

Make the Most of Your Life

July 24, 2014

Today we did a ceremony for Ajaan Jiab's uncle, who died two days ago. We'll make merit and dedicate the merit to him—and reflect on the fact that death comes to all of us. Are we prepared? As the Buddha said, this is a topic of meditation that we should develop every day. And not just every day: He said, "Each time you breathe in, each time you breathe out, you remind yourself: This might be your last breath. Are you ready to go?" A lot of people might find that really depressing, but it's meant to make you see the importance of each moment and the opportunities you have to practice with each moment.

Some people think you practice only when you go off on retreat like this or go off to a quiet place like the monastery and just sit with your eyes closed. Well, that's one part of the practice but there's a lot more in the practice as well: developing all kinds of good qualities.

You need to look into the mind to see, "Is there anything in the mind that would pull you down, if you had to suddenly leave?" Then work on that right away. Make that your top priority. Don't let the pressing events of the world outside take priority. You've got to have your own inner priorities and stick to them. That way your life has meaning, so that when you leave this body, you go with something good. There are all kinds of things you'll have to leave behind, so leave behind some of your greed, aversion, and delusion. Let that go before you even have to let go. Take just the good you've done. If you're not careful, a lot of unskillful things will go along as well. So you try to shed those as much as you can while you're still healthy, while you're still strong. Because there will come a point when you can't do this anymore. So try to have a sense of heedfulness.

It's kind of ironic that in Thailand they list funeral services or funeral commemorations as inauspicious. But as the Buddha said, heedfulness is one of the most auspicious things you can develop for yourself. And this is why we have these ceremonies: both for the sake of the person who's passed away to dedicate the merit to him—the merit of our generosity, the merit of our virtue, the merit of our meditation—and also to remind ourselves that we're all in the same boat. There will come a time when somebody else is doing this for us.

In the meantime, you want to make sure that you make the best use of your life as you have it. The opportunity to do good doesn't come all the time, but you've got it now. So make the most of this opportunity.