity (*santati*) of the mental states (*dhamma*). According to the Abhidhamma, these states arise and at once pass away, flitting by like single frames of a celluloid film and makes sense only in their movement. And yet nothing is really moving in the “movies”; only our mind makes it so.

Verse (2) addresses the past, the dead and gone, all comprising of the aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness). Once they are gone, they do not ever arise again. However, our mind tends to squint or colour the mind-moments as they arise in the present. This is what creates and defines our “life.” We *were* our past, but we *are* not the past: as such, we are the same yet not the same person. If we reflect on this, we might just get a glimpse of the nature of non-self.

Verse (3) refers to the future, the life (or mind, or “self”) to come. We continue to arise because we have a mind. In an important sense, it is the mind that is reborn, and continues to be. In the line, “**When the mind dissolves, the world dies,**” the mind (*citta*) can mean either our attention or our life itself. Wherever we direct our attention, that is, whichever of the 6 physical senses (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind) we attend to, the mind works to create our world.¹⁰

Such an attention tends to be habitual, as one act breeds another, and their fruits accumulate upon us. All this feeds our life, and we are caught in the cyclic rut of karma and samsara. Only when the mind dies—only when we learn to turn the mind away from such unwholesome sense-objects (*ārammaṇa*), do we have any real control of our lives. Such concepts help us to understand the real problem with which we have to deal.

4 How the mindfulness of death works

4.1 THE CONCLUSION [§40] gives a good idea of the spiritual benefits of the mindfulness of death. The first benefit mentioned is that the mindfulness of death, when properly done by any of the 8 methods listed, leads to the suppressing of the mental hindrances,¹ which, in turn, brings the arising of one or more dhyana-factors [§40.1; 4.2].

This means that no full-fledged dhyana arises, but the state is very calm and blissful. It is very close to dhyana, so that the mindfulness of death is said to bring about “access” (*upacāra*) stillness [§40.5]. However, when we let go of all lingering thoughts, and simply “feel” (directly experience) the meditation object, then dhyana would arise. [§40.4].

4.2 THE DHYANA-FACTORS are initial application (*vitakka*), sustained application (*vicāra*), zest (*pīti*), joy (*sukha*), and one-pointedness of mind (*ek’aggatā*).¹¹ When all these are present, dhyana is said to have arisen. However, in the first dhyana, one-pointedness of mind, by way of full-fledged samadhi, has not yet arisen, on account of the presence of residual thoughts, that is, initial application and sustained application.

In the first dhyana, its first four dhyana-factors are said to have arisen “born of solitude” (*viveka,ja*), that is, as a result of the 5 mental hindrances being suppressed. Technically, full-fledged samadhi arises only in the second dhyana onwards. Be that as it may, the first dhyana is still a very profoundly still and joyful state, compared to our daily mundane awareness.

⁹ For other related verses, see SD 8.9 (5).

¹⁰ See **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

¹¹ See **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (5).

4.3 SAMVEGA

4.3.1 The mindfulness of death, like the 6 inspirational meditation,¹² does not lead to dhyana but only to access (*upacāra*) or “neighbourhood concentration,” that is, a good level of mental stillness not amounting to dhyana. Buddhaghosa explains that this limitation is “**on account of the occurrence of a sense of urgency [samvega]¹³ in the essence of reality**” [§40.2].

4.3.2 Spiritual urgency or samvega is an overwhelming emotion of concern which, in simple terms, is the arising of compassion towards a situation when we are unable to act to relieve or prevent pain and loss from arising in living beings (including ourselves), just as the young Siddhattha feels troubled by the first 3 sights of an old man, a sick man and a dead man.¹⁴

4.3.3 A more subtle form of spiritual urgency, known as “**restlessness**” (*uddhacca*) may arise in connection with the Dharma not reaching out to others, or their inability or unwillingness to heed the Dharma. A famous example here is that of **Piṅgiya**, one of the 16 youths, pupils of Bāvarī. Upon listening to the Buddha’s teaching, he becomes only a non-returner.¹⁵ He fails to attain arhathood because at that crucial moment, he thinks of his maternal uncle, Bāvarī, of how he would benefit from the instruction.¹⁶

4.4 BENEFITS OF THE MINDFULNESS OF DEATH

4.4.1 Although the mindfulness of death may not, in itself, bring about dhyana, it blesses us with a number of other spiritual benefits [§41]. We no more see delight in any kind of existence, animate or inanimate, understanding their true nature of impermanence.

We neither long for life, much less rebirth, in the sense that we are happy just the way we are, without any need of external emotional support. This sentiment is beautifully expressed by the arhat Sāriputta, thus:

I delight not in death, nor do I delight in life; I shall cast aside this body fully aware and mindful.
I delight not in death, nor do I delight in life; I await my time as a servant his wages. (Tha 1002 f)

4.4.2 Understand that life must end in death, we see the true nature of impermanence in life. We clearly value **good** above bad, and, as such, have the moral courage (*vesārajja*)¹⁷ to censure the bad and guide the foolish. We are happy to live more simply, such as not collecting and storing things for their own sake. We understand that we are well off, not in what we *have*, but in how we *are* truly happy with the usefulness of things and our ability in bringing happiness to others, too. As such, we are naturally generous, free from avarice.

4.4.3 The most important benefit of the mindfulness of death, in terms of spiritual progress, must surely be that it reinforces in us **the perception of impermanence**. This alone, when habitually cultivated, is sufficient for us to gain streamwinning, the first step to awakening, in this life itself.¹⁸ Beyond this, we

¹² The 6 are the recollections (*anussati*) of the 3 jewels, of moral virtue, of charity, and of the gods: see SD 15. For a list of the 40 meditations, see **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (Fig 8.1).

¹³ On spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*), see SD 1.11 (3); SD 9 (7f).

¹⁴ On the 4 sights, see **Sukhumala S** (A 3.38/1:145 f), SD 5.16(19.4.2) & **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16.19d.

¹⁵ Sn 1120; SnA 2:602; Nc:Be 188. See also SD 45.11 (2.2.2.3).

¹⁶ On *dharm’uddhacca*, see SD 41.5 (5); SD 32.7 (2.1.4, 2.2.3); SD 41.4 (2.2.1).

¹⁷ On moral courage (*vesārajja*), see SD 28.9a (3).

¹⁸ See **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

also go on to master the perception of suffering (*dukkha,saññā*) and of non-self (*anatta,saññā*), which helps us progress in our meditation and further up the path to awakening.

4.4.4 Those who have no understanding of the nature of death, or avoid learning about it, are likely to reinforce their fear and worsen their confusion. The false teachings and superstitions they have been feeding on, would return to terrify and confuse them, especially when they have not cultivated any positive mental states while they lived.

If we practise the mindfulness of death, even if we do not awaken in this life itself, we would be re-born in some happy, even heavenly, state in the hereafter, and we will still somehow be in touch with the Dharma. As such, it is wise to be diligent in the practice of the mindfulness of death.

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Maraṇa Sati Kathā

Talk on the Mindfulness of Death

Vism ch 8 or Vism part 7

Definition

1 [229] Now comes the description of the cultivation of the mindfulness of death, listed next.¹⁹

2 Here, **death** (*maraṇa*) is the interruption of the life-faculty within a single existence.

But death as cutting-off (*samuccheda,marāṇa*), that is, an arhat's cutting-off of the rounds of suffering, is not intended here; nor is momentary death (*khaṇika marāṇa*), that is the momentary breaking-up of formations, nor the conventional death (*sammuti,marāṇa*) in such expressions as “a dead tree,” “dead metal,” and so on.

2.2 What is intended, however, is of two kinds, that is, timely death (*kāla,marāṇa*) and untimely death (*akāla,marāṇa*).

Here, **timely death** occurs with the exhaustion of merit, or with the exhaustion of life, or both.

Untimely death occurs on account of destructive karma [“cutting-off” karma] (*upacchedaka,kamma*).

3 Here, death can occur as a result of all the rebirth-generating karma's having finished ripening despite the presence of supporting conditions for extending the life-continuity of a life-span. This is **death through the exhaustion of merit** (*puñña-k,khayena marāṇa*).

3.2 Death can occur on account of the exhaustion of normal life-span (*āyu*) of people today, which is limited to about 100 years, through the lack of attainments such as destiny,²⁰ time,²¹ food,²² and so on. This is **death through the exhaustion of life-span** (*āyu-k,khayena marāṇa*).

3.3 The death of those whose continuity is interrupted by karma capable of making them fall (*cāvana*) from any place instantly, as in the case of Dūsī Māra,²³ the rajah Kalābu,²⁴ and so on,²⁵

¹⁹ For the full list, see Vism 3.105/110 f.

²⁰ Such as the devas (VismT 236).

²¹ Such as the first inhabitants of earth (VismT 236).

²² Such as the Uttara,kurus, and so on (VismT 236).

²³ M 1:333, 337; Tha 1187 (Dussī).

²⁴ J 3:39, 5:135; Miln 201.

²⁵ Comy says that “and so on” here includes the yaksha Nanda, the youth Nanda and others (VismT 236). See MA 4:8 and AA ad A 2.1.3.

or, the death of those whose (life's) continuity is interrupted by assaults with weapons, and so on, due to past karma. [230] This is **untimely death**.

3.4 All this comes under the cutting-off of the life-faculty in the way stated. Thus, **the mindfulness of death** (*maraṇa,sati*) is the recalling of death, regarded as the cutting-off of the life-faculty.

Cultivation

4 One who wishes to cultivate this should go into solitary retreat, and exercise wise attention, thus, "Death will occur; the life-faculty will be cut off," or "Death, death."

5 On the other hand, for him who proceeds unwisely, **sorrow** (*soka*) arises when recalling the death of beloved people.

5.2 **Joy** (*pānojjā*) arises in recalling the death of undesirable persons, just as it arises in those with enmity who recall the death of their enemies.

5.3 **Urgency** (*saṁvega*) does not arise in recalling the death of neutral people, just as it arises not in a corpse-cremator on seeing dead bodies.

5.4 **Fear** (*santāsa*) arises in recalling our own death, as it arises in a timid person on seeing a murderer brandishing a sword.

6 All this occurs to one lacking mindfulness, urgency, knowledge.

6.2 Therefore, look around at beings killed or dead, and reflecting on the death of those who had previously seen success.

6.3 And applying mindfulness, urgency, knowledge, he should proceed with the attention, "Death will occur, and so on."

6.4 For, proceeding thus, he acts wisely. It means that he proceeds in the right way.²⁶

7 When anyone proceeds in just this way, their hindrances are abandoned. Mindfulness is surely established with death as the meditation-object, and the meditation attains access (concentration).

8 ways of recollecting death

8 For those who find that they are unable to go so far, then, should recollect death in these 8 ways:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| (1) by being face-to-face with a murderer; | <i>vadhaka,paccupaṭṭhānato</i> |
| (2) by the loss of success; | <i>sampatti,vipattito</i> |
| (3) by comparison; | <i>upasaṁharaṇato</i> |
| (4) by the body being shared by many; | <i>kāya,bahu,sādhāraṇato</i> |
| (5) by way of the life's frailty; | <i>āyu,dubbalato</i> |
| (6) by the absence of signs; | <i>animittato</i> |
| (7) by being limited by time; and | <i>addhāna,paricchedato</i> |
| (8) by the shortness of the moment. | <i>khaṇa,parittato</i> |

(1) BY WAY OF FACING A MURDERER (*vadhaka,paccupaṭṭhānato*)

9 Here, as regards "by being face-to-face with a murderer," he should do it by recollecting thus, "Just as a murderer appears with a sword, thinking, 'I shall cut this man's head off!' and he applies it to his neck, so death appears."

Why? Because it comes with life, and it takes away life.

²⁶ Cf "attention as the right means" (*upāya,manasikāra*, MA 1:64).

10 Just as mushroom buds sprout out bearing dirt on their heads, even so beings arise bearing decay and death.²⁷ For, surely, their rebirth-consciousness reaches old age as soon as they have arisen and, just like a stone fallen from a hill-top, **[231]** breaks, along with their associated aggregates. Thus, momentary death comes with birth.

10.2 Even so, it is certain that a person who is born, must die. Thus, the death meant here comes together with birth.

11 Therefore, this being, from the time it is born, surely goes towards death, not turning back for even a moment wherever it is,

11.2 just as the risen sun must surely head for setting, or

11.3 just as a mountain torrent sweeps by in a mighty stream, flowing on, carrying everything with it, not turning back even a bit.²⁸

Hence, it is said,

Ayo,ghara Jātaka (J 510/4:494)

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|------|--|--|
| 11.4 | <i>Yam eka,rattim paṭhamam gabbhe vasati māṇavo abbhuttḥito'va so yati²⁹ sa gaccham na nivattatīti.</i> | Even for a day, the very first, that a man dwells in a womb, he has arisen: he only keeps moving, he keeps going, never turning back. |
|------|--|--|

12 Like the drying up of rivulets in the summer heat,
like the falling of fruits from trees when the sap reaches the stalk at dawn,³⁰
like the breaking of clay-pots by the tapping of a hammer,³¹
like the evaporating of dew-drops at the touch of the sun's rays—
he is near death.
So, it is said,

Āyu Sutta 1 (S 4.10/1:109), SD 61.8

| | | |
|------|--|---|
| 12.2 | <i>Accayanti aho,rattā jīvitam uparujjhati āyu khīyati maccānam kunnadīnam'va odakam</i> | The days and nights slip by, life ceases; Mortals decay with age like water in rivulets. |
|------|--|---|

Salla Sutta (Sn 576 f)³²

| | | |
|------|---|---|
| 12.3 | <i>Phalānam iva pakkānam pāto papatato bhayam</i> | As ripe fruits are in danger of falling at dawn, |
|------|---|---|

²⁷ *Pāto āpo,rasānugata,bandhanānam duma,phalānam patanam viya, muggarābhitāḷitānam mattika,bhājanānam bhedo viya.* VismṬ adds that the mushroom may sometimes be without the soil, but beings are never without death (VismṬ:Be 1:289).

²⁸ *Yathā vā nadī pabbateyyā sīgha,sotā hārahārīni sandate va vattate va isakam pi na nivattati.* Cf **Araka S** (A 7.70/4:137), SD 16.17, & Comy; JPTS 1906-1907:100.

²⁹ HOS *so yati*; Ce *sayati*. HOS = Harvard Oriental Series, ie, *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosācariya*, ed H C Warren, rev D Kosambi, Harvard Univ, 1950.

³⁰ *Pāto āpo,rasānugata,bandhanānam duma,phalānam patanam viya.*

³¹ *Mugga,rābhi tāḷitānam mattika,bhājanānam bhedo viya.*

³² Sn has these vll: ...papatānā...jātānā... || *katā mattika,bhājanā | sabbe bhedana,pariyantā...*

*evaṃ jātāna maccānaṃ
niccaṃ maraṇato bhayaṃ*

even so, are mortals, being born,
are always in danger of dying. (= J 461/1617/4:127)

*yathā'pi kumbha,kārassa
kataṃ mattika,bhājanaṃ
[khuddakañ ca mahantañ ca
yaṃ pakkaṃ yañ ca āmakam]
sabbam bhedana,pariyantaṃ
evaṃ maccāna jīvitam*

Just as pots, made of clay,
fashioned by the potter's hands,
[both small and large,
both baked and raw,]³³
all end up broken—
even so, is the life of mortals.

Yuvañjaya Jātaka (J 460/1608/4:122)³⁴

12.4 *Ussāvo'va tiṇ'aggamhi
suriyass'uggamanam pati,
evam āyu manussānaṃ
mā maṃ amma nivārayāti.*

Just as dew on the grass-tips
vanishes when the sun rises at dawn,
“Such is the life of humans:
hinder me not, mother.”

13 So, this death, which arises with birth, is like a murderer brandishing a sword; like that murderer **[230]** putting his sword to the neck, it takes life away, never returning to bring it back.³⁵

13.2 As such, from coming together with birth, and from the taking away of life, death looms before us like a murderer brandishing a sword.

Thus we should recollect death as being face to face with us.

(2) BY THE FAILURE OF SUCCESS³⁶ (*sampatti,vipattitato*)

14 Here, success [what we have] only shines as long as it is overcome by failure.³⁷

14.2 And that which we call success would never stand out of failure's reach.

Therefore,

14.3 *Sakalam medinim³⁸ bhutvā
datvā koṭi,sataṃ sukhī
addhāmalaka,mattassa
ante issarataṃ gato*

Having conquered the entire world,
giving a thousand million, he is happy.
But in the end, his realm came to
but merely half a myrobalan.

14.4 *Ten'eva deha,bandhena
puññamhi khayam āgate*

Yet, bound by the body,
when his merits come to an end,

³³ Cf S 3.22/1:97; Dh 40. Prec line and this omitted in Ce & Sn. See D 2:120 n4.

³⁴ This Jātaka relates how Yuvañjaya, son of king Sabba,datta of Benares, upon seeing how dew in the park vaporizes in the park he is driving through, renounces the world to be an ascetic. This story is told in reference to the Buddha's renunciation to some monks who marvel at his great sacrifice (J 4:119 ff). The story of Yuvañjaya (Yudhañjaya) is also given in Cariyā,pitaka (C 3.1/242-263/91; CA 181-185), highlighting the perfection of renunciation (*nekkhamma,pāramitā*). Cf **Araka S** (A 7.70/4:137).

³⁵ *Evaṃ ukkhitt,āsiko vadhako viya saha,jātiyā āgataṃ pan'etaṃ maranaṃ gīvāya asim cārayamāno so vadhako jīvitam harati yeva, anāharitvā na nivattati.*

³⁶ Lit, “the depriving of what we have.”

³⁷ *Idha sampatti nāma tāvad eva sobhati, yāva naṃ vipatti nābhibhavati.*

³⁸ Be Ee HOS so; Be:Ka Se *medanīm*; Ce *vedinīm*. *Medinī* (f), from √MID, to be friendly) is a late poetic term for the earth (Vism 125; Mahv 5.185, 15.47). Cf J 4:233.

*maraṇābhimuko so'pi
asoko sokam āgato'ti*

in the face of death, he, too,
Asoka,³⁹ the sorrowless one, faces sorrow.

- 15 Furthermore, all health ends in illness, *sabbaṃ ārogyaṃ vyādhi,pariyosānaṃ*
all youth ends in decay, *sabbaṃ yobbaṇaṃ jarā,pariyosānaṃ*
all life ends in death. *sabbaṃ jīvitaṃ maraṇa,pariyosānaṃ*

15.2 Indeed, all of the world that come with birth follow decay, overcome by illness, struck down by death.⁴⁰

15.3 Hence, it is said,

Pabbatūpama Sutta (S 3.25/441-443/1:102)

(1) *Yathā'pi selā vipulā
nabhaṃ āhacca pabbatā
samannā anupariyeyyūṃ
nippoṭhenta catu-d,disā*

Like a mountain of solid rock,
piercing into the sky,
were to advance from every quarter
crushing everything,

(2) *evaṃ jarā ca maccu ca
adhivattanti pānino
khattiye brāhmaṇe vesse
sudde caṇḍāla,pukkuse
na kiñci parivajjeti
sabba,vevābhimaddati.*

even so, decay and death
crushes breathing beings,
the nobles, the religious, the merchants,
the workers, the outcastes, the scavengers—
sparing no one at all,
crushing all alike.

(3) *Na tattha hatthinaṃ bhūmi
na rathānaṃ na pattiyā
na cāpi manta,yuddhena
sakkā jetuṃ dhanena vā'ti.*

No ground is there for elephants,
nor chariots, nor infantry,
nor is there fighting it off with mantras,
nor is one able to conquer it with wealth.

15.4 Thus, by determining that life's successes fail in the end with death, it should be recollected as the failure of success.

(3) BY INFERENCE (*upasaṃharaṇato*)

16 "By inference" means from comparing oneself with others.
Here, death should be inferred in 7 ways, that is to say, inferred
from those with great fame,
from those with great merit,
from those with great strength,
from those with great psychic power,
from those with great wisdom,
from the pratyeka buddhas, and
from the fully self-awakened buddha.

17 How? This death surely came upon [233] the Great Elect (*mahā sammata*), Mandhātu, Mahā Sudassana, Daḷha,nemi, Nimi, and so on,⁴¹

³⁹ An allusion to emperor Asoka, whose hagiographical account appears in **Asokāvadāna** and Divy 429-434.

⁴⁰ *Sabbo yeva loka,sannivāso jātiyā anugato, jarāya anusaṭo, vyādhinā abhibhūto, maraṇena abbhāhato.*

⁴¹ -*pabhūtīnam pi*, "and so on." The refs for these names are: **Maha Sammata** (the "great elect"), the mythical first king (D 27,20-21; J 2:311, 3:454), SD 2.19; **Mandhātu** or Mandhātā, the 7th of the mythical early kings (J 2:311,

who had great fame, great followings, accomplished with wealth and forces [conveyances],⁴²
and yet their death, in all certainty, fell upon them, too.⁴³
so why would death not fall upon me, too?⁴⁴

| | | |
|------|---|---|
| 17.2 | <i>Mahā,yasā rāja,varā mahāsammata ādayo te'pi maccu,vasarṃ pattā mādisesu kathāva kā'ti.</i> | Noble kings of great glory, such as the Great Elect and others, too— they all fell under the power of death: what more of someone like me? |
|------|---|---|

This is how death should be recollected by way of the greatness of **fame**.

18 How about by way of the greatness of **merit**?

| | |
|--|--|
| <i>Jotiko jaṭilo uggo meṇḍako atha puṇṇako ete c'aññe ca ye loke mahā,puññāti vissutā sabbe maraṇamāpannā mādisesu kathāva kā'ti</i> | Jotika, ⁴⁵ Jaṭila, ⁴⁶ Ugga, ⁴⁷ Meṇḍaka ⁴⁸ and Puṇṇaka, ⁴⁹ too. They exceeded everyone else in the world in terms of great merit— yet they all came to death: what more of someone like me? |
|--|--|

This is how death should be recollected by way of the greatness of merit.

19 How about by way of the greatness of **strength**?

| | |
|---|--|
| (1) <i>Vāsu,devo bala,devo bhīma,seno yudhiṭṭhilo, cānuro yo mahāmmallo⁵² antakassa vasarṃ gatā.</i> | Vasu,deva, Bala,deva, ⁵⁰ Bhīma,sena, Yudhiṭṭhila, ⁵¹ and the mighty wrestler, Cānura ⁵³ — they fell under the end-maker's power. |
| (2) <i>Evaṃ thāma,bal'upetā iti lokamhi vissutā</i> | Endowed with strength and power, thus world renowned, |

3:454); **Mahā Sudassana** (D 17/2:169-199), SD 36.12; **Dalḥa,nemi**, a mythical world-emperor (D 3:59 f), and **Nimi**, ancient king of Videha, whose capital is Mithila, in northern India (J 408/3:378, 541/6:96-129).

⁴² *Mahā,parivārānaṃ sampanna,dhana,vāhanānaṃ*. Here, **vāhana** refers to vehicle, conveyance or monture, esp in iconography of Dharma protectors in later Buddhism. In military or worldly terms, as here, it refers to forces of power, eg, to the 5 remarkable conveyances (*pañca vahāna*, syn of *bala*), viz, a she-elephant (*kaṇeru*), a slave (*dāsa*), best of runners, 2 swift mares (*dve assā*), a swift male elephant (*hatthī*) (said of king Pajjota, DhA 1:196).

⁴³ *Idaṃ maraṇaṃ nāma...pari nirāsaṅkam eva patitaṃ*. A free tr.

⁴⁴ *Kim aṅga pana mayhaṃ upari na patissati*.

⁴⁵ Jotika (Ce *jotiyo*). DhA 1:385.

⁴⁶ Jaṭila, ib.

⁴⁷ Ugga, J 1:94.

⁴⁸ Meṇḍaka, V 1:240 F.

⁴⁹ Puṇṇaka, FhA 1:385,13; J 4:82.

⁵⁰ J 5:426.

⁵¹ J 4:426.

⁵² *Be yo mahā mallo; Ce Ee piyadā mallo*. J 4:81.

⁵³ **Ghata J** (J 454/4:81).

ete'pi maraṇaṃ yātā yet they all must go to death—
mādisesu kathāva kā'ti what more of someone like me?

This is how death should be recollected by way of the greatness of strength.

20 How about by way of the greatness of **psychic power**?

- (1) *Pād'aṅguṭṭhaka, mattena* By merely raising his toe of his foot,
vejayantaṃ akampayī he shook Vejayanta⁵⁴—
yo nāma'iddhimataṃ seṭṭho he who is called the best of those with psychic powers,
dutiyo agga, sāvako the second foremost disciple.⁵⁵
- (2) *So'pi maccu, mukhaṃ ghoram* He, too, entered death's dreadful maw,
migo siha, mukhaṃ viya like a deer into a lion's mouth,
paviṭṭho saha iddhihi despite his psychic powers—
mādisesu kathāva kā'ti what more of someone like me?

This is how death should be recollected by way of the greatness of psychic power.

21 How about by way of the greatness of wisdom? **[234]**

- (1) *Loka, nāthaṃ ṭhapetvāna* Except for the lord of the world
ye c'aññe atthi pāṇino there is no other living being
paññāya sārīputtassa worth even a sixteenth
kalaṃ nāgghanti soḷasi. of Sāriputta's wisdom.
- (2) *Evaṃ nāma mahā, pañño* So he is called the one of wisdom great,
paṭhamo agga, sāvako the first foremost disciple⁵⁶—
maraṇassa vasaṃ patto he, too, fell under death's power:
mādisesu kathāva kā'ti what more of someone like me?

This is how death should be recollected by way of the greatness of wisdom.

22 How about by way of the pratyeka buddhas?

Even those who, having gained individual full awakening, self-cultivated, like the rhinoceros' horn,⁵⁷ by the power of their own knowledge and effort have crushed the enemy that is all the defilements—they, too, are not free from death. So how would I ever be free (from death)?

- (1) *Taṃ taṃ nimittam āgamma* On account of various signs,
vīmaṃsantā mahēsaya examining which, the great sages,
sayambhu, ñāṇa, tejena with the might of self-born knowledge,
ye pattā āsava-k, khayaṃ gained the destruction of the influxes.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Vejayanta is Sakra's celestial palace: **Cūḷa Taṇhā, saṅkhaya S** (M 37, 11-12/1:253), SD 54.8. Cf Tha 1194.

⁵⁵ Tha 1194.

⁵⁶ D 2:5; M 3:25; A 1:13.

⁵⁷ Sn 1.3/35-75.

⁵⁸ There are the 4 influxes (*āsava*), those of (1) sense-desire (*kāma'āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhava'āsava*), (3) views (*diṭṭh'āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijj'āsava*). The destruction of influxes (*āsava-k, khaya*) is syn with the attaining of arhathood. See SD 30.3 (1.3.2).

- (2) *Eka, cariya, nivāseṇa*
khagga, siṅga samūpamā
te'pi nātigatā maccurū
mādisesu kathāva kā'ti.
- Living a life of solitude,
 just like the rhinoceros' horn,
 they are still unable to overcome death⁵⁹—
 what more of someone like me?

This is how death should be recollected by way of the pratyeka buddhas.⁶⁰

23 How about by way of the fully self-awakened ones?

23.2 Even the Blessed One,

23.3 whose physical body is richly adorned with the 32 marks of the great man⁶¹ and their 80 tokens,⁶²

23.4 whose Dharma-body is well fulfilled with the jewels of virtue, such as aggregate of moral virtue, and so on,⁶³ purified in every way,⁶⁴

23.5 who has gone beyond the greatness of fame, or merit, of strength, of psychic powers, of wisdom,

23.6 who is without peer, equal to those without equal, without a match [a double],⁶⁵ worthy, fully self-awakened⁶⁶—

23.7 even he, too, was quenched by the sudden rain-fall of death, like a great mass of fire by a rain-fall of water.

- 23.8 *Evaṃ mahānubhāvassa*
yaṃ nām'etaṃ mahesino
na bhayena na lajjāya
maraṇaṃ vasam āgataṃ
- Such great might he has,
 this great sage, it is said.
 Neither through fear nor with shame
 does he come under death's power.
- 23.9 *Nillajjaṃ vīta, sārappaṃ*
sabba, sattābhimaddanaṃ
tay-idaṃ mādisaṃ sattaṃ
kathaṃ nābhibhavissatīti
- Shamelessly, undaunted,
 all beings are crushed by it.
 What more this being like me,
 how would it not overcome?

This is how death should be recollected by way of the fully self-awakened one.

⁵⁹ Again here, “death” refers to the end-product and necessary fruit of samsaric life, which the arhats, are free from, as they are no more reborn. Only timely and untimely deaths are meant here [§2.2].

⁶⁰ On the pratyeka (or individual) buddha, see SD 36.2 (2.2), esp (2.2.2).

⁶¹ On the 32 marks, see **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30,1.2-3) + SD 36.9 (2); **Mahā'padāna S** (D 14,1.32-33), SD 49.8; **Brahm'āyu S** (M 91,9), SD 63.8.

⁶² On the 80 tokens, see MilnṬ 17 f; SD 36.9 (3.2.3 + 4.3).

⁶³ The “aggregates” (*khandha*) here are those of moral virtue, of samadhi, and of wisdom, ie, the 3 trainings (*sikkhā*), famously known as the “fruits of recluseship” (*sāmañña, phala*): see **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,39-100), SD 8.10; also SD 21.6 (2). On the 3 trainings, see **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6; also SD 1.11 (5).

⁶⁴ *Sabb'ākāra, parisuddha sīla-k, khandh'ādi guṇa, ratana samiddha, dhamma, kāyo*. “Purified” (*parisuddha*) here refers to the 7 purifications (*satta visuddhi*), viz: the purifications of moral virtue, of the mind, of views, of overcoming doubt, by knowledge and vision of the path and the not-path, and by knowledge and vision: see eg **Ratha Vinīta S** (M 24) + SD 28.3 (2).

⁶⁵ See **Bahu, dhātuka S** (M 115), where it is stated that only one fully self-awakened buddha arises, or needs to arise, in a world system (M 115,14), SD 29.1a.

⁶⁶ *Asamo asama, samo appaṭipuggalo arahaṃ sammā, sambuddho*.

24 When he recollects thus, by comparing himself to others endowed with the greatness of fame and so on, thinking, “Death will come to me just as it did to these distinguished beings.” He should recollect on death by comparing in this way, so that his meditation reaches access. [235]

(4) BY THE BODY BEING SHARED BY MANY (*kāya, bahu, sādharmaṇato*)

25 This body is commonly shared. It is shared with the 80 species [families] of worms.

Here, there are creatures that feed on the outer skin (*chavi*),⁶⁷ depending on it.

There are those that feed on the inner skin (*camma*), depending on it.

There are those that feed on the flesh (*nahāru*), depending on it.

There are those that feed on the bone (*aṭṭhi*), depending on it.

There are those that feed on the marrow (*miñja*), depending on it.

25.2 Right here, they are born, they die, they evacuate and urinate.

The body is their maternity home, nursing home, cemetery, toilet, urinal.

The body is also brought to death when these worms are agitated.

25.3 And just as this body is shared by the 80 species of worms,

it is also commonly afflicted with countless internal illnesses,
and external ones on account of snakes, scorpions, and so on,
which are the conditions for death.

26 Just as a target is set up at a crossroads, and from all directions arrows, spears, lances, stones and so on come raining down,

even so, all kinds of calamities fall upon this body.

And when these calamities fall upon it, it comes to death.

26.2 So the Blessed One said,

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

“Many are the causes of [conditions for] my death! *bahukā kho me paccayā maraṇassa*

(1) A snake might sting me, or *ahi vā maṃ ḍaṃseyya*

a scorpion might sting me, or *vicchiko vā maṃ ḍaṃseyya*

a centipede might sting me. *sata, padī vā maṃ ḍaṃseyya*

REFRAIN:⁶⁸

This would be the death of me,

tena me assa kāla, kiriyā

this would be an obstacle for me!

so mama’ssa antarāyo

(2) I might stumble and fall, or

upakkhalitvā vā papateyyaṃ,

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

bhattaṃ vā me bhuttaṃ vyāpajjeyya

(4) my bile might act up, or

pittaṃ vā me kuppeyya

(5) my phlegm might act up, or

semhaṃ vā me kuppeyya

(6) sharp winds in me might act up.

satthakā vā me vātā kuppeyyuṃ

REFRAIN:

This would be the death of me,⁶⁹ or

tena me assa kāla, kiriyā

⁶⁷ In common usage, the words *chavi* and *camma* (the full word) are synonyms for “skin.” However, it appears that *chavi* is the more usual word for human skin, while for animals, *camma* is more often used, when it has the sense of “hide” (n). Apparently, where *chavi* refers to the epidermis or outer skin, *camma* refers to the hypodermis or inner skin, as here. However, here we can imagine the rougher exposed skin as *camma*, and the more sensitive paler hidden or covered skin as *chavi*. The more usual word of “skin,” esp in meditation sets, such as the skin pentad (*kesa loma nakha danta taco*), is *taca*, which seems ancient (eg Sn 1).

⁶⁸ In practical reflection, we can, if we wish, add the refrain after each of the other 5 lines.

would be an obstacle to me!”

so mama assa antarāyo’ti.

(A 6.20/3:306), SD 48.12

This is how death should be recollected by way of this body being commonly shared.

(5) BY WAY OF LIFE’S FRAILITY (*āyu, dubbalato*)

27 This life powerless and frail.

For, the life of beings is bound up with the in-and-out-breath.

It is bound up with their postures, and

it is bound up with heat and cold, and

it is bound up with the primary elements, and

it is bound up with food.

28 Life occurs only when it receives in-breathing and out-breathing regularly

When the air in nostrils has gone out, it does not go in again, or when that which has gone in does not come out, then one is said to be dead.

28.2 Furthermore, life only occurs when the 4 postures function evenly. [236] But when any of them is excessive, the life-formation is interrupted.

28.3 Life occurs only when heat and cold occur evenly, but it fails when there is an extreme of heat or of cold.

28.4 Life occurs only when the 4 elements persist evenly.

But when there is a disturbance in the earth element, the water element, and so on,

even a person endowed with strength will find his body stiffening,

or, his body sweaty and stinky on account of over-exertion,

or, a high temperature overcomes him, or the ligatures of his joints break up⁷⁰—

he reaches the end of his life.

28.5 Furthermore, life occurs only when he receives timely meals of solid food, but should he not receive any food, then he reaches his end.

28.6 This is how death should be recollected by way of the body’s frailty.

(6) BY THE ABSENCE OF SIGNS

29 The meaning here is by way of indefinability, that is, the absence of any limitations [predictability]. For, in the case of beings,

29.2 *Jīvitam vyādhi kālo ca
deha, nikkhepanam gati
pañc’ete jiva, lokasmim
animittā na nāyare*⁷¹

The life-span, the sickness, and the time,
where the body will rest, the destiny—
these five, in the living world
there are no signs by which we can know

30 (1) Here, **life-span** (*jīvita*) has no sign because it is not definite that one should live to such an extent, no further than that.

30.2 For, beings die during the first embryonic stage (*kalala*), the second embryonic stage (*abbuda*), the third embryonic stage (*pesi*), the third embryonic stage (*ghana*), in the first month, the second month, the third month, the fourth month, the fifth month, the sixth month, the seventh month, the eighth month, the ninth month, the tenth month, at the time of leaving the womb, and thereafter, they surely die within a century or just beyond a century.

⁶⁹ “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.

⁷⁰ Cf Vism 11.102.

⁷¹ Ce *ñāyare*. Comy: *Na nāyare* means “can know” (*na nāyare’ti na ñāyanti*, VismṬ),

31 (2) Illness (*vyādhi*), too, has no sign because it is not definite that beings die only of this illness, not any other. For, beings die of eye disease, ear disease, or any other disease.

32 (3) The time (*kāla*), too, has no sign because it is not definite that beings must die at this time, and not any other. For, beings die in the morning, in the middle of the day, or at any other time.

33 (4) The laying down [discarding] of the body (*deha, nikkhepa*), too, has no sign because it is not definite when people die, the body should fall only here, not anywhere else.

For, the person of those born within a village, falls outside a village. The person of those born outside a village falls inside it. Furthermore, those born on land fall in the water.

Those born in the water, fall on land. This can be elaborated in numerous other ways. [237]

34 (5) The destiny (*gati*), too, has no sign because it is not definite that beings, after dying, should be reborn here.

For, there are those who die from the divine worlds who are reborn amongst humans.

For, there are humans who die from the world who are reborn in the heavenly worlds, and so on.

They may arise here, or maybe there, like an ox yoked to the mill.

Thus, the world revolves around the 5 destinies.⁷²

This is how death should be recollected by way of being signless.

(7) BY BEING LIMITED BY TIME (*addhāna, paricchedato*)

35 The life of humans now is limited to a short duration. One lives a hundred, more or less.

Āyu Sutta 1 (S 4.9/1:108)

35.2 So, the Blessed One said,

“Bhikshus, short is this life-span of humans. One must go one to the hereafter. One should do what is wholesome, live the holy life. There is no birth without death. One who lives long, bhikshus, lives but a hundred years, more or less.”⁷³

Appam āyu manussānaṃ

hīleyya naṃ suporiso

careyy’āditta, sīso’va

n’atthi maccuss’anāgamo’ti.

Short is the life of humans,

A good man should scorn it.

One should act as if one’s head is ablaze—

death never fails to come.

(S 4.9/1:108)

35.3 Furthermore, the Teacher said,

Araka Sutta (A 7.70, 2.5/4:136), SD 16.17

“Long ago, bhikshus, there was a teacher called Araka,” which should be elaborated along with all its seven parables adorning the Sutta.⁷⁴

36 Furthermore, he said,

(Atthaka) Marana, sati Sutta 1 (A 8.73/4:318 f), SD 48.5

(1) Bhikshus, that monk who cultivates the mindfulness of death in this way:

‘Indeed, should I live only a night and a day,

⁷² The 5 destinies (*pañca, gati*) are the devas, humans, humans, animals and pretas: see **(Pañca) Gati S** (A 9.68), SD 2.20; also **Mahā Sīha, nāda S** (M 12, 37-41), SD 49.1 = SD 2.24 (abr).

⁷³ *Appam idaṃ bhikkhave manusasānaṃ āyu, gamanīyo samparāyo, kattabbarṃ kusalaṃ caritabbarṃ brahma, -cariyaṃ, n’atthi jātassa amaraṇaṃ, yo bhikkhave ciraṃ jīvati, so vassa, sataṃ, appaṃ vā bhīyyo’ti.*

⁷⁴ That is, **Araka Sutta** (A 7.70, 2.5), SD 16.17.

I would wisely attend to the Blessed One's teaching, much indeed would be done by me!
 (2) Bhikshus, that monk who cultivates the mindfulness of death in this way:

'Indeed, should I live only a day,

I would wisely attend to the Blessed One's teaching, much indeed would be done by me!

(3) Bhikshus, that monk who cultivates the mindfulness of death in this way:

'Indeed, should I live only half a day,

I would wisely attend to the Blessed One's teaching, much indeed would be done by me!

(4) Bhikshus, that monk who cultivates the mindfulness of death in this way:

'Indeed, should I live just the time it takes to eat a single alms-meal,

I would wisely attend to the Blessed One's teaching, much indeed would be done by me!

(5) Bhikshus, that monk who cultivates the mindfulness of death in this way:

'Indeed, should I live just the time it takes to eat half an alms-meal,

I would wisely attend to the Blessed One's teaching, much indeed would be done by me! and

(6) Bhikshus, that monk who cultivates the mindfulness of death in this way:

'Indeed, should I live just the time it takes to chew and swallow four or five morsels,

I would wisely attend to the Blessed One's teaching, much indeed would be done by me!

—those monks, bhikshus, are said to dwell without diligence.

They (only) slowly cultivate the mindfulness of death for the destruction of the influxes.⁷⁵ [238]

37 (7) But, bhikshus, as for that monk who cultivates the mindfulness of death in this way:

'Indeed, should I live just the time it takes to chew and swallow a single morsel,

I would wisely attend to the Blessed One's teaching, much indeed would be done by me!

(8) And, bhikshus, that monk who cultivates the mindfulness of death in this way:

'Indeed, should I live just the time it takes to breathe in and then out, to breathe out and then in,

I would wisely attend to the Blessed One's teaching, much indeed would be done by me!

—Those monks, bhikshus, are said to dwell diligently.

They keenly cultivate the mindfulness of death for the destruction of the influxes.⁷⁶

38 So short is life's duration, that it is not even certain for just the time it takes to swallow four or five mouthfuls.

38.2 This is how death should be recollected by way of being limited in time.

(8) **BY THE SHORTNESS OF THE MOMENT** (*khaṇa,parittato*)⁷⁷

39 Ultimately, the life-moment of beings is extremely short, that is, just the occurrence of a thought-moment.⁷⁸

39.2 Just as a chariot's wheel, when turning, turns on only one spot on its tyre; when remaining still, stands on only one spot, too,

even so, the life of beings is but a single mind-moment.

39.3 The very moment that the mind [consciousness] ceases, that being is said have ceased, to be dead.

39.4 Thus it is said,

"In the past, the mind-moment lived, neither lives nor will live;

In the future, the mind-moment will live, neither lived nor lives;

In the present, the mind-moment lives, neither lived nor will live.

⁷⁵ Both sentences: *Ime vuccanti bhikkhave bhikkhū pamattā viharanti, dandhaṃ maraṇa-s,satiṃ bhāventi āsavānaṃ khayāya*. On the influxes, see [§22 (1)n].

⁷⁶ Both sentences: *Ime vuccanti bhikkhave bhikkhū appamattā viharanti, tikkhaṃ maraṇa-s,satiṃ bhāventi āsavānaṃ khayāya*.

⁷⁷ For notes in this section, see (3).

⁷⁸ *Paramatthato hi atiparitto sattānaṃ jīvita-k,khaṇo eka,citta-p,pavatti matto ye ca*

- (1) *Jīvitam̐ atta, bhāvo ca
sukha, dukkhā ca kevalā
eka, citta samāyuttā
lahuso vattate khaṇo.* ⁷⁹Life and person,
pleasure and pain—all these
are joined together in a single mind-moment
that moves quickly by.
- (2) *Ye niruddhā marantassa
tiṭṭhamānassa vā idha
sabbe’pi sadisā khandhā
gatā appaṭisandhiyā.* The aggregates of one who is dead,
or of one who is still existing here,
they are all the same aggregates,
when gone, they will never link up again..
- (3) *Anibbattena na jāto
paccuppannaena jivati,
citta, bhāṅgā mato loko
paññatti paramatṭhiyāti* Without (the mind) arising, one is not born,
with its presence, one lives.
When the mind dissolves, the world dies—
this is the ultimate in terms of concepts.

39.5 This is how death should be recollected by way of the shortness of the moment.

40 CONCLUSION

40.1 When, on account of the mind thus often and habitually attending to one or other these 8 forms of recollecting,⁸⁰

mindfulness is established on death as the object,
the mental hindrances are suppressed,⁸¹
the dhyana-factors appear.⁸²

40.2 On account of the occurrence of a sense of urgency [samvega]⁸³ in the essence of reality,
there is no attaining of full concentration, but only the attaining of access [neighbourhood concentration] in terms of dhyana.⁸⁴

40.3 However, [239] on account of distinction [special cultivation] in the cultivation on the essence of true reality, one attains full concentration by way of the supramundane dhyanas and, secondly [followed by] the 4 formless dhyanas.⁸⁵

40.4 For, with the progressive cultivation of the mental purifications, one attained full concentration.

For, on account of the progressive cultivation of the meditation object, full concentration is only attained when the dhyana’s object is somehow transcended.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ For an explanation of these verses, see (3.4).

⁸⁰ *Iti imesaṃ aṭṭhannaṃ ākārānaṃ aññatar’aññatarena anussarato’pi punappunam̐ manasikāra, vasena cittam̐ āsevanam̐ labhati.*

⁸¹ See [4.1].

⁸² *Jhān’āṅgāni pātubhavanti.* Note here that it does not say “dhyana,” but “dhyana-factors” (*jhān’āṅga*): see [4.2].

⁸³ On spiritual urgency (*samvega*), see SD 1.11 (3); SD 9 (7f).

⁸⁴ The above 2 lines: *Sabhāva, dhammattā pana samvejanīya, vattā ca ārammaṇassa appanam̐ appatvā, upacāra-p, pattam-eva, jhānam̐ hoti.*

⁸⁵ *Lokuttara-j, jhānam̐ pana dutiya, catutthāni ca āruppa-j, jhānāni sabhāva, dhamme’pi bhāvanā visesena appanam̐ pāpuṇanti.*

⁸⁶ *Ārammaṇātikkama, bhāvanā, vasena āruppam̐, appanā, pattass’eva hi jhānassa ārammaṇa samatikkamana, mattam̐ tattha hoti.* See Vism 10.

40.5 But here, there is neither. As such, there is only the attainment of access in terms of dhyana. It is this access, arising by the power of mindfulness, that brings about what is called the mindfulness of death.⁸⁷

41 And, a monk⁸⁸ devoted to this mindfulness of death, is constantly diligent.

He gains the perception of non-delight in all existence. *Sabba,bhavesu anabhirati,saññam paṭilabhati.*

He abandons longing for life. *Jīvita,nikantim jahāti.*

He is one who censures the bad. *Pāpa,garahī hoti*

He is not one who stores up much. *Asannidhi,bahulo parikkhāresu.*

He is free from the taint of avarice. *Vigata,malam macchero.*

And the perception of impermanence grows in him. *Anicca saññā c'assa paricayam gacchati.*

With this, he surely goes on to establish himself in the perception of suffering and the perception of non-self.

41.2 On other hand, as regards to those who have not cultivated the death (recollection), at the time of dying, they fall into confusion, as if overcome with the fear and terror of wild beasts, spirits [yakshas], snakes, robbers, and murderers. He himself, however, dies undeluded and fearless.

41.3 And, even if he does not penetrate the death-free state, then with the body's breaking up, he passes on to a happy hereafter.

41.4 *Tasmā have appamādam
kayirātha⁸⁹ sumedhaso
evam mahā'nubhāvāya
maraṇānussatiyā sadā'ti.*

Therefore let one be diligent!
Let one do what is to be done with wisdom,
so that there is great efficacy
in the recollection of death always.

This is a detailed introduction to the mindfulness of death.

— evam —

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⁸⁷ *Idha pana tad-ubhayam pi n'atthi. Tasmā upacāra-p,pattam eva jhānam hoti. Tad etam sati balena uppannattā maraṇa,sati'cceva saṅkham gacchati.*

⁸⁸ Here, and in the meditation context here, "monk" (*bhikkhu*) refers to a meditator: see **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (14.7): Meditation as progressive renunciation; as referring to all attending: see **Dhānañjāni S** (M 97) @ SD 4.9 (5.3).

⁸⁹ *Kayirātha*, 2 sg pot (**S** 1:2 = vv2+4, 55 = v310, 62 = v359, 178 178 = vv691+692; A 1:155*; Dh 25, 117, 118, 211; U 92*; It 13*+14*; J 2:42,8*).