

2003-10-30 Remembrance of the Dead

Sat, 7/11 11:38PM • 53:58

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, coffin, buddha, hungry ghosts, life, son, died, ceremony, blessing, supreme, person, holding, village, kindness, offer, encounter, tommy, beings, death, passed

SPEAKERS

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It said that

when the Buddha before he was a Buddha, when he was still living his life as a prince living in the palaces of the foothills of the Himalayas, he lived a very protected life. And he didn't have much encounter with the great sufferings that people encounter in life. It said his father kept them protected from very well protected from ever seeing sick a sick person or an old person or a dead person. And it's kind of like growing up in the suburbs. And in fact, the first dead person I saw the first corpse I ever saw in my life, was when I was 11 years old, was in Nepal, which is the place where the Buddha was kept protected from at all. I saw a child didn't actually see the body so well because the child was wrapped in cloth. It was being carried on a stretcher down to the river where they were going to have the fire that burned the body. And so the Buddha was kept protected from seeing these things. And then as young people might be inclined to do if they've kind of kept cooped up, at some point, he ventured forth beyond that palace walls. And for the first time in his life, he encountered a sick person, an old person and a dead person. And this had a very big impact on him. He asked the person who was with his attendant, what is that? What is that? You know, you've never seen a sick person. Oh, that's a sick person. And the person explained, it's the fate of everyone, sooner or later they get sick. What's that? Oh, it's an old person, sooner or later Unless, you know, if nature takes his normal course, everyone gets old like that. And back in engineering 2500 years ago, old age didn't have they didn't have plastic surgery and they didn't have cosmetics. They didn't have dentists and the way we have them. So you can imagine, you know, the age showed much more perhaps than sometimes we see it here in the modern west where we say we have a youth culture. And then he saw a corpse. What's that? And his attendant said, Oh, that's a dead person, and sooner or later, everyone will die, including you. And this impact of seeing firsthand, sickness, old age and death was, was so strong in the psyche of the Buddha. He decided to leave the life that he was set to become a king and follow the family business and became a renunciant left all that behind, in order to seek for some deeper answers, not just answers, but transformation. In the context of this life that we live where sickness old

age and death is a common part. Our life. And he wanted to find some answer to the suffering that entailed. And you can maybe imagine someone who until they were 2829 years old left lived a very protected life, the shock of kind of the protection, the barriers of that protection being dropped down, and then seeing life for the first time vary dramatically, and how very motivating that experience might be. And so it was for the Buddha. So his encounter with death, then motivated him to engage in the spiritual life and his spiritual practices seek and try to find that which brings peace and freedom in the context of this kind of life that we live. Many years later, after he had discovered what that piece is how to have this. They have a kind of deep abiding sense of well being or peace in the midst of this world of transiency of suffering and death. He was visited by a woman who had lost her only son. And I'd like to read you that story. It's it's a very famous story. And I think all the pieces of the story are significant. Go Tommy was her family name, but because she tired easily, she was called kisa go Tommy, or frail or Tommy. She had been born at 70. In a poverty stricken house. When she grew up, she married, going to the house of her husband's family to live there, because she was the daughter of a poverty stricken house. They treated her with contempt. After a time she gave birth to a son, then they according to her respect, and this is quite common in ancient India, that a woman status was really in relationship to the men around and you enter a family, because you married to the family, your status and family is very much dependent on you having mostly a son back in those times. But when that boy of hers was old enough to play and run hither and about, he died, so sprang up within her, thought she, since the birth of my son, I was once denied honor and respect in this very House have received respect. These folk may even seek to cast my son away, taking her son on her hip. She went about from one house door to another saying, Give me medicine for my son. Wherever people encountered her, they said, Where did you ever meet with medicine for the dead? So saying they clap their hands and left and indirect division. She had not the slightest idea what they meant. Now a certain wise man saw her and thought, this woman must have been driven out of her mind by sorrow for her son. But medicine for her, no one else is likely to know except the Buddha. So he said to her woman, as for medicine for your son, there is no one else who knows, but the Buddha. Go to him and ask. The man speaks the truth. He taking your son on her hip, she took her stand, she took her stand in the outer circle of the congregation, around the seated Buddha and said, Oh, Buddha, gave me medicine for my son. The teacher, seeing that she was ripe for understanding, said you did me You did well go Tommy in coming here for medicine. Go into the city. Make the rounds of the entire city beginning at the beginning. In whatever house No one has ever died from that house fetch tiny grains of mustard seed. Every house in India has mustard seeds or the cooking well, very well Reverend SIRs said she delighted in heart. She entered within the city and at the very first house she said the Buddha bids me fed fetch tiny grains of mustard seeds for medicine for my son. Give me tiny grains of mustard seed. Alaska Tommy, and they said they and brought in gave to her this specific particular seat I cannot take in this house. Someone has died. What say you got Tommy? Here it is impossible to count the number of people who have died. Well then enough I will not take it. The Buddha Not telling me to take mustard seed from a house where anyone ever has anyone has ever died. In the same way she went to the second house and to the third house in the fourth. Finally she understood in the entire city. This must be the way the Buddha full of compassion for the welfare of everyone must have seen. overcome with emotion. She went outside the city, carried her son to the burning ground, and holding

him in her arm said, dear little son, I thought I thought that you alone had been overtaken by this thing, which people call death. But you are not the only one death has overtaken. This is a law common to everyone. So saying she cast her son away in the burning ground. Then she uttered the following verse. No village law, no law of market town. No law of a single house is this of all The world and all the worlds of gods. This only is the law that all things are impermanent. So the story of a woman who incense goes a little bit crazy with her grief. And you can imagine because partly because of the tremendous meaning it meant to have a son in that context, he was poor, no status, maybe danger being driven out of the house, kid direct, probably bring this love for a son. He was lost to refuse to believe he had died or refused to believe she had let go of him. Until somehow she realized the universality of death. That's something we all face. It's part of everybody's life. And then the question is, and you know, in some ways, this story is a parable, not only for our encounter with death and coming to some kind of acceptance of death as part of life, but also it's a parable for any kind of loss that we have in our life. What do we have Are we still holding on to things that are long gone, trying to relive or keep in place something which will never come back again? are we holding on to anger unnecessarily? Because of what we've lost or what's taken away from us. We hold on to grief unnecessarily. There might be time for anger and time for grief. But are there ways that we hold on to it because we don't accept what's happening. I like to distinguish the difference between anger and resentment, as as resentment is frozen anger, the holding on to it we're not willing to let go of a situation or accept it in some deep way. Or like the little quote, that's gonna cliché, that's forgiveness is giving up all hope for a better past. You're holding on for a better pass trying to construct a better path. To make it make the past better, there are wise ways and unwise ways of relating to the past. But here this parable at least is a parable. If someone is holding on to the past holding on to something she doesn't want to let go she's gonna accept. So what do we hold on to what are we not willing to let go of and move on in our life and meet the next moment free or more awake. When I was many years ago, I went to one of the offshoots I not tributary, I guess the offshoots of the Amazon River. There's a in French Guiana, which borders Brazil. It was actually the river we went up one of these rivers at borders actually a French Guiana in Suriname, and we went far up the river to a place where people sell them go and we came across a village of African Americans, and the story they called the bony, very proud people. And they had been taken to serving them in maybe the 1700s, to be slaves. And in the first generation, while there's, you know, people who've been captured in Africa and taken in slave, they escaped from slavery. And they went deep into the jungles where they couldn't be found where they left alone. And they kind of created a kind of friendship with the Indians there and they actually taught the Indians how to make canoes, then you have to make canoes with the natives there didn't but they retain the culture. And in paradoxically, oddly enough, they're kind of more African than people in Africa in the sense that they maintain many of the traditional religious ideas and values and customs kind of untouched by by much of modern, modern world. So we encountered these wonderful village of people in the day we got there, and an old woman in the village had died. And as we entered the village They have this big workshop area, and they were building a coffin. And they're building it around her. You know, she's just laying there on the planks, and they're building this coffin around her. So we've watched for a while and we went about and that evening they were going to have a festival, a ceremonial ritual funeral ceremony. For her. It was very interesting the way they conducted it. In the

center of the village, they had this kind of ceremonial hall that had no walls, just big posts, kind of and attached attached roof. And they were going to carry the coffin up there to this place to celebrate their performance ceremonies. And there were I think, as I remember six older men below the village carrying the coffin up the road. And when they came to the entryway of this ceremonial Hall, there was an old man waiting. As they tried to enter the entryway, he started pushing back on the coffin, and pounding on it. And yet in some language I couldn't understand yelling sound like swearing at the coffin and hitting it and, you know, being really angry, and obviously he was angry and you know, and that went on for a while. And then he stopped. But he refused to let the confident and then he changed place and then other men, all the good men carrying the coffin. And the other guy stood in front and did the same thing. Yeah, language. So then I asked someone who spoke English, what's going on here. And it was explained that these are the old, these old men of the village. She was an older woman, she old woman. They were friends. They were friends since they were they grew up together. They were kind of in the village for since you know, they were children. And they knew each other really well, in all kinds of ways in which you spend your whole life growing up together. Maybe some of you've been lovers with her and all kinds of things. And they're getting off their chest the things they had to get off their chest before they're ready to celebrate her life. From her passing away, and they were kind of expressing themselves letting her know, you know, remember that time and, and once they kind of set it all, then they finally get the coffin into the ceremonial Hall. And the rest of the night through the whole night, that village just danced, they Brigade, around the coffin, music and dancing is quite, you know, festive occasion. But before the festivities could happen, they had to have this little kind of letting go of the resentment, the holding of things that they've never told her, but they felt they should have said, in order to allow it to move on. So it's one way of, you know, one cultural way of dealing with death. Here in the modern world, the kind of funerals in world services I've been to, they tend to be much more sedate compared to that. But how is it we relate to people who are dying, and how do we release them, one of the one of the customs in Buddhism is, as someone who is dying or once they've died, especially at once they've kind of you know, had their last breath. There's a practice and kind of inner practice of allow of releasing that person from any holding you hold to holding on to them, they're going through this huge transition. And it said then since you kind of kind of, if you're still kind of grab on to it, refusing to allow them to go in your mind, at least, like this woman is refusing to let them go, that you kind of actually make it harder for the person to go into that transition of dying. And so this is inner practice, then, of finding inside of you the ability to let go, Okay, I'll let you go. I let you go. I'm not gonna hold on to you. It's okay. You could please go you know, and we send people off with kindness and with our goodwill. A very important story in the myth legend in Buddhism is that of them of a disciple of Buddha named Mark Liana. In mocha Yana mother, who was very close to died. And after she died, he had a series of dreams. He dream that she was reborn in kind of this hell realm where she was a hungry ghost. And it was a very difficult hell realm where ghosts have difficulty anyway because they have these. These are beings with huge, huge, huge, huge bellies, but their throats are amazingly thin. And so no matter how much you can eat, you can't get food down your throat fast enough to satisfy this huge belly, which is always hungry sees hungry ghosts are always hungry, never satisfied. And some people are like that you see them you can never give them enough they always want more. And now maybe feel yourself or sometimes feel like hungry ghosts. But his

idea is hungry. He was reborn as a hungry ghost and in a particular place where every time They're not only was she hungry ghosts was kind of throat. But every time she took a bite of solid food to eat, it turned to flames in her mouth. And every time she tried to drink something, it turned to blood into pus. So she hasn't had these dreams and use his mother. So he's quite horrified, you know, disturbed by it. So it goes to the Buddha and, and explains he has his dreams. And the Buddha says, Oh, yes, you agree, you're actually seeing what's going on with your mug mother, but you can help her. And what you need to do is to I forget exactly how the story goes, but you need to do some acts of goodness in the world, make some offerings, do some good, good deed in the world. And then when you've done that, then dedicate the goodness of that the merit of that for the welfare of your mother, and that'll help release her from that particular state of life, their state of rebirth or whatever and help her Move on. And then it said that look Liana when went in descended into the hell realms to and came to the gate of her particular Hill and he broke open the lock and all the beings in that whole realm all those hungry ghosts were able to escape and they came up to the world of humans

and

and so the people that were aware of this, then gathered together and made all these food offerings and offerings of merit to these hungry ghosts encouraging go wherever they needed to go go back to where they came from, if they need to kind of live out their kind of their karma down there, I suppose. They'll be out as mother was released once and for all and found some kind of freedom. But in order to get these beings to go back where they belong, I think it was kind of a packed set up these hungry ghosts, Miss Hill, that every year on the seventh month, they would be allowed to leave their hell realms, and the people would feed them and and, and offer their kindness and their merit and their goodness to them in the respect to these beings that have passed away these hungry ghosts. So you find in Japan and in China, to this day, right here in the peninsula, you find it and some of the Japanese Buddhist have ever been to Oban ceremony that the Japanese temples nearby? Well, the obon ceremony is celebrating this particular story. And they're kind of festive, right, aren't they? But they're celebrating the story. And the set usually is compared to seven months of the year is when all these hungry ghosts come visit. And so that month, you're supposed to have put extra food out on the altar and do all these wonderful things for these hungry ghosts and the goblins, noise things Here in America, July doesn't mean much for us in terms of hungry ghosts and goblins in America, the ghosts and goblins, they tend to come out wherever they come from. I don't know where they come from, but they tend to come out in October, the end of October. And because of that, the Buddhist groups that do the ceremony, like this goes in center, for example, and some other I know, will celebrate the cigar key ceremony, the ceremony for feeding the hungry ghosts on around Halloween or on Halloween, but they don't do it just as a kind of way of feeding the hungry ghosts. They do it as a very respectful, reverent way of remembering those beings, those people we know who have passed in the last year. And often they evoke their names. They do some chanting for them, they make some offerings to them. They offer them light, they offer them food. And the idea is partly to offer some kind of memorial service. It's also often very For the psyche for people for us to remember people that passed away and, and to honor that memory and honor the goodness of that person or the good memories or just

remember who they are, as just seems like a wonderful thing to do at times for the psyche, and also as a way of helping us release any way in which we're still holding on to that person and the memory of that person or holding on to the grief or, or not really haven't really fully accepted that this is what's happened in our life. And so I think every individual person that goes through this gawky ceremony, where it's kind of a memorial service, it has a different meaning for each person, depending on what needs to be done. For some people is very much a memorial service, or release to that person or are sending our goodwill to that person who's dying. For some TV, what people it's more visitation of their own hungry ghosts in their own psyche. And having that remembering that recognizing the demons, the goblins inside themselves, and somehow being very respectful and kind to them, In contrast, the way we are sometimes can be towards the part of ourselves which we're uncomfortable with, we don't want to accept and we don't want to admit it's there. And, and this is a time then to kind of let it come up in a sense in a very generous way and very respectful way and kind way, in a way that's not going to cause suffering for other beings to remember it, and then and then they say, to offer light or for food, but to offer something offer goodness, to that respectful context, differently context for at all. So what I'd like to do with all of you, is to lead you in a little ritual. That's also kind of a guided meditation

and

And what are these is a mostly a guided meditation on loving kindness, meditation, loving kindness with the practice of offering our goodwill or kindness or well wishing for others. And that at some point in the middle of this guided meditation I'll invite you all to name someone that you know who's died in recent times in the last year or something, you know, some recent time and just to bring up their name, in the middle of this ritual, the ceremony this commemoration is meditation and, and then we'll do that for a while, say names and then I'll continue then offering loving kindness and loving kindness that will be offered to that those names those people as their names have come up to seem okay with all of you. So Make yourselves comfortable and an upright posture. And before we do loving kindness meditation, I'm going to do some Pāli chants, chants in the ancient language of the Buddha. And you can use include this as part of your meditation to listen to this. So sitting upright, gently closing your eyes and letting your mind be at ease the best you can, letting your heart be at ease. taking a few moments to feel your breathing Breathing in and breathing out a little bit letting your mind become still and quiet.

Oh

good. Otto. Otto. Some sun Buddhas. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma some some Buddhists

No, no.

go toe to some some Buddhists.

Mood siren cha gotcha me. Dumb. Saarinen. Gotcha. Sang Suriname cha cha me. Duty MP budem sadhana Saarinen gotcha v DMP dumb Saarinen. Gotcha. DMP Sangam Suriname, Cha me

the blue

Gotcha the

DMP DME sarena Cha me the hottie the son GM siren Mmm, gotcha. Me

Neato, Sankara

you Domino Rupa kita Chanti song boo pasa, masuku,

Sukkot.

All things are impermanent.

They have the nature of arising and passing away.

They're quiet quieting the peacefulness of all the activity of the mind.

is the greatest happiness. So bringing your attention to the area around your heart, feeling whatever sensations might be in that area and then have your breathing. move in and out, move through the heart center. Like you're imagining you're breathing through that part of your body and having a sense of yourself sitting here respectful awareness of yourself. An offer yourself some thoughts of goodwill. Wishing yourself well thinking kindly of yourself. Perhaps you can even be happy with yourself. And then I'll give you the classic Buddhist phrases of loving kindness and then silently in your own mind, you can repeat these phrases. And as you repeat them, see if you can sink into the intention, the meaning, the motivation that might give rise to these wishes.

May I be happy?

Each of you say that for yourself, may I be happy?

May I be safe?

May I be healthy?

May I be at ease

Breathing in and out through your heart.

Saying again, may I be happy?

May I be safe?

May I be healthy?

May I be at ease

Then bring to mind someone who is a benefactor for you. It could be someone who has cares about you quite a bit or has helped you somewhere in your life. Or it could be someone who inspires you like maybe some people I know, take the Dalai Lama said benefactor or somewhat some person. Kind of get a sense of this person, this benefactor. Maybe the image of them in front of you or a sense of their presence, reminding yourself of their capacity to be happy that they have that potential. And that wouldn't be great if they fulfilled that potential. And be great if they could be happy. And then repeat these words. Extend This intention of goodwill towards this person

may you be happy.

May you be safe.

May you be healthy

May you be at ease

and then again For the same person, maybe now imagining how you would feel a little bit if you knew that they were happy or how you'd feel receiving their kindness from them.

May you be happy.

May you be safe.

May you be healthy

You'll be at ease.

And now bring to mind someone that you know who has died in recent times, or someone you've learned about who has died. And the best it could be someone bring to mind for him. It doesn't bring a lot of grief at this moment and then remembering this person And offer your kindness. Offer your goodwill to this person by being willing to release the person from any hold holding you have and by extending your kindness

May you be happy

May you be safe

May you be healthy.

May you be at ease.

Now I invite you

to speak out loud.

The name, name or names of people you've known who've passed away in recent times.

And you can just be spontaneously as you want to and it's fine to have two or three people saying names at the same time. Quietly saying Get out loud. Now start with Marty Marty martyr and on a garlic I'm with Indra. My friend Butch

Medical Center

Jason

And then we offer the merit of our practice and our efforts or kindness. We offer whatever benefits that come from our offer of loving kindness to others. We offer our compassion, our care for those who have passed and for those who still live

May all beings be happy?

May all beings

be safe.

May all beings

be healthy.

May all beings be at ease.

May all the unresolved tension And pains, frustrations and sorrows that we carry within us. May all the hungry ghosts and demons fears that we carry.

May they be at ease.

May they find their way

to feeling safe and to relax

to liberation And then, one tradition is at the end of ceremony like this. There's this following discourse of the Buddha which is recited. It's called integrate discourse on blessings. to associate not with the foolish, but to be with the wise to honor the worthy ones. This is the blessing Supreme. to reside in a suitable location, to have good pass deeds done, and set oneself in the right direction. This is a blessing Supreme. To be well spoken, highly trained, well educated, skilled and handicraft and highly disciplined. This is a blessing supreme To be well caring, of mother or father, to look after spouse and children, to engage in a harmless occupation. This is a blessing supreme outstanding behavior, blameless virtue, blameless action. open hands to all relatives and selfless giving. This is a blessing Supreme. To see sin abstain from evil, to avoid intoxicants to be diligent and virtuous practices. This is a blessing supreme to be reverent and humble, content and grateful to hear the Dharma at the right time. This is a blessing Supreme. To Be patient and obedient, to visit with spiritual people to discuss the Dharma at the right time. This is a blessing supreme to live simple purely to see the Noble Truths and to realize freedom is the blessing Supreme. A mind unshaken when touched by the worldly states. Sorrow lists stainless insecure. This is a blessing Supreme. Those who have fulfilled all these are everywhere invincible. They find well being everywhere. This is the blessing Supreme.

Nature water Sankara, yo Domino Berkey to Nero Shanti sung pasa Masuko

all things are impermanent. They have the nature of arising and passing away.

Bringing to peace.

All the activity of the mind is the greatest happiness

So May the

this little remembrance of the dead

may Halloween

May your meditation practice in general

May

your life all a nurture and bring forth the goodness that's inside of each of you and may that goodness that's in each of you be offered to for the welfare and happiness of everyone that you encounter. They all beings everywhere be happy so thank you very much and I wish you are well and Happy Halloween