

Practising the Five Remembrances

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 40:38

Okay, so these are the five remembrances that the Buddha says will really awaken our desire to practice. The idea is that we don't think about it so much. It's more getting into the feel of these things. Remember, in our death-phobic culture, we don't like to think about these things. For instance, every morning I'm sure we all wake up presuming without any shadow of a doubt that we will actually live throughout the day. There's no logical reason for believing that, because as you know, accidents happen, things happen, we can die just on a whim. But we don't remind ourselves. So what this is trying to do is say, look, every morning when you wake up, the first contemplation is to rejoice that you've actually woken up and then to remind yourself that this could be the last day.

One way or the other, or at least you could fall seriously ill and so on. Definitely you'll be getting older. There's no way you can get around that. So the sickness there, you see, that's a preparation for terminal sickness if we have one. And it's also just basically recognizing that the body can fall ill.

There's your aging business. And lots of things that the Buddha says about death. We just read one of them: death is inescapable. Everybody must die. Remember, the remainder of your lifespan is decreasing continuously. So that's a nice little reflection. And death will come regardless of whether or not we have made time to practice the *dharma*. So wealth cannot help. All this is little ways in which he encourages us.

And then number four is recognizing that in the end we part and are separated from everyone and everything dear and agreeable to us. And then finally, there's the contemplations of *kamma*.

There's two ways of doing it. One way is just to repeat the sentence into your heart, getting the feel of what your reaction is. And you might say, "This body is subject to disease. This body is subject to disease. This body is subject to disease." You play with the words to try and get some recognition of its truth value. And what you're interested in is, of course, how you're reacting to it. Either with a sense of anxiety, there's anxiety there, there's fear, et cetera.

Now you can up the ante by actually bringing to mind those things that you're particularly afraid of. So this body is subject to disease, and it could be Alzheimer's or it could be a paralyzing neurological disease, or it could be cancer. We've always got something that really worries us. And if you bring that to mind, again you're looking at your fear. So you remember this is the self not wanting to die, not wanting to fall ill, not wanting to age.

And in getting in contact with that, as soon as those feelings come, to be open to them, to receive them, to accept that this is the way our relationship is to this, and then just to allow it to evaporate a little bit.

And also the other thing is that when the fear, the grief, the aversion comes, it's easier to accept it if you receive it with a sense of care. So there's a part of the heart that is not particularly happy and it's not feeling well. And you would hug it, shall we say, as you would a child who's suffering one of these mental states.

So there's two ways there. Just repeating the phrase—this is what it says in the *Visuddhimagga*, the Path of Purification by Buddhaghosa—just to repeat it. But I think you can also use your imagination to get in touch with how we feel about these things. And so we just repeat these things to ourselves: aging, and then death, and then there's that one about parting, separated from everyone. And here again you can say it in different ways. And of course you can bring to mind what it is you are most attached to and what it will be a pain to leave. And of course you can also extend that to be parted from everyone, because they're leaving you. People die, people leave.

And again you can use your imagination to what does that mean to you. And then finally *kamma*, which has a certain brightness to it. We are the owners, we do possess our own actions. We are responsible for them: body, speech, and mind. But here of course we've got the ones that are unwholesome, but the ones that are also wholesome. And we get either the consequences of something we've done which is unskillful, and we get the reward of doing something which is skillful. So we inherit the results. We're born out of our *kamma*. It's always with us. Our relationships are formed through our *kamma*. And in fact, you could say that relatively speaking, that's what we are. We are our relationships, and they depend on your *kamma*.

And what I'll do is time a minute for each sentence, and then I'll remind you to do the reflections on gratitude. So you always have to balance these negative reflections with something positive. You know, gratitude for being born, your mother, for your family, your father, friends, your upbringing and education. We bring that to mind, all the medical practitioners who've helped you, all the gifts of our society, of our culture, the world, of nature.

And then finally, just to remind ourselves that this life is precious. Here the Buddha says we have this combination of joy and woe, and the intuitive intelligence sharp enough to find our way out of *saṃsāra*, the world of constantly going round and round. And finally just the preciousness of the *dharma*.

So now we can find the first one there. I'll just keep a timer going. So: "This body is subject to disease. This body is of a nature to fall ill. This body has not gone beyond sickness. This body is subject to aging. This body has not gone beyond aging. This body is now in a process of aging. This body is subject to death. This body has not gone beyond death. This body will die.

"I will be parted and separated from everyone and everything that is dear and pleasing to me.

"I am the owner of my actions of mind, speech, and body. I will inherit the results of my actions." Don't forget there's a dark and a bright side to these statements, and you can bring both wholesome and

unwholesome actions to mind. And in that way you can balance the act, you might say. And I dare say that in the end you're on the positive side. "I am born each moment, each day, each lifetime of my actions. I form relations through my actions. I live dependent on my actions. Whatever I do, for good or for ill, I shall inherit the results."

To balance these reflections, we can either really consider the wonderful things we've done in our lives, and there will be them, they will be there if you care to look, or we can do this reflection on gratitude and the joys of life. So to make sure that it's actually worth living.

So just bringing to mind our mother, father, family, friends, all our upbringing and education, all the people, all the teachers that have helped us. And if we had a religious upbringing, the teachers that have helped us spiritually. And there's all the medical practitioners. And there's the gifts of our society, our culture, of the world, of nature. And then there's the miracle of waking up in the morning, consciousness, the preciousness of human life. Remember, we were given it. We weren't in control of that. There's very little we're actually in control of. Then finally, just the preciousness of the *dharma*.

So at this point, you can either continue this contemplation and what you can do is go back to the one or two that seemed to really touch you, that had an effect on you, and work with it gently, just accepting its truth value. Or then you can just return to *vipassanā*.

So just a final word. As we practice this, what we're doing is we're moving from an intellectual understanding of these statements into a heart acceptance. So a sense of them being digested. And when we accept the truth value of these things, the gift, of course, is a feeling of safety, a feeling of equanimity. And that allows us to feel inwardly more serene, just this acceptance of the way things are and the fact that we have very little control over sickness, aging, and death. And it's just allowing that thought to be accepted within the heart. That's the thing, you see.

And if you do this exercise, you don't have to do it for so long. In the morning, you know, almost one of the first things you do before you even sit. Then after a while, just reading them through is enough. It's enough to put you into that right mindset of not being surprised if something goes wrong during the day.

So I hope you found this useful. And according to the Buddha, remember, just the contemplation of death—never mind all the *vipassanā* and all the other stuff—just contemplating death is a path to *nibbāna*. That's how incisive, how wonderful it can be just to do that. And the paradox is, of course, that everything becomes precious. Life becomes absolutely more wonderful because of it.

There's a book by a man called Becker called *The Denial of Death*, and he goes into what happens when we deny it, when we're in a state of aversion to it. And it's really interesting how money is somehow connected to the aversion to death, you know, getting as much as we can to preserve ourselves. And the other one, which of course we do know from COVID, is our going to our toiletry is part of death, because of course all our shit, if you'll excuse the word, is dead. And that's why during COVID, everybody went out

and bought loads of toilet paper. So that's what happens if we don't contemplate death. We spend a lot of money on toilet paper.

So I hope my words or this little practice has been of some assistance and that it will help you in your journey towards full liberation from all suffering.

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