

A Comparative Study on Death in Buddhism and the West

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Death is still, for most people, an uncomfortable subject that many do not care to think about much, even though it is no longer a taboo topic that it once was. Yet, if there is one thing that is certain in life it is that we shall all die, sooner or later, whether we like it or not. The life of human kind is short, and death is inevitable for what is born. We all know it, but we may try to forget the fact. This avoidance and fear of death contribute toward making death a social problem.

There are many different attitudes to death, and two main ones predominate: the Traditional Christian View and the Modern Secular View. The Traditional Christian View asserts the reality of an after-life, which the Modern Secular View denies or at the very least calls strongly into question. Besides, the Stage theory of Dying has proposed that persons aware of their impending death pass through five psychological stages in preparation for it: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

On death and dying, Buddhism denies two extremes - eternalism (*sassatavāda*) and annihilationism (*ucchedavāda*). According to Buddhism, there are two kinds of death: timely death (*kāla-maraṇa*) and untimely death (*akāla-maraṇa*). Beings are born along with ageing and death. Fear of death (*maraṇa-bhaya*) is an unwholesome state of mind. For this reason, Buddhism gives a remedy. There should always be mindfulness, a sense of urgency, and knowledge through recollection of death in eight ways. One devoted to mindfulness of death (*marāṇassatikathā*) is constantly diligent. Then “access-concentration” may be gained, and this is the basis for the arising of Insight (*vipassanā*). The more ready we shall be to die, the further we shall get along the path that leads to the “Deathless” (*amataṃ*).

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