

## **A Recollection on Death (The Salla Sutta – The Dart)**

1. Life is unpredictable and uncertain in this world. Life here is difficult, short and bound up with suffering.
2. A being, once born, is going to die, and there is no way out of this. When old age arrives, or some other cause, then there is death. This is the way it is with living beings.
3. 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.
4. Just as the clay pots made by the potter tend to end up being shattered, so is it with the life of mortals.
5. Both the young and the old, whether they are foolish or wise, are going to be trapped by death. All beings move towards death.
6. 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.
7. Look: while relatives are watching, tearful and groaning, men are carried off one by one, like cattle being led to the slaughter.
8. So death and ageing are endemic to the world. Therefore, the wise do not grieve seeing the nature of the world.
9. You cannot know his path as to where he has come from, or where he is going to. So it makes no sense to grieve for him.
10. The man who grieves gains nothing. He is doing no more than a foolish man who is trying to hurt himself. If a wise man does it, it is the same for him.
11. Peace of mind cannot come from weeping and wailing. On the contrary, it will lead to more suffering and greater pain.
12. The mourner will become pale and thin. He is doing violence to himself, and still he cannot keep the dead alive; his mourning is pointless.
13. The man who cannot leave his sorrow behind him only travels further into pain. His mourning makes him a slave to sorrow.
14. Look at beings who are facing death, who are living out the results of their previous deeds; people are terrified when they see that they are trapped by death.
15. What people expect to happen is always different from what actually happens. From this comes great disappointment; this is the way the world works.

16. A man may live for a hundred years, or even more, but in the end he is separated from his relatives, and he too leaves life in this world.
17. So we can listen and learn from the noble man as he gives up his grief. When he sees that someone has passed away and lived out their life, he says "he will not be seen by me again".
18. When a house is burning, the fire is put out by water. In the same way the wise man, skilful, learned and self-reliant, extinguishes sorrow as soon as it arises in him. It is like the wind blowing away a tuft of cotton.
19. The person who is searching for his own happiness should pull out the dart that he has stuck in himself, the arrow-head of grieving, of desiring, of despair.
20. The man who has taken out the dart, who has no clinging, who has obtained peace of mind, passed beyond all grief, this man, free from grief, is still.

Source: <http://patacarabhikkhunihermitage.wordpress.com/2013/06/12/vesak-meditation-retreat-2013/>

### **Comments on the Recollection on Death**

The sutta is not saying that grief is something that we must instantly suppress or give up. In the same way that we are working to develop positive emotional states, through the *brahmavihāra* practices, we can work for a fuller understanding of life, death, and relationship. Armed with clearer sight and skills that are the product of sustained work, we can see death – even of a dear one – as something other than a wrenching apart of a personal relationship. It remains hard, and is amongst the most difficult things we face, but our acceptance of *dukkha* as reality can help us to bring about the conditions to allow a gentle goodbye rather than something we battle against futilely. A synonym for Nibbāna – the goal of the Buddhist path – is *amaravati*, or the Deathless Realm. While we are faced by the debilitating effects of untempered grief, we are unable to take effective steps to move forward on a path that leads to the end of all grief, all suffering. We are not there yet, but we can edge ever closer to constructing our lives in ways that are fully lived, wholly engaged, and freer from suffering. Little by little our understanding grows and we can appreciate the reality of what we will face. In this way we can fully come to understand death and ensure that the preparations we make are as skilled as possible. We often think that we understand death, but this remains one of the great challenges of life.

Source: <http://www.vipassana.com/course/> (From the Vipassana Fellowship Meditation Course, an online course in mindfulness meditation as found in the serenity and insight traditions of early Buddhism, led by Andrew Quernmore.)