

A Letter to a Father Who Has Lost His Son

Hello John,

I still remember hearing the news of your son's passing away. Apart from education/teaching, my life has been drawn toward spirituality. Here is a passage dealing with *the reality of death* that I recently came across from another faith tradition (in this case, Buddhism). I found the passage honest in its description of death, and it complements what we read in the Old Testament of the Bible. It's a recollection on death from a discourse called the *Sutta Nipata*; here is part of it.

"Life in this world is unpredictable and uncertain.
It is difficult, short and bound up with suffering.
Once born, a being is going to die, and this is unavoidable.
When old age arrives, or another cause, then there is death.
This is how it is with living beings.
When fruits become ripe, they may fall in the early morning.
In just the same way a being, once born, may die at any moment.
Just as the potter's clay pots tend to end up being shattered,
so is it with the life of mortals.
Both young and old, whether foolish or wise, will be trapped by death.
All beings move towards death. They are overcome by death.
They go to the other world.
And then not even a father can save his son, or a family their relatives.
Look: while relatives are watching, tearful and groaning, men
are carried off one by one, like cattle being led to the slaughter.
Death and ageing are endemic to the world."

True, the author doesn't address the hope beyond the grave (as the New Testament does), but he has come to accept our mortal life for what it is.

In closing, John, may your grieving, in its own time and way, turn into a gentle goodbye, where death can be accepted, rather than something we battle against futilely.

Upon my reflection of a father and his departed son,

Alex