



Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center

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How to Prepare for Death

Preparing for death is accomplished by training the mind so that wholesome kamma ripens, leading either to a fortunate rebirth or to liberation from rebirth altogether (nibbāna). The training involves practicing moral conduct (sīla), concentration (samādhi), and cultivating wisdom (paññā).

The training in moral conduct has been discussed in the June 2023 Newsletter-Progressive Instruction and Gradual Training, and in the February 2024 Newsletter - Perfection of Virtue (sīla pāramī). To live a moral life, the mind trains in the Five Precepts (pañca sīla), acts with compassion (karuṇā), speaks truthfully (saccā), earns a livelihood (ājīva) harmless to others, and cultivates generosity (dāna) and mindfulness (sati). This purifies conduct (caraṇa), protects relationships, and lays the foundation for concentration and wisdom, leading ultimately to liberation. Good conduct creates conditions for a fortunate rebirth among humans and heavenly beings (devas).

The training in concentration has been discussed in the September 2023 Newsletter-Tranquility Meditation (samatha) and The Five Hindrances (pañca nīvaraṇā), October 2023 Newsletter - Insight Meditation (vipassanā), and in the January 2025 Newsletter - Removal of Distracting Thoughts. Training, taming and developing the mind (citta-bhāvanā) is central to the path of practice that leads to a happy rebirth and enlightenment.

Cultivating wisdom (paññā) is ongoing and the culmination of the entire spiritual path, the key facility that causes liberation (nibbāna). While morality (sīla) and concentration (samādhi) prepare and purify the mind, wisdom is what ultimately sees reality as it truly is (yathābhūta) and cuts through ignorance (avijjā), the root cause of all suffering (dukkha). Wisdom is not mere intellectual understanding or book knowledge, it is direct experiential insight into all conditioned phenomena as comprising the Three Characteristics of Existence (tilakkhaṇa): impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā). The realization of wisdom through meditation and contemplation, attachment (rāga), aversion (dosā), and delusion (moha) are eradicated, leading to the cessation of suffering. Wisdom performs a discerning function, it distinguishes wholesome (kusala) from unwholesome (akusala), real (bhūta) from illusory (māyā), conditioned (saṅkhata) from unconditioned (asaṅkhata). Wisdom uproots ignorance by understanding The Four Noble Truths (ariya catusacca), Dependent Origination (paṭiccasamuppāda), and the nature of mind and matter (nāma-rūpa). When ignorance is eradicated through wisdom, craving (taṇhā) ceases and the cycle of rebirth (saṃsāra) comes to an end. The training in cultivating wisdom has been discussed in the April 2024 Newsletter - Perfection of Wisdom (paññā pāramī).

There will be peace as the physical body ceases to function while actively dying and returns to the elements when issues that have troubled the mind are resolved beforehand. Inner peace and freedom from regret are achieved when unresolved issues such as guilt, grudges, and regrets that cause mental unrest and suffering are resolved, bringing to mind calm and acceptance. Carrying unresolved resentment, shame, or fear will be a heavy load at the time of death. Confess secrets that have been hidden out of shame, come to terms with past failures or missed opportunities, and make amends for harm done to others.

Acceptance of mortality and readiness for a transition in consciousness is possible when burdens are resolved; the mind can approach death with clarity, courage, and acceptance rather than

fear and regret. Make peace with one's own life story, including failures and imperfections; and come to terms with the inevitability of death rather than resisting it.

A calm, clear mind at the time of death is important because the final thought moment (*cuti-citta*) helps to condition the next rebirth. Recollecting wholesome deeds performed acts to bring joy to the mind and aides in the transition at death. Contemplate now the nature of cause and effect (*kamma*), that wholesome deeds bear fruit that will support a beneficial rebirth; and make much merit now before the body succumbs to death, do not regret failure in doing good when you had the strength and opportunity to do so. See the August 2023 Newsletter-kamma and February 2024 Newsletter - Perfection of Virtue (*sīla pāramī*) for a discussion on acts that produce wholesome kamma.

Training the mind now in the Ten Recollections (*anussati*) help to cultivate faith (*saddhā*) in the Three Jewels (*triratana*): Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha; encourages the cultivation of wholesome qualities, and helps to develop concentration. These recollections train and prepare the mind for death by conditioning the mind toward wholesome states rather than fear, anger, or craving.

1. Recollection of the attributes of the Buddha (*buddhānussati*) can produce neighborhood-concentration (*upacāra samādhī*). This practice involves reflecting upon the qualities, virtues, and teachings of the Buddha. By contemplating on the Buddha's life and teachings, the mind cultivates faith, devotion, and tranquility. See the April 2025 Newsletter for a discussion on the qualities of the Buddha.
2. Recollection of the attributes of the Dhamma (*dhammānussati*) can produce neighborhood-concentration (*upacāra samādhī*). See the May 2025 Newsletter for a discussion on the qualities of the Dhamma.
3. Recollection of the attributes of the Saṅghā of Noble Ones (*saṅghānussati*) can produce neighborhood-concentration (*upacāra samādhī*). See the June 2025 Newsletter for a discussion on the qualities of the Saṅgha.
4. Recollection of the benefits of practicing morality (*sīlānussati*) can produce neighborhood-concentration (*upacāra samādhī*). See the February 2024 Newsletter for a discussion on the Perfection of Virtue (*sīla pāramī*).
5. Recollection of the benefits of practicing generosity (*cāgānussati*) can produce neighborhood-concentration (*upacāra samādhī*). See the August 2022 Newsletter for a discussion on the The Practice of Generosity (*dāna*) and the January 2024 Newsletter-Perfection of Giving (*dāna pāramī*).
6. Recollection of the attributes of heavenly beings (*devānussati*) can produce neighborhood-concentration (*upacāra samādhī*). A discussion of cosmic realms taught by the Buddha is found in the August 2023 Newsletter-kamma and the November 2024 Newsletter-Rebirth (*punabbhava* or *paccājāta*) and a Brief Survey of Evidence for Rebirth.
7. Recollection of the certainty of death (*marañānussati*) can produce neighborhood-concentration (*upacāra samādhī*). The recollection is a mindfulness and contemplation practice that brings to awareness the certainty and immediacy of death, as a means to deepen wisdom, urgency, and detachment.

The recollection of death is not morbid; it is a meditation on reality. Every being who is born will die, this fact is certain, though the time of demise is uncertain. Remembering death purifies the mind from heedlessness (*pamāda*), vanity, and attachment to the body and worldly concerns.

- Conceptual recollection is to contemplate death is inevitable, it cannot be avoided; life is uncertain, death is certain.
- Visualization of death is performed by imagining the process of dying: illness, old age, or sudden death, and the decay of the body. Alternatively, one may recall the nine charnel ground contemplations (*asubha-bhāvanā*), imagining one's own body as a corpse in various stages of decomposition. See the October 2023 Newsletter - Insight Meditation (*vipassanā*) for a discussion on the charnel ground contemplations.

- Momentary awareness of death is imminent at every moment, this brings mindfulness to the present, sharpening insight and dispelling procrastination.

Recollection of death removes heedlessness (*pamāda*) by realizing the brevity of life; the mind becomes earnest in practice of the Dhamma, fosters energy (*virīya*) and urgency (*saṃvega*) for diligent effort; leads to detachment (*nibbidā*) that dampens clinging to possessions, body, and reputation; and strengthens mindfulness and clarity where each breath becomes precious, grounding awareness in the present.

8. Recollection of the characteristics of the body (*kāyagatāsati*) can produce the first *rūpa jhāna*. The October 2023 Newsletter-Insight Meditation (*vipassanā*) contains a discussion on body contemplation.
9. Recollection of mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*) can produce all four *rūpa jhānas*. The October 2023 Newsletter-Insight Meditation (*vipassanā*) contains a discussion on meditation on the breath.
10. Recollection of peace (*upasamānussati*) can produce neighborhood-concentration (*upacāra samādhi*). The November 2023 Newsletter is a discussion on peace.

Practice with physical uncomfortable feelings now because during the process of dying the feelings will be most painful. Preparing now to meet physical discomfort with awareness is a direct way to prepare for dying. Stay with physical uncomfortable feelings during meditation imagining them to be what will be experienced while actively dying.

- Begin the practice with the right intention (*cetanā*), set the motivation:
“May I learn to meet discomfort with calm, awareness, and compassion. May this practice prepare my heart and mind for dying with peace and clarity.”

This intention transforms any sensation, even pain, into part of the path.

- Turn attention to areas of discomfort, for example, an ache, stiffness, or heat. Observe the sensation and not the story. Instead of labeling the feeling as “pain” or “bad,” get curious:
 - What is its texture? Is the sensation burning, throbbing, tight, or pulsing?
 - Does the sensation move or change over time?
 - Is the sensation solid, or does it vibrate in tiny sensations?
 - Where are the edges of the sensation; are they clear or fuzzy?

This investigation shifts the mind from reacting to knowing the sensation.

- Practice non-resistance to the uncomfortable feelings and have compassion when aversion or fear arises. Have the mind speak to itself with phrases such as:
 - “These uncomfortable feelings are contents of experience and not my identity.”
 - “Let the mind meet these uncomfortable feelings with equanimity and without judgement.”
 - “May the mind be at peace with these uncomfortable feelings.”

If the uncomfortable feelings overwhelms the mind, then turn the attention to the physical sensations of breathing or to a neutral area of the body. The purpose of this exercise is not endurance but non-reactive present moment awareness.

- Contemplate the impermanence of the sensations.
“This discomfort is impermanent. All sensations arise, change, and pass away. The body is not under the complete control of the mind and the body has the nature to break down.”
This contemplation helps loosen identification with the body and supports acceptance in dying.
- The training of mind is gradual, build tolerance of uncomfortable feelings slowly. Begin with short periods of mindful contact with discomfort, then increase duration as energy, mindfulness and concentration increases. Use safe discomforts as teachers, like holding a yoga stretch, sitting still through an itch, or facing cold or heat mindfully.
- Integrate loving-kindness (*mettā*) with the practice. After practicing with discomfort, radiate kindness to the mind and to all others who are suffering:

“Just as the mind meets discomfort with equanimity, may all beings find peace within suffering.”

The practice becomes a rehearsal for the process of dying, not with resistance, but with presence.

The state of mind at the moment of death, the dying consciousness (cuti-citta) is important because the rebirth-linking consciousness (paṭisandhi-citta) helps to determine the next rebirth. Therefore, avoiding medications, when possible, that cloud mindfulness, awareness and clarity of mind may assist in supporting a favorable rebirth and perhaps enlightenment.

- The state of mind at death is a condition that determines rebirth according to the Abhidhamma and Sutta teachings. The final thought-moment before death is the bridge between this life and the next. Whatever mental state arises, wholesome or unwholesome, conditions the quality of the next existence. A calm, lucid, wholesome state assist to a fortunate rebirth while a confused, fearful, or deluded state may condition an unfortunate rebirth. Thus, the mind's clarity, mindfulness, and purity at death are important.
- Clarity of mind, clear comprehension (sampajañña) allows the mind to maintain mindfulness (sati) and right view (sammā-diṭṭhi). Recall and reflect on wholesome deeds performed in the past, refuge in the Triple Gem, and meditation subjects such as the Buddha, loving-kindness, or breath sensations. Recognize and release attachment, fear, and craving that might arise. Meet death with equanimity and wisdom, rather than delusion or grasping. These reflections and clarity of awareness helps prevent unwholesome mental states like greed (lobha), hatred (dosa), or delusion (moha) from arising at the moment of death.
- Sedating or disorienting drugs are discouraged in the dying process, certain medications such as heavy painkillers, tranquilizers, or sedatives, because they can cloud consciousness, dulling mindfulness and awareness; disrupt attention to wholesome thoughts; and prevent clear recollection of refuge, virtue, and concentration. When the mind is stupefied or confused, the mind loses the opportunity to establish wholesome consciousness at death. While the intention to relieve pain is compassionate, excessive sedation may unintentionally obscure wisdom and mindfulness, which are essential supports for liberation.
- Clarity and mindfulness supports a favorable rebirth when dying with clarity because the mind can take as its final object something wholesome, such as a meritorious deed, the qualities of the Buddha, or peace. The generation of wholesome kamma or mental state (kusala javana-citta) may lead to rebirth in a happy realm: human, heavenly, and is also conducive to awakening; and avoid unwholesome mental reactions such as fear, craving, or confusion that could lead to lower realms. A lucid, calm, and mindful death continues the wholesome momentum of the mind, while a confused, clouded, or grasping death disrupts it.
- The ideal approach at death is to balance compassionate care, including appropriate pain relief, with efforts to preserve mindfulness. Reflect on virtue that has been lived. Meditate, taking the sensations of breathing or a usual meditation subject to develop mindfulness. Chant softly to calm and relax the mind and to reflect on the Dhamma. Create a peaceful environment free of agitation and distractions. The goal is to support a clear, steady, and fearless mind, allowing the mind to meet the dying body with peace rather than confusion.

The Cūḷakammavibhaṅga Sutta establishes that intentional action (kamma) determines rebirth. However, the final thought (cuti-citta), which is conditioned by previous kamma, acts as the proximate cause for the new birth. Hence, the state of consciousness at death has great influence.

The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi

135 Cūḷakammavibhaṅga Sutta: The Shorter Exposition of Action

1. THUS HAVE I HEARD. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park.
2. Then the brahmin student Subha, Todeyya's son, went to the Blessed One and exchanged greetings with him.¹²²³ When this courteous and amiable talk was finished, he sat down at one side and asked the Blessed One:
3. "Master Gotama, what is the cause and condition why human beings are seen to be inferior and superior? For people are seen to be short-lived and long-lived, sickly and healthy, ugly and beautiful, uninfluential and influential, poor and wealthy, low-born and high-born, stupid and wise. What is the cause and condition, Master Gotama, why human beings are seen to be inferior and superior?"
4. "Student, beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions; they originate from their actions, are bound to their actions, have their actions as their refuge. It is action that distinguishes beings as inferior and superior."

"I do not understand in detail the meaning of Master Gotama's statement, which he spoke in brief without expounding the meaning in detail. It would be good if Master Gotama would teach me the Dhamma so that I might understand in detail the meaning of Master Gotama's statement."

"Then, student, listen and attend closely to what I shall say."

"Yes, sir," the brahmin student Subha replied. The Blessed One said this:

5. "Here, student, some man or woman kills living beings and is murderous, bloody-handed, given to blows and violence, merciless to living beings. Because of performing and undertaking such action, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a state of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, even in hell. But if on the dissolution of the body, after death, he does not reappear in a state of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell, but instead comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is short-lived.¹²²⁴ This is the way, student, that leads to short life, namely, one kills living beings and is murderous, bloody-handed, given to blows and violence, merciless to living beings.
6. "But here, student, some man or woman, abandoning the killing of living beings, abstains from killing living beings; with rod and weapon laid aside, gentle and kindly, he abides compassionate to all living beings. Because of performing and undertaking such action, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a happy destination, even in the heavenly world. But if on the dissolution of the body, after death, he does not reappear in a happy destination, in the heavenly world, but instead comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is long-lived.¹²²⁵ This is the way, student, that leads to long life, namely, abandoning the killing of living beings, one abstains from killing living beings; with rod and weapon laid aside, gentle and kindly, one abides compassionate to all living beings.
7. "Here, student, some man or woman is given to injuring beings with the hand, with a clod, with a stick, or with a knife. Because of performing and undertaking such action, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a state of deprivation... But if instead he comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is sickly. This is the way, student, that leads to sickness, namely, one is given to injuring beings with the hand, with a clod, with a stick, or with a knife.
8. "But here, student, some man or woman is not given to injuring beings with the hand, with a clod, with a stick, or with a knife. Because of performing and undertaking such action, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a happy destination... But if instead he comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is healthy. This is the way, student, that leads to health, namely, one is not given to injuring beings with the hand, with a clod, with a stick, or with a knife.
9. "Here, student, some man or woman is of an angry and irritable character; even when criticised a little, he is offended, becomes angry, hostile, and resentful, and displays anger, hate, and bitterness. Because of performing and undertaking such action... he reappears in a state of deprivation... But if instead he comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is ugly. This is the way, student, that leads to ugliness, namely, one is of an angry and irritable character... and displays anger, hate, and bitterness.
10. "But here, student, some man or woman is not of an angry and irritable character; even when criticised a lot, he is not offended, does not become angry, hostile, and resentful, and does not display anger, hate, and bitterness. Because of performing and undertaking such action... he reappears in a happy destination... But if instead he comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is beautiful. This is the way, student, that leads to being beautiful, namely, one is not of an angry and irritable character... and does not display anger, hate, and bitterness.
11. "Here, student, some man or woman is envious, one who envies, resents, and begrudges the gains, honour, respect, reverence, salutations, and veneration received by others. Because of performing and undertaking such action... he reappears in a state of deprivation... But if instead he comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is uninfluential. This is the way, student, that leads to being uninfluential, namely, one is envious... towards the gains, honour, respect, reverence, salutations, and veneration received by others.
12. "But here, student, some man or woman is not envious, one who does not envy, resent, and begrudge the gains, honour, respect, reverence, salutations, and veneration received by others. Because of performing and undertaking such action... he reappears in a happy destination... But if instead he comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is influential. This is the way, student, that leads to being influential, namely, one is not envious... towards the gains, honour, respect, reverence, salutations, and veneration received by others.
13. "Here, student, some man or woman does not give food, drink, clothing, carriages, garlands, scents, unguents, beds, dwelling, and lamps to recluses or brahmins. Because of performing and undertaking such action... he reappears in a state of deprivation... But if instead he comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is poor. This is the way, student, that leads to poverty, namely, one does not give food... and lamps to recluses or brahmins.
14. "But here, student, some man or woman gives food... and lamps to recluses or brahmins. Because of performing and undertaking such action... he reappears in a happy destination... But if instead he comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is wealthy. This is the way, student, that leads to wealth, namely, one gives food... and lamps to recluses or brahmins.
15. "Here, student, some man or woman is obstinate and arrogant; he does not pay homage to one who should receive homage, does not rise up for one in whose presence he should rise up, does not offer a seat to one who deserves a seat, does not make way for one for whom he should make way, and does not honour, respect, revere, and venerate one who should be honoured, respected, revered, and venerated. Because of performing and undertaking such action... he reappears in a state of deprivation... But if instead he comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is low-born. This is the way, student, that leads to low birth, namely, one is obstinate and arrogant... and does not honour, respect, revere, and venerate one who should be honoured, respected, revered, and venerated.

16. "But here, student, some man or woman is not obstinate and arrogant; he pays homage to one who should receive homage, rises up for one in whose presence he should rise up, offers a seat to one who deserves a seat, makes way for one for whom he should make way, and honours, respects, reveres, and venerates one who should be honoured, respected, revered, and venerated. Because of performing and undertaking such action... he reappears in a happy destination... But if instead he comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is high-born. This is the way, student, that leads to high birth, namely, one is not obstinate and arrogant... and honours, respects, reveres, and venerates one who should be honoured, respected, revered, and venerated.
17. "Here, student, some man or woman does not visit a recluse or a brahmin and ask: 'Venerable sir, what is wholesome? What is unwholesome? What is blameable? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What kind of action will lead to my harm and suffering for a long time? What kind of action will lead to my welfare and happiness for a long time?' Because of performing and undertaking such action... he reappears in a state of deprivation... But if instead he comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is stupid. This is the way, student, that leads to stupidity, namely, one does not visit a recluse or brahmin and ask such questions.
18. "But here, student, some man or woman visits a recluse or a brahmin and asks: 'Venerable sir, what is wholesome?... What kind of action will lead to my welfare and happiness for a long time?' Because of performing and undertaking such action... he reappears in a happy destination... But if instead he comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is wise. This is the way, student, that leads to wisdom, namely, one visits a recluse or brahmin and asks such questions.
19. "Thus, student, the way that leads to short life makes people short-lived, the way that leads to long life makes people long-lived; the way that leads to sickness makes people sickly, the way that leads to health makes people healthy; the way that leads to ugliness makes people ugly, the way that leads to beauty makes people beautiful; the way that leads to being uninfluential makes people uninfluential, the way that leads to being influential makes people influential; the way that leads to poverty makes people poor, the way that leads to wealth makes people wealthy; the way that leads to low birth makes people low-born, the way that leads to high birth makes people high-born; the way that leads to stupidity makes people stupid, the way that leads to wisdom makes people wise.
20. "Beings are owners of their actions, student, heirs of their actions; they originate from their actions, are bound to their actions, have their actions as their refuge. It is action that distinguishes beings as inferior and superior."
21. When this was said, the brahmin student Subha, Todeyya's son, said to the Blessed One: "Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent, Master Gotama! Master Gotama has made the Dhamma clear in many ways, as though he were turning upright what had been overturned, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or holding up a lamp in the dark for those with eyesight to see forms. I go to Master Gotama for refuge and to the Dhamma and to the Sangha of bhikkhus. Let Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge for life."

Notes:

- 1223 See MN 99. According to MA, his father, the brahmin Todeyya, was reborn as a dog in his own house because of his extreme stinginess. The Buddha identified him to Subha by getting the dog to dig up some hidden treasure Subha's father had buried before his death. This inspired Subha's confidence in the Buddha and moved him to approach and inquire about the workings of kamma.
- 1224 If the kamma of killing directly determines the mode of rebirth, it will produce rebirth in one of the states of deprivation. But if a wholesome kamma brings about a human rebirth — and rebirth as a human being is always the result of wholesome kamma — the kamma of killing will operate in a manner contrary to that of the rebirth-generative kamma by causing various adversities that may eventuate in a premature death. The same principle holds for the subsequent cases in which unwholesome kamma comes to maturity in a human existence: in each case the unwholesome kamma counteracts the wholesome kamma responsible for the human rebirth by engendering a specific type of misfortune corresponding to its own distinctive quality.
- 1225 In this case the wholesome kamma of abstaining from killing may be directly responsible for either the heavenly rebirth or the longevity in a human existence. The same principle applies in all the passages on the maturation of wholesome kamma.

At the moment of dying (*maraṇāsanna-citta*) there are four types of death signs (*maraṇāsanna nimitta*) that are described in Bhaddantācariya Buddhaghosa's commentary Visuddhimagga: the Path of Purification, XVII, 134–140. The death signs condition the next rebirth.

If the dying person's mind is clear and alert, they can recognize and direct attention toward a wholesome sign, for instance, a vision of offering alms or recollection of the Buddha. If their mind is confused or drugged, the consciousness may latch onto an unwholesome object, leading to an unfortunate rebirth.

Buddhaghosa describes the relationship between the dying consciousness (*cuti-citta*) and the rebirth-linking consciousness (*paṭisandhi-citta*). Just before death, one of several mental images or signs arises, these are called signs of the time of death (*maraṇāsanna-nimitta*). They indicate the moral and kammic momentum that will determine the next existence.

- At the moment before death, the dying mind can take as its object one of the following three kinds of signs (nimitta):
 1. Past deeds (kamma) are the actual wholesome or unwholesome volitional action done previously, something vividly remembered or re-experienced at the point of death. For example, a wholesome recollection of an act of generosity, such as offering food or caring for the sick; or an unwholesome memory of killing, lying, or other harmful act. Buddhaghosa says this may occur as if one were performing the act again, the mind relives the deed vividly.
 2. Symbol of the deed (kamma-nimitta) is a symbol or object related to that deed. This is a mental image or object associated with that deed, not the act itself, but a symbol that evokes it. For example, a wholesome symbol such as a monk's robe, a stupa, a flower garland, an alms bowl, a shrine; an unwholesome symbol such as a weapon, a knife, intoxicants, gambling tools, or anything related to unwholesome actions. This sign arises due to the force of past kamma that is about to produce its result. Buddhaghosa explains that it appears as if brought before the mind's eye, as though the dying person is directly perceiving that object.
 3. Sign of the destination (gati-nimitta) is a sign of the realm one is about to enter. This is the image or symbol of the realm of rebirth (gati) that the mind is moving toward. For heavenly rebirths: a vision of radiant light, celestial mansions, deities, or other blissful forms. For human rebirth: familiar human settings such as a house or mother's womb. For lower realms: darkness, smoke, fire, fearful beings, or unpleasant environments. This sign represents the proximate result of kamma, the mental object at the instant before the rebirth-linking consciousness arises.
- Although Buddhaghosa mentions three types of objects (kamma, kamma-nimitta, gati-nimitta), Buddhaghosa elsewhere divides death signs into four modes, depending on how the mind apprehends them at death. These four modes describe the manner of appearance rather than the type of object.
 1. Present kamma is a deed being performed at that very moment of death, for example, one dies while meditating, giving alms or while committing harm. Kamma is the related sign.
 2. Recent kamma is a deed done shortly before dying, which comes vividly to mind, for example, remembering a recent offering. Kamma-nimitta is the related sign.
 3. Habitual kamma is a deed often repeated during life, strong through long habituation, for example, repeated acts of generosity or cruelty. Kamma-nimitta is the related sign.
 4. Stored kamma, accumulated, reserve or latent kamma, is any past action not recalled or habitual, but with strong latent potential; it takes over when no other kamma predominates, for example, old forgotten deeds resurfacing. Gati-nimitta is the related sign.

According to Buddhaghosa, whichever of these signs appears most vividly conditions the rebirth-linking consciousness (paṭisandhi-citta). The moral tone, wholesome (kusala) or unwholesome (akusala) kamma, of that sign determines the realm (gati): heavenly, human, or lower. Hence, mindfulness and purity of mind at the moment of death are important: a wholesome kamma or its sign can lead to a favorable rebirth; an unwholesome kamma or its sign can lead to an unfortunate destination.

Buddhaghosa's analysis isn't mere metaphysics, there is practical guidance. Cultivate wholesome kamma habitually, so that habitual wholesome kamma predominates. Maintain mindfulness and clarity near death in order to recognize wholesome signs. When the mind is facing death, avoid confusion, attachment, or fear, which can cause an unwholesome nimitta to arise.

The following sutta passage emphasizes habitual kamma and its power at death and supports Buddhaghosa's idea that habitual kamma can dominate the death moment.

The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi

19 Dvedhāvitakka Sutta: Two Kinds of Thought

...

6. “Bhikkhus, whatever a bhikkhu frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of his mind. If he frequently thinks and ponders upon thoughts of sensual desire, he has abandoned the thought of renunciation to cultivate the thought of sensual desire, and then his mind inclines to thoughts of sensual desire. If he frequently thinks and ponders upon thoughts of ill will... upon thoughts of cruelty, he has abandoned the thought of non-cruelty to cultivate the thought of cruelty, and then his mind inclines to thoughts of cruelty.

The Cūḷakammavibhanga Sutta above, particularly at line 20, describes how different kamma lead to different destinies (gati), illustrating the law underlying the gati-nimitta concept, even if the term itself is not yet used.

The Mahānāma Sutta below shows that Mahānāma, a noble person, had a lifelong cultivation of virtue, faith, and right view that created a strong habitual tendency (bahula bhāvitattā) which naturally inclines the mind toward wholesome objects at death. But for ordinary persons (puthujjana), active mindfulness and clarity at the moment of death is necessary for a favorable rebirth.

The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi
55.21 (1) Mahānāma (1)

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling among the Sakyans at Kapilavatthu in Nigrodha's Park. Then Mahānāma the Sakyan approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and said to him:

“Venerable sir, this Kapilavatthu is rich and prosperous, populous, crowded, with congested thoroughfares. In the evening, when I am entering Kapilavatthu after visiting the Blessed One or the bhikkhus worthy of esteem, I come across a stray elephant, a stray horse, a stray chariot, a stray cart, a stray man. On that occasion, venerable sir, my mindfulness regarding the Blessed One becomes muddled, my mindfulness regarding the Dhamma becomes muddled, my mindfulness regarding the Saṅgha becomes muddled. The thought then occurs to me: ‘If at this moment I should die, what would be my destination, what would be my future bourn?’”

“Don't be afraid, Mahānāma! Don't be afraid, Mahānāma! Your death will not be a bad one, your demise will not be a bad one.³³⁸ When a person's mind has been fortified over a long time by faith, virtue, learning, generosity, and wisdom, right here crows, vultures, hawks, dogs, jackals, or various creatures eat his body, consisting of form, composed of the four great elements, originating from mother and father, built up out of rice and gruel, subject to impermanence, to being worn and rubbed away away, to breaking apart and dispersal. But his mind, which has been fortified over a long time by faith, virtue, learning, generosity, and wisdom—that goes upwards, goes to distinction.³³⁹

“Suppose, Mahānāma, a man submerges a pot of ghee or a pot of oil in a deep pool of water and breaks it. All of its shards and fragments would sink downwards, but the ghee or oil there would rise upwards. So too, Mahānāma, when a person's mind has been fortified over a long time by faith, virtue, learning, generosity, and wisdom, right here crows ... or various creatures eat his body... But his mind, which has been fortified over a long time by faith, virtue, learning, generosity, and wisdom—that goes upwards, goes to distinction.

“Don't be afraid, Mahānāma! Don't be afraid, Mahānāma! Your death will not be a bad one, your demise will not be a bad one.”

Notes

338 At the time Mahānāma was at least a stream-enterer, possibly a once-returner; hence he was assured of a good rebirth and had no reason to fear death.

339 Taṃ uddhaṅgāmi hoti viśesagāmi. The passage shows citta as the principle of personal continuity which survives the death of the body and reaps the fruits of kamma. In the case of a noble disciple it “goes to distinction” by way of a higher rebirth and by evolving onwards to Nibbāna.

The next sutta emphasizes letting go and maintaining non-attachment even in sickness and while dying. This clear, detached awareness supports rebirth free of delusion.

The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi
35.74 (1) Sick (1)

At Sāvattṥī. Then a certain bhikkhu approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and said to him: “Venerable sir, in such and such a dwelling there is a certain newly ordained bhikkhu, not well known, who is sick, afflicted, gravely ill. It would be good, venerable sir, if the Blessed One would approach that bhikkhu out of compassion.”

Then, when the Blessed One heard the words “newly ordained” and “sick,” and understood that he was not a well-known bhikkhu, he went to him. That bhikkhu saw the Blessed One coming in the distance and stirred on his bed. The Blessed One said to him: “Enough, bhikkhu, do not stir on your bed. There are these seats ready, I will sit down there.”

The Blessed One then sat down on the appointed seat and said to that bhikkhu: “I hope you are bearing up, bhikkhu, I hope you are getting better. I hope that your painful feelings are subsiding and not increasing, and that their subsiding, not their increase, is to be discerned.”

“Venerable sir, I am not bearing up, I am not getting better. Strong painful feelings are increasing in me, not subsiding, and their increase, not their subsiding, is to be discerned.”

“I hope then, bhikkhu, that you are not troubled by remorse and regret.”

"Indeed, venerable sir, I have quite a lot of remorse and regret."

"I hope, bhikkhu, that you have nothing for which to reproach yourself in regard to virtue."

"I have nothing, venerable sir, for which to reproach myself in regard to virtue."

"Then, bhikkhu, if you have nothing for which to reproach yourself in regard to virtue, why are you troubled by remorse and regret?"

"I understand, venerable sir, that it is not for the sake of purification of virtue that the Dhamma has been taught by the Blessed One."

"If, bhikkhu, you understand that the Dhamma has not been taught by me for the sake of purification of virtue, then for what purpose do you understand the Dhamma to have been taught by me?"

"Venerable sir, I understand the Dhamma to have been taught by the Blessed One for the sake of the fading away of lust."

"Good, good, bhikkhu! It is good that you understand the Dhamma to have been taught by me for the sake of the fading away of lust. For the Dhamma is taught by me for the sake of the fading away of lust."

"What do you think, bhikkhu, is the eye permanent or impermanent?" - "Impermanent, venerable sir." ... "Is the ear ... the mind permanent or impermanent?" - "Impermanent, venerable sir." - "Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?" - "Suffering, venerable sir." - "Is what is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'?" - "No, venerable sir."

"Seeing thus ... He understands: '... there is no more for this state of being.'"

This is what the Blessed One said. Elated, that bhikkhu delighted in the Blessed One's statement. And while this discourse was being spoken, there arose in that bhikkhu the dust-free, stainless vision of the Dhamma: "Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation."⁴⁰

Notes

40 The arising of the vision of the Dhamma (dhammacakkhu) means the attainment of one of the three lower stages of awakening, usually stream-entry.

The commentarial emphasis underscores that even a moment of pure, mindful consciousness at death can redirect the stream of rebirth. Hence, preserving clarity and mindfulness is valuable.

Visuddhimagga: The Path of Purification by Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosa, translated from the Pali by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli VIII.41. A bhikkhu devoted to mindfulness of death is constantly diligent. He acquires perception of disenchantment with all kinds of becoming (existence). He conquers attachment to life. He condemns evil. He avoids much storing. He has no stain of avarice about requisites. Perception of impermanence grows in him, following upon which there appear the perceptions of pain and not-self. But while beings who have not developed [mindfulness of] death fall victims to fear, horror and confusion at the time of death as though suddenly seized by wild beasts, spirits, snakes, robbers, or murderers, he dies undeluded and fearless without falling into any such state. And if he does not attain the deathless here and now, he is at least headed for a happy destiny on the breakup of the body.

Now, when a man is truly wise,
His constant task will surely be
This recollection about death
Blessed with such mighty potency.

Aim beyond rebirth to nibbāna. While wholesome actions lead to good rebirths, the highest preparation is developing wisdom. Let go of craving and clinging to any form of identification and becoming. Liberation from suffering is where the cycle of rebirth (saṃsāra) ends.

The following is a daily routine meant to prepare the mind for death and rebirth. The routine combines generosity, morality, meditation, and wise reflection.

- Morning

- Recollect the Triple Gem and the benefits of morality.

On waking, bring to mind the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, and chant verses of Refuge and the Five Precepts.

Bow three times to a representation of the Triple Gem, then hands together at the heart in añjali: a gesture of respect; the palms of both hands join together directly in front of the chest, with the fingers aligned and pointing upwards.

Ceremony for Taking the Three Refuges:

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

Homage to the Blessed, Noble, and Perfectly Enlightened One.

Homage to the Blessed, Noble, and Perfectly Enlightened One.

Homage to the Blessed, Noble, and Perfectly Enlightened One.

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

To the Buddha I go for refuge.

To the Dhamma I go for refuge.

To the Saṅgha I go for refuge.

Dutiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Dutiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Dutiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

For the second time, to the Buddha I go for refuge.

For the second time, to the Dhamma I go for refuge.

For the second time, to the Saṅgha I go for refuge.

Tatiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Tatiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Tatiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

For the third time, to the Buddha I go for refuge.

For the third time, to the Dhamma I go for refuge.

For the third time, to the Saṅgha I go for refuge.

Ceremony for Taking the Five Precepts:

1. Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi

I undertake the precept to refrain from taking the life of any living creature.

2. Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi

I undertake the precept to refrain from taking that which is not given.

3. Kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi

I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct.

4. Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi

I undertake the precept to refrain from lying.

5. Surāmeraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi

I undertake the precept to refrain from consuming intoxicating drink and drugs which lead to carelessness.

- Set an Intention (adhiṭṭhāna) and resolve:

“Today, may I act with kindness, restraint, and mindfulness.”

“Whatever wholesome deeds I do today, may they support clarity of mind and a fortunate rebirth, and may they lead toward nibbāna.”

- Loving-Kindness Meditation (mettā bhāvanā); sit quietly, breathe naturally, and repeat slowly in your heart.

“May I be well, happy, and peaceful.

May all beings be well, happy, and peaceful.

May all beings be free from suffering.”

• Daytime

- Practice generosity (dāna): share food, time, kindness, or resources with others. Even a small act like giving a smile, holding a door, or feeding an animal plants seeds for wholesome rebirth.

- Guard morality (sīla): keep the Five Precepts throughout the day, and use mindfulness to notice temptations toward breaking them.

- Mindfulness in activity: practice awareness while eating, walking, and working; this builds familiarity with mindful attention that will support you at the moment of death.

• Evening

- Meditation (bhāvanā): practice mindfulness of breathing to steady and calm the mind; and loving-kindness to replace anger and fear with goodwill.

- Recollection practices (anussati): recall good deeds you have done today and reflect: “These wholesome actions will follow me like a shadow.” Recollect the Buddha’s qualities and the peace of nibbāna.
- Reflection on death (maraṇānussati), contemplate: “Death is certain; the time of death is uncertain. What will I rely on when that moment comes?” This deepens urgency (saṃvega) and encourages practice without fear.
- Recollection and reflection: “All good I have done today by thought, word, or deed I share with all beings. May this merit support their welfare and awakening.”
- Closing Contemplation: “All that arises will pass away. Death is certain, the time of death is uncertain. May I live wisely and without regret.”
- Bedtime
 - Dedicate merit, offer the goodness of the day to all beings: “May this merit lead to the welfare and awakening of all.” This softens attachment to “my” good deeds and strengthens compassion.
 - Go to sleep mindfully, fall asleep with loving-kindness, repeating silently: “May all beings be happy, may all be free from suffering.” The state of mind before sleep mirrors the state of mind at death.

The above practices, chanting, and wholesome states of mind will become habits. When death comes, the mind then will naturally incline toward refuge, precepts, loving-kindness, and clarity. The routine practices strengthen and help to maintain clarity of mind so that when death comes, the mind will meet it with calm, kindness, and non-clinging; leading to a fortunate rebirth, or perhaps, nibbāna.

Announcements

- Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center has a presence on Meet-Up social media, and we ask that you please sign up for every event that you are planning to attend at www.MeetUp.com. Some people are intimidated by a small number of attendees, and a larger number will be encouraging.
- Please help advertise Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center by providing a review at www.google.com/maps.

Activities of the Meditation Center

- Group sitting meditation practice for one hour is held Monday through Friday at 6:30 a.m. and every day at 5:30 p.m. After meditation, Ajahn Kumāro is available to answer questions and discuss the Dhamma. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email to mittameditation@gmail.com on the days and time you would like to participate.
- Group sitting meditation practice for two hours is held every Saturday and Sunday at 6:30 a.m.
- The days of the full moon, new moon, and the two half moons are called in Pāli: The Uposatha, and it is a Buddhist day of observance. A lunar calendar is available at <https://cal.forestsangha.org>. Ajahn Kumāro will perform the ceremony of giving the five precepts on the full and new moon days after the 5:30 p.m. meditation. You may elect to keep the precepts as long as you see fit (one night, a week, a lifetime, etc.).
- Meditation Workshop is held on the first Sunday of each month between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. The workshop will provide instruction and practice for sitting and walking meditation. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the Dhamma. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email to mittameditation@gmail.com if you are planning to participate.
- A recording of a Dhamma Talk from an experienced Thai Forest Teacher will be played on the third Sunday of each month. Sitting meditation starts at 4:30 p.m. and the Dhamma Talk will be played afterwards. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email to mittameditation@gmail.com if you are planning to participate.

- Every Saturday at 4:15PM the Meditation Center will be cleaned. Please join us in maintaining a clean space for practicing and discussing the Dhamma.
- There is a library at the Meditation Center. You may browse for books to borrow at 5:00 p.m. and check out the books for three weeks.
- Everyday at 8:40AM Ajahn Kumāro leaves for alms-round in order to give residents of Asheville the opportunity to earn merit by practicing generosity of giving food and placing it into the alms bowl. Ajahn does not accept or handle money. Ajahn usually arrives at the Whole Foods Market, 70 Merrimon Ave., just before 9:00 a.m. and stands in front of the store for alms.
- Ajahn is available at other times during the day to meet with individuals or groups when requested.
- For more additional information, please send an email to mittameditation@gmail.com. We also have a presence on Facebook and Meet-Up social media.

Request for Support

The Meditation Center is in need of support in order to accomplish its mission and vision. The support may take various forms. You will support the Meditation Center by:

- Being present at the Meditation Center for group meditation.
- Giving alms during alms-round.
- Bringing to the Meditation Center items that are listed on the support page of the website www.mittameditation.com.
- Volunteering your skills, energy, and time at the Meditation Center.
- Informing your family and friends about the Meditation Center and encouraging them to participate in the activities.
- Donating financial contributions for the Meditation Center's expenses. Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center is recognized as a tax-exempt organization by the IRS under section 501(c)(3). Donations are deductible in accordance with IRS regulations. Financial contributions may be made on the support page of the website www.mittameditation.com, and additional means for making financial donations may be discussed with Elisha Buhler at (910) 922-1549.