

Care of the mind

Letting go of the fear of death

Most of us find death and dying an uncomfortable topic. It is not something we want to think about, talk about or ever have to face. However, by closing our mind to thinking about this we lose an opportunity to explore and accept this natural stage of life, which can reinforce our discomfort when we or a loved one is faced with death.

Two approaches which may be of benefit are:

- To consider and explore your beliefs about death and dying
- To contemplate the impermanent nature of all things

Exploring your beliefs about death and dying

Fear can come from not being confident about what happens at the time of death and afterwards, so it is important to become clear about your personal beliefs. Some of the more common beliefs are that:

- Death is a permanent end and nothing continues afterwards
- The spirit or soul continues on in another form
- God or other Divine Beings exist and there is eternal life after death
- The most subtle level of mind separates from the body at the time of death and [transitions from this life to the next](#).

In addition to considering our beliefs, another step is to strengthen our familiarity with a practice that we will be able to rely on whenever we are confronted by the fear of death. Some examples are:

- Accepting death as a natural part of life – all of us are born and eventually will die
- Feeling great compassion for all other beings who are confronted by the fear of death
- Having total faith in God and trust in His love for us
- Praying for a positive rebirth or rebirth in a Pure Land

Contemplating the impermanent nature of everything

Teachings from the Buddhist world view on impermanence can help us to be accepting of death.

Impermanence means that all things are in a state of continual change. Everything changes – our body, mind, relationships, environment, other people, everything. Change can be challenging and sometimes frightening. We don't want to age and we don't want our friendships to finish. We don't want to lose our

Care of the mind

loved ones and we definitely don't want to die.

However we're not able to change the impermanent nature of life and the ongoing change that continues to happen. Because things depend on many other factors they only exist for as long as these causes and conditions remain the same.

A strong awareness that all things are actually impermanent helps us to be flexible and adapt to change. We can be more open to the future and not hold so tightly to the past. Having less anxiety around change means we will have a calmer mind which gives us a greater capacity to plan for and move into the future. We can cope better with the difficult things we face, even our own death or the death of a loved one.

Practice Technique

To increase your awareness of impermanence, meditate on the continuous changes taking place at every moment in our external and internal worlds. Some examples are:

- Natural environment – the movement of the moon, sun and planets; day and night, the seasons, the weather, moving clouds, the ebb and flow of the ocean; the life cycle of plants (seeds, buds, fruit or flowers & finally decay).
- Living beings – the birth, life and death of people and animals.
- Our body - the body with its beating heart and flow of breath; sensory experiences of the things we see, smell, hear, touch and taste; growth from infancy through childhood, adolescence, adulthood and older age.
- Our mind – the mind and its constant flow of thoughts; mental states such as happiness, unhappiness and calmness.
- Illness – injuries; common illnesses such as colds; transient pain such as sore muscles and headaches; deteriorating sense faculties such as eyesight and hearing; incurable and advancing illness.
- Relationships – strangers who become friends, friends who become people you dislike or who upset you, enemies who become friends, friends you lose touch with.

Impermanence is neither a good nor a bad thing. It is a law of nature which we can use to our advantage to influence our response to change and to plan and shape our future. While we don't have full control over what happens to us in the future, by considering all the possibilities we can prepare for them practically and emotionally.

If things were permanent everything about us would stay the same. We would not be able to develop and strengthen positive qualities, learn from our mistakes, live our life in a meaningful way or become who we want to be. Without impermanence we would

not have met with those who love us and we would not separate from those who harm us.

When we learn to work with the impermanent nature of life, we can develop a deeper sense of calmness as change happens, even the most challenging change we face.

Karuna also has experienced people you can talk with on:
07 3632 8300 or karuna@karuna.org.au

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