

# On the Virtue of Visiting a Cemetery

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

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(Best in Spring! No better time than to contemplate our mortality.) Every city, every town, every little village, they all have cemeteries. They are ubiquitous. They are everywhere where there is human habitation. And it's because people die. In fact everyone who has lived has died. Pretty obvious?! Yet even so we need to remind ourselves that life is short: 'life is hard and then we die'. At first this seems so negative. We love life. We want to live. Why talk about death, for heaven's sake. We all know death comes. We don't need to rub our noses in it. In medieval times it was thought good practice to have a *memento mori*, some object that reminded you of death in the house. The skull was thought to be especially beneficial. In Buddhist understanding too, death acts as a reminder of deeper truth. The Buddha said that there are those who wake up even on the mention of death, others not till someone famous dies, still others not until someone close dies, and there are those unfortunates who don't wake up till it is their turn to die. A lot of use making sense of our lives on the point of death! So there's a deep wisdom to be had in walking around the local cemetery. We see the same surnames cropping up. Stones dating back two, three hundred years. Here they all are, our forebears. Their actions made our history. Now at this very moment I am also making history and there will come a time when it stops and this body will join them in some field, or its ashes scattered into water or into the wind - somewhere here on this earth. 'The way they came, I must also go. As their body is now, mine will also be.' 'Life is uncertain : death is certain.' There's a certain comfort in knowing others have trod the same path. There's a relief in embracing a certain fate. 'This is the way it is.' But such reflections may bring a poignancy into our lives, may lead to resignation and eventually hopelessness. However, our path is imbued with a transcendent understanding. The Buddha taught there is a 'sphere of experience' where there is no birth and no death. How can the contemplation of death and dying help us to experience Nibbana? It is by contemplating death, we enter directly into the monster's jaws. Feel the terror, hold firm, knowing it is but a chimera. When the roaring ceases, we find it to have been but our own poor, sweating self.

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