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No Death (The Deathless)

Death is the locus of all fears.

Death is the great danger threatening ordinary people. Death, both physical and mental, forms the locus for fears of all kinds: fear of wild beasts, reptiles, ghosts, disease, of pain, of loss of one's livelihood, of one's reputation, of poverty and so on, including fear of death in its ordinary forms, or in some undignified, infamous form, like moral or spiritual death.

If there were no fear of death there'd be almost no fear of anything and we'd dwell with a peaceful, a cooled mind, hence cleansing away any and all problems associated with death, making death meaningless should be of great interest. If someone could really achieve this feat it would make their life into a win only experience. One who really knows that there is no death that one reaps the greatest good. So, how can we overcome the fear of death, or render the concept meaningless?

The cause of deathlessness.

The experience of being deathless may display several characteristics and arise from various causes, all of which can render one, more or less, dukkha-free. It all depends on whether the underlying causes of this experience are born of right understanding, sammaditthi, or of wrong understanding, micchaditthi – even those based in right understanding will still display shallow and profound, elevated and baser modes depending on the level of knowledge involved.

That deathlessness based in micchaditthi, in 'wrong' understanding.

Animals, and smart, ruthless criminals afflicted by the defilements of dosa and raga, aversion and lust, will have little or no feeling about death, hence little or no fear of it either, and can therefore die without dukkha. Hence it would be relatively easy for a military commander to encourage his young soldiers to be without fear of death. He could, for instance, arouse their raga, their greed through encouraging sexual violation of women, or by invoking their patriotism, their debt to their ancestors, or by prodding their personal feelings of honour. He could arouse their dosa, their hatred, aversion, by provoking them into hot anger and the desire for vengeance. He could encourage their moha, their stupidity, their delusion, through disbursing theories like that which postulates that there is no death because the atman, the soul, cannot die, or that which tells us that the atman can't be hurt or affected by any physical experience, or that it can't be made to change in any way at all. All of which could serve to reduce the fear of death or dispel the notion completely. But this sort of thing would still be defiled, still be based, more or less, in wrong understanding, in micchaditthi, and we should consider the deathless in a more refined and careful way, taking into account that death which isn't 'death,' which is cooled, which is in no way a hot affair.

Smart and ruthless criminals afflicted by the defilements of dosa and raga, aversion and lust, will have little or no feeling about death, hence little or no fear of it either, and can therefore face death without experiencing undue dukkha. Hence it would be relatively easy for a military commander to encourage his young soldiers to be without fear of death. He could, for instance, arouse their raga, their greed through encouraging the stimulation involved in sexual violations, or by invoking their patriotism, their debt to their ancestors, or by prodding their personal feelings of honour. He could arouse their

dosa, their hatred, aversion, by provoking them into hot anger and the desire for vengeance. He could encourage their moha, their stupidity, their delusion, through disbursing theories like that which postulates that there is no death because the atman, the soul, cannot die, or that which tells us that the atman can't be hurt or affected by any physical experience, or that it can't be made to change in any way at all. All of this, because it tends to debase the human condition, because it makes human beings less human, can remove the fear of death or dispel the notion completely. But this would still be defiled, still be based, more or less, in wrong understanding, in micchaditthi, and we should consider the deathless in a more refined and careful way, taking into account that 'death' which isn't death, which is cooled, which is in no way a hot affair.

Deathlessness based in sammaditthi, right understanding.

That deathless based in sammaditthi, in right understanding the form of which is still, however, on the worldly, the lokiya, level, will include the belief in kamma, in merit and demerit, in good and bad, in heaven and hell, etc. will also include the certainty that one has done the right things with regard to death and the hereafter; will include the belief that death is just 'a change for the better,' a continuance, from which there's nothing to fear, it being better than continuing to experience the torment of living in this old worn out body with its pains and sicknesses; and will also include the understanding that for so long as the fruits of kamma, merit and demerit, exist for us we'll continue to cycle around. Hence death will be seen as affording one the opportunity of doing better, going higher in a new and slicker body and mind combination. Death is, therefore, just an advance to a higher level for those who truly keep to the good.

When people have only good, beautiful, proper feelings, when there's equanimity and the mind is luminous, clear and bright, they'll forget all about their body and about death. The mind being dominated by Dhamma the feeling will have arisen that for me there truly is no death. The physical body is then of little or no consequence, there's only the mind consisting in that Dhamma which doesn't know death. Hence there's no fear of death, nor are there any of those problems usually associated with that concept, disease also loses its meaning, and any partner or children cease to be matters for concern, for anxiety, even when we have to be apart from them, because we no longer see them as prone to death either. This might arise in both religious and non-religious cases, but when a good result occurs and people become interested, become followers, it will become something religious.

The mind undergoes change in accord with its surroundings

Because the mind isn't 'self' it changes in accord with its environment, any 'environment' being composed from nothing more than thought, received knowledge, and belief, which mind increasingly meets with up until that time when life comes to a close. These 'environments' lead the mind into various levels of either miccha or sammaditthi. Now, each level of sammaditthi is like a device which acts to make the mind suitably smoother, calmer, more and more untroubled, while succeeding levels of micchaditthi serve only to render the mind more and more unstable, confused, and reckless. When the mind is guided by right beliefs, and by mindfulness and right knowledge it can overcome the threat that death poses.

Birth and death, or arising and quenching, is just the flowing on, the cycling around of causes and conditions.

A device, or a method designed to raise the mind above death must be a matter of ultimate truth, hence it falls to the duty of sammaditthi on the transcendent, or lokuttara level to be capable of

experiencing aniccam, dukkham, anatta, and, especially, sunnata, with clarity. Seeing the anatta quality of the mind and body brings recognition of the truth that the mind isn't 'self,' isn't 'me,' it's just a namadhamma, just a natural process, operating in combination with a rupadhamma, another natural process, and void of anything that could be called a 'self.' Further: birth, or 'arising,' is just a stream, a flowing-on, a spinning around which will continue until the causes and conditions promoting it cease. We understand that it's 'me' that is born and dies because we misunderstand these processes. In the end the arising and quenching of the mind which, ultimately, is the right and correct form of birth and death, still isn't birth and death in itself, it's just the flowing on, the spinning around of things which are really just natures operating under the power of various causes and conditions.

'Death' doesn't exist for the mind that experiences sunnata properly.

The ending of the causes and conditions supporting all that flowing and spinning has its roots in the true experiencing of sunnata, of 'voidness,' that is, that namarupa, or all things, are altogether without anything that could be called 'self.' This causes us to realise that there is no 'birth,' and if nobody gets born then how could anybody die? Hence there is no 'death' because there's no 'arising,' no 'persisting,' and no 'ceasing' anymore. Seeing in this way doesn't just cause birth and death in the ordinary sense to lose meaning, but makes the 'arising' and 'quenching' of the mind come to a stop too. How can the mind arise and quench without the feeling being present that it's 'me' who 'thinks,' who 'feels,' who's 'pleased,' who's 'displeased,' who's experiencing 'dukkha,' who's experiencing 'sukha'? In the final count where then could 'death' come from? Seeing sunnata marks the ending of 'self'-belief for a particular person, everyone else then being understood in the same way what remains is just the flowing-on of nature, and the mind is then without any feeling that 'I' was born, that 'I' exist, or that 'I' will die, hence there's no death, death doesn't exist for the mind which experiences sunnata properly.

Why do we use the word 'properly'? For the reason that the sunnata which isn't proper, which is a product of micchaditthi, and which isn't consonant with Buddhism still exists. Some doctrines hold that the mind is 'amata,' is deathless, doesn't know death, and only the body will die, so that this mind tends, when the time comes, to seek for a new platform, a new body; such a doctrine, however, isn't Buddhist and runs contrary to the principle which has it that there is arising, persisting, and ceasing by denying the ceasing factor, which is amusing, because mind will spin in a continual cycle of arising persisting, and ceasing until the causes and conditions which support that activity disappear. Throughout all of that there's really won't be a 'me' involved even for one moment, and when this truth is experienced the mind will quench. 'Death' doesn't actually exist, it originating from the illusory 'self.'

Just put an end to the 'self' and there will be no death

As regards the amata, the deathless, this isn't the province of the conditioned mind, it's something natural as opposed to being something un-natural, or conditioned, and will be experienced once the mind has put an end to the 'self' illusion; because then it will be realised that the mind has no essential element, neither does it belong to anyone, it's just a nature which flows and spins, and, since amata doesn't flow and spin then, in Buddhism, there cannot be a deathless, or an immortal mind, there can only be the mind which can clearly experience the deathless, the amata - at which point mind ceases to be 'me' becoming instead simply nature, just as all 'things' are. Mind attaining to ultimate knowledge naturally knows the deathless as it is, and also knows that which doesn't know death, so where would death come from?

One might get a good result from this if it's read late at night, but it will need to be reviewed several times and perhaps considered continuously until the experience of deathlessness really arises. Because the experience of deathlessness can display, as mentioned, several levels, it could, depending on the circumstances present at the time, come 'out of the blue,' so to speak, and could therefore produce a variety of results, both shallow and profound. So, there's no death when there's no birth, and no birth when there's no 'self.'

If it doesn't conform to this principle it won't be a true experience of the deathless, won't be able to put a complete end to dukkha, and death will still be around, lurking in a corner somewhere. 'Self' is coupled with 'birth,' and 'birth' must be coupled with 'death,' so, just put an end to the 'self' once and for all and put an end to death once and for all too.

From the book “ธรรมานุสรณ์ Dhamma Teaching for Ending of Suffering – Dhamma about Death (มรณานุสติธรรม)” --- Page 65-72, Published by Dhammadana