

Conference on
HEALTHY AGING AND HAPPY DYING
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"Healthy Ageing and Happy Dying" is the topic.

Let's begin from the beginning: when I was studying *Vinaya* texts, I find a greeting phrase, *arogya* which is a Sanskrit word. The literal meaning of this phrase is "May you never have any disease". Is a human body without any disease possible? I am the least qualified person to answer this question and talk about this point, especially in this august gathering with presence of eminent medical experts. My tradition says that the roots of diseases are always present in the human body. As long as these roots remain harmonious among themselves, we consider the body healthy. When there is a slightest disharmony among them, it is considered disturbance in the system and the person is unhealthy. These roots are called *doshas* in Sanskrit and *nyepa* in Tibetan.

The original definition of the Sanskrit word *dosha* is described as "*doosyati iti doshah*". The literal meaning of this phrase is "that which contaminates is called *dosha*". So, *doshas* may be considered the disease-causing agent in the body. Imbalance of *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha doshas* causes disease in the body.

Dosha only refers to the three biological energies of *vata* (*wind*), *pitta* (*fire*) and *kapha* (*earth*). As an imbalance of these elemental combinations is the direct cause of physical disease, they are the prime disease-causing factors.

These three factors are further linked with three mental factors of unwholesome attitudes. They are attachment (*raga*) related with *Vata*, hatred (*dhvesha*) related with *pitta*, and delusion (*moha*) related with *kapha*. They control the senses, the mind, the thoughts and actions resulting in bodily related problems of birth, old age and death.

As such, in the context of holistic view, health is not only physical wellbeing, but also mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing is important. Wellbeing of a person as a whole is called *swast* in Sanskrit or *deleg* in Tibetan. In the context of the present topic, it will be correct to say that a healthy person is not only physically free of major diseases but has good control over three roots or more appropriately having control over three poisons namely attachment, hatred and delusion. Thus, synchronisation of life and spirituality is the key point.

There are factors for being healthy other than medicine, therapy, exercise and such other things. Balancing one's sensual emotions as well as certain spiritual practices play effective roles. There are many... one of the spiritual methods is visualisation.

Let me introduce you to an experiential exercise called **The Flow of Nectar: A Purification Method**. Purification presupposes that there are defilements and impurities. In Buddhist context, the mind is by nature pure and clear but due to defilements of afflicted emotions such as attachment, hatred and delusion, the mind has become impure. The mental impurities in turn creates impure or immoral acts at physical level, and also causes generation of inharmonious external environs that are related to us.

These negativities can be categorised into three main groups: 1) physical hindrances, such as diseases, 2) hindrances due to negative spirits and 3) interplanetary and cosmic forces. This particular method of purification is a very simple visualisation type of meditation or imagining, if you like. It is a preliminary practice in Tibetan tradition. So, let us try some experimental exercise... stay in a relaxed position.

(There are nine rounds of clearing away of impure air:

Slowly and deeply...

Inhale through right nostril; exhale through left – 3 times

Inhale through left nostril; exhale through right – 3 times

Inhale through both nostrils; exhale through both - 3 times)

Now watch your thought...

It is said that the very beginning of meditation is watching your thought. If your thought is engaged in a negative activity, avert it immediately. If the thought is positive thinking, appreciate and leave it there. If the thinking is a neutral one, just ignore it. A verse from the text known as *The Eight Verses for the Mind Training* written by a Tibetan meditation master Langri Thangpa who lived in 11th century, may be recited at this point:

In all actions may I observe my mind,

And as soon as delusions arise

That endangers me and others,

May I firmly face and avert them

Meditation is not simply emptying of the mind, or a relaxation practice. The practice of meditation neither does not imply any mysterious or mystical state of ecstasy nor is it a state of non-thinking or absence of mental activity. Meditation means either of the following three:

- 1) Single pointed
- 2) Analytical
- 3) Visualization

We are concerned here with the third i.e. visualization.

Visualize a moon like disc on the crown of one's head which is crystal clear with cooling effect. Above the disc stands a white letter "A" (in any script). While making the sound of "A", a stream of nectar, accompanied by a soft gentle light flows down

from the letter “A”. It penetrates the moon like disc, enters through the crown of one’s head and reaches one’s heart. Think that all the defilements related to one’s physical body like diseases, toxicities, viruses, and bacteria are washed away through the pores and openings of the body in the form of inky fluid and one’s body becomes free of defilements like a polished crystal vase. Again, while making the sound “A”, a stream of nectar flows down from the letter “A” as before, think that all the impediments caused by negative spirits driven away through the openings of the body in the form of dirt and ugly insects etc. making one’s body clean and spotless. Repeat the sound “A” for the third time, a stream of nectar flows down again, think that all the obstacles of spiritual progress are chased away in the form of darkness just as darkness is removed instantly by strong light.

Now make the sound “AUM”, and think that all the essence of five elements, positive spiritual powers, and enlightened qualities entered through the crown of one’s head in the form of light and nectar which then dissolves into one’s heart.

Finally make the sound of “HUM”, think that all the positive qualities and distinguishing attributes thus received are firmly established. Then, think that the moon like disc along with the letter “A” is dissolved into one’s body.

Let me come to "Ageing". Everyone aspires ageless. We imagine that there are certain celestial beings that are ageless or never ageing. But, as far as human beings are concerned, though some signs of ageing may be slowed down or they can be hidden; but ageing cannot be stopped or reversed; and the process of ageing cannot be slowed down.

Ageing does not start when someone reaches at the age of fifty or sixty. The moment one arrives in this world, one starts ageing. This statement is based on a simple logical reasoning. Any change whether it is ageing, decay or progress cannot take place all of sudden, but has to go through a process.

A Buddhist Saint from Tibet said that old age comes progressively which makes it somewhat bearable. Otherwise, it would be unimaginable mental distress.

Buddhist logic says that whatever is a result of causes and conditions, changes take place in split seconds. They do not remain static. Just the other day, I received a message saying “Today is Charlie Chaplin’s birth day and he had said, “Nothing is permanent in this world, not even our troubles”

It is important to understand that the rule of the nature cannot be changed and that it should not only accepted but appreciated also. In reality, ageing can be graceful and beautiful provided one does not have many wants or many regrets.

Happy Dying is the second part of today's topic. Can death be a happy occasion?

Actually, death cannot be discussed independently without talking about life. Life is an aspect of existence related to human or animal that supports consciousness and

feeling. Human life specially gives opportunity to achieve great things that other types of living beings cannot provide. Certain species of animals like certain species of birds can do many wonders but I don't think they have the capacity to think beyond this life.

Buddhist teachings tell us that it is important to appreciate the fact that we have obtained this human life. At the same time, we are told that life is not permanent by nature and there are many obstacles. Like a candle light in a stormy night, there is no guarantee that our life will go on till one gracefully get ageing and then plan to die happily. Tibetan Buddhist masters emphasis that people must cultivate a sense of urgency for planning happy dyeing.

A text written by the first Panchen Lama says:

*What comes together must part and
All hat is accumulated comes to an end;
Highness is followed by decline, birth by death:
Not only must we die, there's no certainty when.
Bless us to feel a sense of urgency.*

The Sanskrit word for time is 'kala' and Tibetan equivalent is 'due. They are the synonyms of death. The death is the most powerful phenomenon in the same way as the time is. The time is a phenomenon that no one can stop its forces or slow down its speed. When it is personified, it becomes *Yama Raja*, the Lord of Death. In ancient India, almost every phenomenon is personified and given a role and an image either pacifying or terrifying, depending on their function. *Yama Raja* is shown as a buffalo headed terrifying figure mounted on a buffalo. In Buddhist Tantra, to counter the death, the *Yama*, we have a deity called *Yamantaka*, the crusher of the *Yama*, or the death. This is just to indicate that there is a state of birth-less and death-less.

In the mind of average people, death is something undesirable, unpleasant and not spoken at pleasure seeking occasions. If death is such undesirable, how can there be a happy dying? Or can there be? This talk will attempt to make a case that there can be a happy dying at least in theory.

In a Tibetan Buddhist text, it is written that the best follower of righteous path will be happy to die, and actually looks forward to it. The mediocre ones will have a sense of self-complacency, and the last ones will have no fear of death. This is to say that if you have perfectly accomplished the purpose of life, with pure thought and pure action, you will have a sense of enjoyment and you can rejoice with it. If you have a feeling that you have done your best, you will have a sense of self-complacency. If you have a feeling that you have not done anything that is harmful to others and have not nurtured harming thought toward others, then there will be no regrets, no fear of death.

((I would now like to refer to a Buddhist sutra called *Atyayajñāna* in Sanskrit, 'da' ka ye shes in Tibetan and in English "*Wisdom of the moment before dying*"

Bodhisattva Akashagarbha asked the following question, “Victorious One, how should a Bodhisattva who is about to die see mind?”

The Buddha answered, “*Akashagarbha*, when *Bodhsattvas* are about to die, they should cultivate the wisdom of "the moment before dying”

“This wisdom is a thorough cultivation of the recognition that:

- 1) Since things are pure of any inherent existence, they do not have objective existence.
- 2) Since all Dharmas are included within the enlightenment mind, they should thoroughly cultivate the attitude of great compassion.
- 3) Since all phenomena are clear light by nature, they should thoroughly cultivate the attitude of not being attached to anything at all.
- 4) Since understanding the mind is the cause of wisdom, they should thoroughly cultivate the attitude of not looking for Buddhahood elsewhere.”

The emphasis here is on MIND. The mind is like the bull drawing a Bullock-cart. The cart follows the bull. Similarly, the way to the future is dependent on the state of mind. So says another *Pali Sutta* known as *Dhammapada*.

ཚམས་རྣམས་ཡིད་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་ཏེ། ཡིད་ནི་གཙོ་ཞིང་ཚུན་ལ་འགོ།
གལ་ཏེ་གདུག་པའི་ཡིད་ཀྱིས་ནི། ལྷན་སམ་ཡང་ན་བྱས་ཀྱང་ཅང་།
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Lastly, I come to a prayer for deliverance from the straits of the Bardo. It says:

*May we have the confidence of joy and delight
When food and wealth accumulated with miserliness are left behind
And we separate forever from cherished and longed for friends,
Going alone to a perilous situation.*

All the wealth and possessions are left as inheritance. One leaves behind friends, loved ones and those longed for forever. One will walk alone without a companion towards an unfamiliar situation called *bardo*. We pray to enter *bardo* cheerfully with joy and confidence without panic and anguish just like a child going home. All the circumstances of death are to be visualised in meditation prior to death. If reflected again and again on impermanence, you will not come under fire influenced by unfavourable conditions.

To avoid being depressed about dying, take refuge in your respective religion within compassion for all beings.

The instructions on approaching death are six:

1.
May we generate a powerful mind of virtue

**When the elements – earth, water, fire, and wind dissolve in stages
And physical strength is lost, mouth and nose dry and pucker,
Warmth withdraws, breaths are gasped, and rattling sounds emerge.**

Whether you live out your full lifespan or not, the process of death involves many phases. In a sudden death you pass through these phases very quickly with little chance of noticing them.

When the process of dying begins, you pass through eight phases. The first four involve the collapse of the four elements. The last four involve the collapse of consciousness in stages into the innermost level of mind called the mind of clear light.

When the element earth constituent declines and it dissolves into the water constituent, the external sign is that the strength of the body is lost, feels that one is sinking into the earth. Similarly, when the water constituent dissolves into the fire constituent, the external sign is that the moisture of the mouth and nose dry up and the lips become puckered and so forth. When the fire constituent dissolves into the wind constituent, the external sign is that warmth of the body gathers at the heart and ones glow deteriorates. When the wind constituent dissolves into the consciousness, gasping for breathing in, one makes a wheezing sound from the breath breathing unevenly. We pray for not to be moved by non-virtuous thoughts but to have the strength of virtuous minds.

2.

**May we realize the deathless mode of being
When various deceiving visions frightful and horrible
And in particular mirage, smoke, and fireflies appear
And the mounts of the eighty conceptions cease.**

In absolute level there is no death or birth but in conventional level various phenomena appears and exist. As the potencies of the physical body begin to disintegrate, various visions occur.

Various visions such as pleasant and unpleasant forms and sounds appear to those who have been virtuous or non-virtuous. Those who have made progress on the path will get visions of being welcomed by celestial beings.

Specifically, an appearance like a mirage arises as the internal sign of the dissolution of earth into water, an appearance like smoke as the internal sign of the dissolution water into fire, and an appearance like fire flies as the internal sign of the dissolution of fire into wind.

We pray for the ability to sustain the insight of mode of being. That all of these appearances and the mind are mere misleading conceptions and ultimately that which is called “death” does not exist.

3.

**May we generate strong mindfulness and introspection
 When the wind constituent is about to dissolve into subtle constituent
 of consciousness,
 The external continuum of breath begins cease, and coarse dualistic
 appearances dissolve,
 And an appearance like a burning butter lamp dawns.**

The movements of the karmic winds that serve as the mounts of the eighty conceptions-
 the forty conceptions of appearance, the thirty-three conceptions of increase, and the
 seven conceptions of near attainment-gradually dissolves into consciousness.

An external sign of this is that inhalation and exhalation of the breath ceases. As an
 internal sign all coarse dualistic disappear and an appearance dawns like a blazing
 butter lamp unmoved by the wind.

We pray for being able to maintain mindfulness when all of these internal and external
 signs appear.

4.

**May we know our own nature ourselves
 Through the yoga realizing cyclic existence and nirvana as empty
 When appearance, increase, and near-attainment dissolve the earlier into the
 later
 And experiences like pervasive moonlight, sunlight, and darkness dawn.**

Then, consciousness dissolves into the "appearance" in the central Chanel and there is
 the appearance of radiant whiteness, like a clear autumn sky pervaded by moonlight.

The "appearance" dissolves into "increase" and there appears radiant redness, like a
 clear autumn sky pervaded by sunlight.

When "increase" dissolves into "near attainment", there appears thick blackness, like
 a clear autumn sky pervaded by the thick darkness of night.

These three subtle consciousness are subtler than gross level five consciousness, the
 eye consciousness and so on. The very subtle level of consciousness, the mind of clear
 light, which if utilised in the spiritual path, is most powerful.

We pray to have the ability to experience the nature of my mind exactly as it is, through
 the yoga of the special realization that inseparably joins the entities of the object
 emptiness and the subject.

5.

**May the mother and child clear lights meet
 When near-attainment dissolves into the all-empty
 And all conceptual multiplications cease and an experience
 Like an autumn sky free from polluting conditions dawns.**

Then, upon the dissolution of the subtle mind of "near attainment" itself into the clear light of the "all empty", all the elaborations of thought that conceive various objects cease and an experience dawns like the utter vacuity of a pure autumn sky free from moonlight, sunlight, and thick darkness, the three tainting conditions that prevent the natural color of the sky from coming out just as it is.

This spontaneous vision is termed as "death clear light", and also is called the "mother clear light". The wisdom that sees the subtle emptiness with spontaneous great bliss is called as "child clear light". The union of those two into one entity is the meeting of "mother clear light" and "child clear light".

6.

**May we be set in one-pointed profound meditation
In the exalted wisdom of joined innate bliss and emptiness
During the four empties upon the melting of the moon-like white constituent
By the fire of the lightning-like Mighty Female.**

At the time of the "all empty", the clear light, the lightening like fire by the yogic power, moving up the central channel, the *dhuti*, it melts the moon, the white *Bodhichitta*, at the crown and descends through the *dhuti*, down wards throat, heart-point, navel and private-part thereby engendering bliss, super bliss, special bliss and the spontaneous great bliss. We pray to be placed in one-pointed wisdom that inseparably joins in entity that bliss and the subtle emptiness.

Tsong kha pa emphasised the uninterrupted daily practice that combines three things:

- 1) Keeping in the mind again and again, the instructions for one about to die
- 2) Reminding oneself repeatedly, "At death I should meditate in this way"
- 3) Strongly beseeching the enlightened ones for the purpose of that

Instruction on the *bardo*:

*May we complete the meditation of illusion in place
Of the intermediate state so that upon leaving the clear light
We rise in a Body of Complete Enjoyment blazing with the glory
Of Buddha's marks and beauties*

When one rises from that meditative state, the wind (with five rays) that serves as the vehicle of the clear light of death acts as the substantial cause and the mind of clear light as the cooperative condition, a body of illusion arises, that blazes with the glory of the thirty-two major marks and the eighty beauties.

The bardo of ordinary sentient beings comes about in the same way, but this yogin who is able to turn the clear light of death into the path enjoyment body, that is, an "impure illusory body". We pray for the completion of the illusion-like meditation of such an Unexcelled Mantra path. If due to Karma, an intermediate state arises.

May erroneous appearances be cleared.

Through immediately analysing and realising the absence of inherent existence

Of the sufferings of birth, death, and intermediate state

If an ordinary body of the mundane bardo arises due to karma.

Analyse well immediately and understand that *bardo* has established and then realise that all the appearances of birth, death, and the intermediate state are appearances of a erroneous mind and realise the way in which all of those sufferings are not true, Bless us so that all of appearances as the play of bliss and emptiness.

May we be born in a pure land

Through the external, internal, and mystical transforming yoga

When various signs - four sounds of the reversal of the elements,

Three frightful appearances, and uncertainties - appear.

Thus, at the time of the *bardo*, the signs of the reversal of the elements come. With the reversal of the earth-wind, there is the sound of an avalanche; with the reversal of the water-wind, the sound of a stormy sea; with the reversal of the fire-wind, the sound of a forest fire; with the reversal of the wind-wind, the sound of the wind storm.

Bless us to be born in a pure land, a special place for cultivating the path of unexcelled mystic Mantra path.