

Advantages and Potential Dangers of Contemplating Death

May I be prepared when death finally comes.
May I be fearless as life ebbs away.
May my detachment help in the freeing of the heart.
(Bucknell & Kang, p. 90)

Advantages

- To fully *acknowledge death in a calm and open-eyed way*, and to thereby be prepared for one's hour of death – that is, to be peaceful, tranquil, composed, serene, clear-headed, and without fear at death.
- To cultivate a *sense of urgency* for using one's remaining life in as skilful a way as possible, without frittering away time and opportunities.
- To enable one to die in a calm, unbewildered way, having already *accepted and processed one's coming death*.
- To arouse an existential *awareness of human mortality and frailty*, and to remain cognizant of this.
- To embrace with *conviction and faith* the understanding of a way beyond birth and death, to the Deathless, *Nirvāna*.
- To diligently seek the *path to Awakening* through the earnest contemplation of death and which can act as a spur.
- To deeply recognize that *all conditioned things are impermanent*, and so not be overwhelmed with grief at the death of loved ones or friends.
- To understand what is of *true value in life*, and to realize that many of our hopes, fears, and pleasures in the end will appear as mere shadows (Bucknell & Kang, p. 89).
- To use whatever time remains to *repay all debts, forgive all transgressions*, and be at odds with none (Bucknell & Kang, p. 89).
- To squander *no time brooding* on past mistakes, but to use each day as it were the last (Bucknell & Kang, p. 89).
- To *purify the mind*, rather than to pamper the body (Bucknell & Kang, p. 89).
- To develop *detached compassion* rather than possessiveness and clinging toward those loved, since death will cause separation from those loved (Bucknell & Kang, p. 89).
- To *use each day fully*, not wasting it on fruitless pursuits and vain longings (Bucknell & Kang, p. 89).

In practising the above, one will develop: diligence; disenchantment with any rebirth; non-attachment to life; disinclination to evil; avoidance of much storing; non-avarice; as well as the recognition of impermanence, and thus of *dukkha* and non-Self.

Potential Dangers

- To experience *sorrow or fear* by contemplating the death of a person that is dear to one (Buddhaghosa).
- To undergo or suffer *undue anxiety*, or even fearfulness, in contemplating one's own death (Buddhaghosa).
- To unwittingly and unskilfully experience *gladness* by contemplating the death of a disliked person (Buddhaghosa).
- To feel relatively *indifferent* in contemplating the death of a neutral person (Buddhaghosa).

Sources:

- Bucknell, R. and Kang, C. (compilers). (1997) *The meditative way: readings in the theory and practice of Buddhist meditation*. New York: Routledge.
- Ñānamoli, Bhikkhu. 1991. *The path of purification: Visuddhimagga (by Buddhaghosa)*. Onalaska: Pariyatti Editions.
- Class notes for *Buddhist Meditation and Psychology* ("5. Developing the 'Immeasurable' Emotions") in the MA in Buddhist Studies offered by the University of South Wales.

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