So then I welcome you all to this three part class. And for our discussion about dying and how I see this class as a series is my hope for it in the sense was primarily for for it to be informative. In the past I've done you know, workshops kind of thing on the topic of death and dying, that were more of a practicing with the topic or working with it with our own relationship to it and, and our attitudes towards it. And we're a practice way. And we'll do some of that in a couple of Fridays from now. It's in the newsletter that particular Friday, it is maybe a week from Friday. We have a kind of a one day retreat from 930 to 330. That this, the topic will be death and dying and I realize a lot of people can come in from But that's the way it worked out for us to do. And that'll be more practice focused. And the reason why I wanted to do something was more information informative. Formation focused here is some people said earlier. There's a lot of people now in on the peninsula connected to our community, who have been Buddhist practitioners for a long time where the mindfulness practice the Buddhist practice is very central to how they orient their lives and when you come to the issue of death and dying, they would like to somehow have the process of dying, the process of taking care of other people dying, informed by their spiritual affiliation or religious connection to Buddhism. What does it mean what is it like to die as a Buddhist or the resources as a Buddhist are the understandings or the practices, that kind of thing in harmony with what my practice has been

and I've been now to a number of people in our song guy who's with him I start dying and the memorial service for people and

and it's all been you know, maybe as it should be, but as a person who comes in kind of in the capacity of a minister kind of somebody meditation teacher comes in to offer spiritual counseling and to offer the memorial service the funerals and stuff that happens, the tending of the body, the I often find myself in situation where I, you know, where I you know, I don't want to impose a Buddhist particular Buddhist view on people and because often center probably people have their idea what this when they feel they want to see happen. But people, same time are interested in knowing what a
Buddhist view is. And it seems awkward for me to kind of present too much, you know, a loved one, it just died. And I'm going to go through the list and see, you know, this is what you can do as a Buddhist, it just somehow doesn't seem appropriate for me, I'm more kind of in tune with the relationship and what needs to be said and done. And we come up with something that seems appropriate. But I thought it would be very helpful to kind of put together a class maybe a manual, where a lot of these issues a lot of the possibilities are laid out. So people can study that and look at that. And so it isn't coming from me. It's just like this is this is a resources available and people can craft it and use what part of it is helpful for them.

So in the Buddhist tradition, there's a very strong emphasis on being mindful and being doing things consciously, mindfully And certainly there's a very important emphasis on being mindful as we die to be mindful of the process of dying as much as we can. But in that spirit, there's also a place for being considered reflective, conscientious about this very important transition in our life that is called death. And to prepare for it, not just simply to kind of wait until that time comes and just come with, you know, take it as it is, but actually spend some time preparing for it and understanding a little bit the process and, and becoming more conscious of that, and more part of one's life that this is really a possibility. I know there's lots of people who know In theory, they're going to die. But, you know, it's later who knows, you know, sometime later and, and sometimes it comes quite a surprise that later is today. So to have to be more conscious and aware of it is a very important part of the Buddhist tradition. It's also considered to be a very important spiritual practice. In Buddhism, to do mindfulness meditation, do reflection practices on death in the Theravada tradition that were part of their, in classically considered to be 40 meditation topics. And of those 40 there are two which are said to be universally useful to everybody and also to all situations. And one of them is the meditation practice on loving kindness, and the other is the practice of mindfulness or reflection on death. In one famous passage, the Buddha said, just as the elephant footprint is the biggest footprint in the jungle. So the most important meditation to do or reflection to do is that a reflection on death and you find many Buddhists In a terrible world who spent time very, very concentrated time doing meditation practices on death and dying, reflecting on it, doing various practices on that topic. Among them, especially among the monastic community in Asia, the monks were monks and nuns will often go spend time with a corpse. Usually someone they don't know but sometimes somebody you know, in order to do this contemplation of death and dying to contemplate that some point they'll be like this, and really look kind of death straight in the face. When I was in, sophomore in college, I took a drawing class. And somewhere in the halfway through the quarter they, our teacher took us to the university's anatomy lab to draw a corpse that was there. And we went to sessions for three hours each. And the first session. I do the fellows foot By time I came back for the next session I realized I did that because that was about as far as I could get from the from facing this issue by drawing his foot so I so the next time I went I drew his face thinking kind of look at it directly and see directly and it was a bit of a shock to go to the army lab because we showed up kind of quite innocent and of you know, I wasn't expecting to do this and hadn't had much experience with dead bodies before that. And the teacher said he wanted to do it because everybody's drawings became a lot stronger after that experience going to spending that week and those two sessions in the anatomy lab, and we showed up in the technician said it was.
his body perfectly good body laying there on the table and he said, What part of the body we'd like to see in quite understand and they started peeling back the skin and the muscles like was a banana and you know, You know, it's kind of like a little bit of a surprise to see, you know, different body parts being taken off and moved around and peeled back. It was kind of very powerful experience for me to have seen that. in Southeast Asia. There's one tradition of going to these, sometimes they cremate bodies, and they'll go out into the cremation grounds and spend time looking at the body as it's burning. And often, sometimes the bodies will charge doesn't. And they'll look at the charred body.

I sent a present to an Abbot in Thai temple and monastery in Thailand. And a couple years ago, and I got a lovely kind of letter back of thanks. Sweet letter thanks. And then as a kind of a gesture of response, I guess of appreciation and giving a gift back to me. He sent him in this envelope he sent a postcard like you would get a card right? And it was a card is a photograph of a burnt body or black and charred and in all color and and he you know it he thought this was really wonderful thing he knew I was a serious practitioner and so it wasn't like probably don't send it to you know his mother or something but because I was serious practitioner he thought I'd appreciate having this contemplation of death this was a normal thing you do you contemplate death and look at it people especially in Thailand who don't have easy access to charnel grounds or will go nowadays in the modern world, they'll go off into the anatomy lab or the or they go to the morgue and watch autopsies and things like that in order to really kind of really kind of be honest about this debt to really see it clearly look at it directly. And so that's a practice people do. There's also practices that people do that or not, doesn't involve directly confronting dead body but involved Thinking about death and all kinds of different ways reflecting on it meditating on the topic. One classic one is to sit and meditation gets stale and quiet. And then just repeat the phrase periodically death. Yeah, and see what bubbles up, come back and be quiet like oh, and then do it again and see what bubbles up in other practice is to say certain phrases around in your meditation and see what bubbles up then say like the phrase Death is inevitable. And you see what happens. And he's saying that death is inevitable. In other practice is, which is in the Satipatthana Sutta. The, the the, the manual or the description of the very practice that we a classic description of the practice we do here at our center has within it a section, which involves contemplation of a corpse, nine different contemplations on a corpse and it's different stages of the decay of a corpse and it's not They clear in the text whether you're actually supposed to go look at actual corpse, or they're supposed to imagine it. But you imagine a corpse that's just been dead and when speaking to bloat and fester, and when that's just the bones and bones are bleached, and you've been looking at, and it's part of this imagination, this visualization of a corpse, then the reflection is just as this corpse is like this, one day I will be like this. So this is this is gonna be the fate of my body and my you know, from from me also as at some point. Now, it isn't just the Buddhist tradition that does this kind of practices, reflecting and thinking about death ahead of time. I've read about Christian practices that are very similar or not similar. They are, you know, same, same type. I've heard of monks, Christian monks, who will, instead of having a bed to sleep in, we'll have the coffin they're gonna be buried in, that they sleep in. Every night as a reminder, this is you know, this is where they're gonna end up in this coffin. And there are monasteries in Europe where everybody's scared all the previous monks there's skulls and skeletons are stored in this big you know you can go
see these rooms filled with their skulls skeletons. I'm not sure why they saved them like that, but certainly it adds to the fact that you can go look at that and be aware of death is something that is ever present ever a possibility.

The great Tibetan Yogi Milarepa said something like the contemplation of death, the careful meditative reflection of it is one of the ways to ensure that our spiritual practice does not remain superficial. It's also a way of maybe ensuring that our spiritual practice is honest You really confront that which to many people is the most difficult, and raises the biggest existential questions and personal questions. And to have that really come up against your, your psyche in your imagination and really look at that and deal with it. Some people associate spirituality with joy and bliss and peace and wonderful qualities and try to emphasize that. And that's fine. It's certainly part of a spiritual life. But part of it should also be some kind of direct confrontation with this issue of that, which can be very helpful. So in Buddhism, we put a lot of emphasis on this. And probably not very much here in the West in western Buddhism. But in classic Buddhism, there's a big emphasis on this practice. Then you might ask a Why, why is this important? I've since given some reasons already, but some people will say, Well, it seems kind of morbid. spend time thinking and reflecting on death. And it's not meant to be a more morbid practice at all. One of the reasons to do it is to help cultivate a healthy and underscore the word healthy detachment to the world into our body. As you know, there's a tremendous preoccupation attachment people have with their physical bodies and the life here. And to really deal with that directly. And look at it and what it's all about, can help, hopefully in a very healthy way to not be so caught by, by these kinds of things. Maybe many of you maybe have had some experience of being close to death or having some accident or being very sick, and seeing how your priorities change from doing that. And maybe things you saw that were so important that you're so attached to, you know, vanish. Like this fellow here had a bicycle accident. If he had pedic preoccupations before his accident before being hit by the car. They probably were kind of distant right afterwards, probably lost too much importance and so soon help with this process of letting go. Looking at death can be very helpful. Here in the West, there's a tendency for people to emphasize the contemplation of death, as a way of helping us to live better, better, to appreciate life better and to enter life more fully. And you don't find that emphasis so much in Buddhist Asia, I think it's a few fine ones find one to have. But the emphasis in Buddhism is really this process of not affirming the world so much, not negating the world either. But rather, this end is ongoing process of finding how to live in this world, without the psyche of the mind clinging to anything or resisting anything, being very open, open handed, open minded, open hearted, pointing to that capacity we all have of touching what's known in Buddhism as the deathless and so deathless dimension, which is the word up there. I'm not a doctor. The Buddha when he became enlightened, it said that when he became enlightened death lost its thing. It's also said that someone who's enlightened, becomes invisible to death, or tomorrow, Laura's kind of this personification of death. The word Mara which is kind of sometimes considered as the Buddhist devil is a cognate word to our word mortal. A wonderful way in which indo European languages are connected to each other and Mara is a kind of comes from the Sanskrit root for death to die. And so someone who comes enlightened has become in it freed from this thing of death become invisible to death tomorrow, doesn't mean the person doesn't die. But I believe it means that their psyche is no
longer troubled, no longer afraid, by death is no longer death has no has no hold on that person in terms of Fear might be there.

So when the Buddha was enlightened that was part of, you know, the result of it. And as many of you know, the whole quest that the Buddha set out to resolve was this question of resolving the suffering inherent in sickness, old age and death. He had this confrontation with sickness, old age and death as a man who was 29 years old. Seemingly, he became 29 years old, without ever seeing a corpse. And having grown up partly in the suburbs of Los Angeles, I can tell you how easy it is to grow up without seeing a corpse. You don't even see my neighbors when they were alive. We had these electric car doors, you know that you push the button and they opened the garage and drove in and they went directly from the garage into their house. The street was like a ghost, Ghost, ghost town and really my own first meeting Principle of a dead body was not in America, not in the West, but was in when I was 11 years old and cut Bundu where we were walking down the street one day and there was a little procession of a young girl who had died. And she was wrapped in a white cloth and it was being carried by four people. But that was the first time I've ever seen someone who's died was you know, by going to Asia where it's very common to see you know, part of the culture it's it's not hidden from society and from people as sometimes it's here in this culture and just kind of right out there and in the you know, right there. If you go to Varanasi for example, you very easy to go sit there and watch the bodies burn. So part of the meat one of the purposes of reflecting on death or dealing it is to help point us towards letting go of clinging how pointless To that phenomenally important teaching of impermanence, and that's liberating, and help pointing us to that possibility of the deathless the deathless dimension, over our psyche of our life.

There's another reason to prepare for death to reflect on it and think about beforehand. And that is, it helps people around us. It's one thing, if we can become if we can be at peace with our own death. I think it's a tremendous gift to the people who attend to us as we're dying. Recent retreat I was that it was a lovely woman who have known for many years, who was dying of cancer. And she thought maybe, you know, she didn't know how long she had, but maybe six months left. And she, but the tragedy of it was that she had a she had a seven or nine year old daughter, and that's where her great suffering was about her own dying. was you know the impact this would have on our daughter. And I hope that one of the more useful things I told her as I worked with her was that as much as she was afraid of this and anxious about the impact on her daughter, that her anxiety and her fear around her death would have a big impact on her daughter, because what such a huge impact on a young child impressionable child have a mother or a parent die. But if the mother could die at peace with her own death, you know, personal peace about it, I think is a phenomenal gift to give someone. And so one of the things we do and we prepare for death ahead of time is we doing it for the sake of other people around us also to help them and their own confrontation and meaning of death.

I spent a lot of time probably a couple of years, almost on a daily basis. Having the reflection? What would it be like? If I was going to die tonight? I get up in the morning and you want to be like if I knew I
was going to sit with my last day. And it was a fascinating contemplation to do very interesting to think about that and reflect on it. It was very interesting to watch how that answer that question to that question changed over time. And, you know, as I changed in the process of it, and I still asked that question periodically, not as regularly as I did for those couple of years. So there's many ways of doing this kind of contemplation. And it's kind of practice we'll do some of them in this Friday day that we do that we have.

So offering this class as part of that spirit, of contemplation of death. Now what I had in mind, it might evolve as we do these three days, but I have in mind is to divide The three days in three parts today to spend to focus on this issue of preparation for death. And part of it's already talked about is emphasize that there are a lot of these practices in Buddhism that you can do contemplating death reflecting on death. There's not a lot of places you can go to read about it, but there's a few. And in our own process tradition. Larry Rosenberg has written the book called living in the light of death, and on the art of being called the art of being truly alive. And he talks he gives a nine different meditation practice to hear around reflective reflective practices on this topic, and it's a very nice read, reads well and addresses the topic quite well. So want to talk a bit more about preparation and I also want to talk a little bit about the Buddhist understanding of the process of dying Or what happens at death, the issue of death and rebirth as a background for these three days. And then next week, what I'd like to do is to talk about the dying process itself in the immediate immediacy of it of what happens as people die and how to work with people that are dying, how to work with your own death as you're doing, how practice the practices, practices that are suitable at times of you know, last minutes, less hours last days, and focus a bit more at that particular juncture of time. And then, perhaps in the last time, focus a bit more on the practices of after death, the Buddhist resources for the rituals of what to do with the body when it's died, and with people who are left behind what they can do. funerals and memorial services to handle the body, the practices like that and also During that last week, I talked a little bit about the ethics Buddhist view of the ethics around dying. I think Allison asked about suicide euthanasia, some of these issues are very important for people to address around death, they want to know what the Buddhist views are about this.

So, is that sound okay? So, okay. So your audio you along the program and so, for Buddhists, when I say this way they are, as most of you know, Buddhism has a very particular view about what happens when people die and that is Unless you're fully enlightened, you get reborn somewhere. And there's a view that human human beings that that there's been this endless cycle of birth, death, rebirth, death, rebirth and death. And then that cycle has has no beginning had no beginning. There's no first beginning be starting point for that process. It comes from beginning beginningless time. And there's no end to this process. In fact, the Buddhist cosmology is one of the cosmos the universe is a big bang universe, so it expands and contracts endlessly. And even though the universe contracts and expands into unrecognizable forms, the process of beings dying and being reborn continues, uninterruptedly, on and on and on.
This view of rebirth is one that some classic Buddhists will. Some some Buddhists will say, you cannot be a Buddhist without believing in it. It doesn't make any sense to be Buddhist believing in rebirth. And there are other Buddhist teachers who will say, That's nonsense. You don't have you don't have to believe in it. Buddhist practice doesn't isn't predicated on believing in rebirth. The Buddha once said, it's wonderful, kind of Pascal's Wager kind of thing. Where the Buddha didn't seem to mind if people didn't believe it or not. He seemed to believe in it or know it. He was supposed to have had remembered his past lives. So I guess he wouldn't say he believed anything he would say he knew it. That rebirth is true. And but his kind of Pascal's Wager his version is

If there is rebirth, and you'll live accordingly, living an ethical life a good life, then chances are you'll get a good rebirth. If there is no if there is no rebirth, but you act as if there is then at least you'll get a lot of benefits in this life. Because there's a lot of benefits that come from living an ethical spiritual life. So you can't lose he said, so you should act as if it's true. Then and then you have Buddhist teachers who emphasize you find this very powerfully emphasized in the Zen tradition, that death and dying happen every moment. Not just simply things arise and passive in every moment, but but in very Core outweigh the human being who we are, there's a kind of constant process of dying and then being reborn over and over again. And so the whole process of confronting death is not something some something is useful for the last moment of death. But rather, it's something that's useful each moment that we're alive, because each moment we are alive, is built into this very profound movement of birth, death, and rebirth, death and rebirth. So, for some Buddhists, it's very reassuring to know or to believe that they're going to be reborn, because the idea that it's just everything ends, you know, with this life, for some people, is a very bleak, kind of nihilistic and just, that's what's the point of anything? And to know, oh, you know, oh, this is hard or whatever, and, but, you know, I'm going to be reborn. This is very reassuring for other Buddhists. It's actually quite distressing. Because especially like if they hadn't lived a very good life, and they see the, you know, the gates of Hell is opening for them. Because Buddhists classically will believe in the possibility being reborn in hell. Possibility being reborn in heavenly realms discards the possibility being reborn in as hungry ghosts, so as animals or, or as a human being. And if people take this very literally true, which a lot of Buddhists do, it can be quite frightening, the tension that builds up but you're not sure where I'm going to go and do I really want to be burn in hell for the next 10 million years. The good news in Buddhism is that a classic view of Hell's in heavens and all that is that they're always temporary. The fact that you've been reborn in hell and reborn in in heaven, in heavenly realms, doesn't mean the process of death. To be rebirth doesn't continue it just that your lifespan has become very long in those states. But sooner or later, you die from those states and get reborn. So for some Buddhists is very reassuring. For some Buddhists, it's very distressing the idea of rebirth. For some Buddhists, they take very seriously the possibility of rebirth. And their spiritual practice. Their Buddhist practice itself is predicated on a strategy of how to work with this endless cycles of rebirth, to optimize it, to work with it, to make it to work in their favor. So for example, they'll do practice a lot of merit making, because doing it living an ethical virtuous life and forming merit is one way of creating the proper spin. So that being is reborn in beneficial states.
Some Buddhists in Thailand and Sri Lankan different places Lion also has a strategy of trying to report being reborn in in certain very ideal places, certain heavenly realms or in the presence of certain kind of Buddhas or Buddhists to be. So they can peacefully wait for the arrival of the next Buddha. See, there's a very, there's a few, because the world expands and contracts, things will get are going to get a lot worse before they get better. You know, things are things that worse they get better and worse and get better. And, and it's a kind of, you know, to spend endless life's, you know, give me being reborn over and over again, in the cycle of the universe getting worse than better and worse and better. It's kind of a drag. And so they, they strategize, they do practices, to try to help them get reborn in particular heavens, that are kind of exempt from this process, where you have a really, really long lifetime, we can kind of peacefully live in this blissful state, and then you can finally kind of get reborn die in that state and get reborn at a time when a future Buddha will be here. Which is there are the best times to be reborn because then you can get most easily to get most easy to get fully enlightened in the presence of a Buddha. So these are some of the traditional beliefs that exists. There's a lot of people who believe these things are very important for people, I'm not going to knock them for anyone. But I want you to know this is this is kind of in the background of classic Buddhism. There's different variations on it in different Buddhist traditions. What happens at the moment of death? There are different, even though there's some commonality in the different schools of Buddhism is also a great diversity. And in fact, some people have pointed out there's greater diversity among the different schools of Buddhism. And there is between all the different types of Christianity. There's a great diversity in Christianity too, but even more, and one of the reasons perhaps, perhaps the greater diversity in Buddhism is that Buddhism does not have a central Bible or central Pope around Which all the traditions kind of orient themselves somewhat. So that as Buddhism has evolved, for example, traditions have been have created their own or whole new scriptures have evolved and developed, and old ones have been forgotten. So like the scriptures that the Theravada tradition is centered around, had basically been forgotten or ignored by the Tibetan tradition, for example, they just didn't bother translating those, or they didn't translate them. And, and so that the Satiputthana Sutta, for example, which is a discourse that our practice is based on, was not known in Tibet, until very recently think the last century when they went to Sri Lanka or Thailand and learned about it from there. So there's great diversity in the Buddhist tradition in this diversity view, but what happens at the moment of death and what's most commonly what people are most commonly aware of in the West, or the Tibetans use about it and they A number of reasons for that. One reason is that the bet the Tibetan Buddhist, Tibetan Book of dying was called the right person looking at the dead, right, which translate translate in 1920s had a huge impact on Western psyche, and had a big impact of course, on the hippies, who were our forefathers and creating the western Buddhist movement. Some are sitting here in this room, I'm sure. And if you bow tour and and also the Tibetan tradition that has, I think, has some ways a greater emphasis on the importance of the process of dying than other Buddhist traditions. They have elaborate texts like Tibetan Book of The dead that talks about this elaborate process that resonated very much with psychedelic experience for people. So it kind of got people's attention imagination going quite strongly. And that could well be right. Tibetans, who knows. The, the tariff on tradition has a very different view about

This transcript is machine generated and may contain errors
Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License
audiodharma.org
8
what happens at the moment of death. But the tariffs, as Cheryl pointed out, she has never heard me talking about that and dying and, and Western teachers, vipassana teachers don't talk about this very much. And so people who have embraced this practice here in the West, who are looking to understand Buddhist views of death and dying, don't see it, you know, until their his book was published, don't see any resources in our tradition. So they do the obvious thing, which is they have all these wonderful books coming up being published by the Tibetan teachers. And so they go there to understand it. And there's no question Without I think, particularly however, it is a little bit sad not to know at least what those resources are in their own tradition. And to know actually, the understanding is different. The understanding in the end then there's always this is interesting, you know, sometimes I go on and on, you know, while you're here for me to do a monologue it's dangerous to do monologues You know, you're at parties you can trouble but but it's okay here I guess. I do sometimes feel self conscious. Yes.

I believe without, in my impression, having read different things by Stephen the line that He is kind of an agnostic about what happens when you die. He's really focused his life on that process of dying and helping people in that process. But what happens after you've died? I think he's kind of you know, he's I think he's, you know, quite open to tremendous mystery being there. I don't know. But I've heard I've heard once where he said, You know, I don't know. And so his emphasis has done has been kind of this the mindfulness of the mindfulness and the process of healing that can happen in in as we go through the death process itself, and not what happened dyeing process and not what happens afterwards. So in that sense, he hasn't borrowed from the, the metaphysics, the cosmology, the Buddhist tradition that much, but he's borrowed his practices that really focus on in the mind first practice, which is very important for him, that he brought to the whole work of hospice work that he had, he did and that's been an emphasis you know, of art. Kind of Western Vipassana tradition that we're part of, is for the most part to leave behind not be so interested in the metaphysics or the cosmology, you know, that not talk about it so much. And I mostly contend not to talk about it. I'm content to focus on the process of practicing this life. But I thought in doing this class, they'd be very hard or it seems inappropriate not to next talk briefly about the classic Buddhist view of what happens there. People want to know, and it's a big question, big existential question. Yes. Well, that's a modern book written by a Bart modern teacher and his Western assistance. I think some of it was penned by Andrew Harvey. Harvey, so yeah, Andrew Harvey. And he's kind of a poet person. I read the book is a great book, you know, I thought was very helpful. But again, it's the It's a Tibetan view of what happens in that process. And the Theravada is don't exactly share that view, it's a different view. So the big difference is that in the Tibetan view, there's an intermediate period between a time a person dies, and the time of the reborn and that Intermediate Period can be very short, or can be as long as 49 days. I don't know this tradition that well, so I can't represent it that well, but and that, that, that period, Intermediate Period is a very important period, because there's various opportunities there various Bardot's various kind of gaps or transition periods, where it's relatively easy to get liberated. And so, to be prepared for this transition period to have guides, who stay with a body for the first couple of days, reading the Tibetan Book of the Dead or guiding it to encourage the psyche before To take advantage of the possibility inherent in this intermediate stage, and it says, right after death is the

This transcript is machine generated and may contain errors
Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License
audiodharma.org
most opportune time if you know what to do, but then there's all these, the mind conjures up these can
conjure up a very frightening images. So you have to learn how to work with the frightening
images so you don't get caught by them. Because if you are, then that'll spin you back to be reborn.
The Terra Vaughn view is that rebirth happens pretty much instantly, instantaneously, pretty much
quickly. Sometimes there's the idea that you hear terrible teachers say that the the, the being for kind
of hover conscious will kind of hover for a while around the body of the corpse. But basically, there's
no there's no emphasis Intermediate Period. Often it says it's pretty instantaneous, that the being gets
reborn.

Is it appropriate. Might not be for you to say a few words about the relationship between entity that
dies in the entity that's reborn.

Yeah, the entity that dies. So. So in a terrible tradition, the idea is that it's pretty instantaneous. So
sometimes it can be the consciousness kind of hovered for a while been around for a while you can
get a sense, some people have a sense, very strong sense that the person is still there somehow in
the room or in the air, somehow there's a presence and there's a kind of sense or feeling qualitative
feeling people have, oh, now it's really gone. That's sometime after the last breath. But so there isn't in
the terraform tradition, there are not these resources, or the technology for working with the
intermediate Bardo period is transition period, as is that there's an opportunity here for liberation, in
the same way as isn't Tibetan tradition. So maybe it's pretty Tradition because of it, or maybe just
different or, you know, I must say that I am also an agnostic around all this. I really don't know.
Sometimes I'm a sympathetic agnostic to the Buddhist view. And sometimes it makes a lot of sense to
me mixed in sometimes. Not so sympathetic agnostic. It doesn't make so much sense. And but I'm in
either case, I'm an agnostic. And in my own view, about the My own view is that it's not really
necessary to have a view about what happens when you die. Though, that's counter to what some
other Buddhist teachers feel very strongly. I think I'm heretical to say that. So you have to, you have to
sort your own way through this. And I apologize for any confusion. I cause people from my own
ignorance about this topic, but I do the best. I can

The Buddha wants to ask what happens? What is it that gets reborn? And it's very interesting. The
Buddhist basically said this is an inappropriate question. The Buddha said this is not a question you
want to you want to ask you can't be going to say something is some there is something that gets
reborn, or there's something that does that there is nothing that gets reborn. There's no thing which is
the process. One way of understanding this, which is probably not the tradition uses itself sometimes
but is the process of rebirth is a process of it's similar to how waves move across the ocean. It looks
like from a distance that the particular wave is moving through the ocean. You can kind of track and
point to it but If you know the physics of waves, there's no thing which is moving across the ocean.
There's no entity. It's a pattern that's moving across. And you can point to that pattern. It's the, you
know, water molecule goes up and down, vibrates up and down and strikes a small molecule next to it
that goes up and down. And so there's no thing which is moving across. But rather is this this you
know, vibration thing. It's kind of like, you know, in sports theaters nowadays people do the wave. Is anything moving across the Coliseum? There's no thing which is moving right, though thing is this kind of this, this? I don't know if you could say energy, but just, it looks like movement, you know, something's moving. So at the moment of death, cut the consciousness at the moment of death has a spin to it. And that part of that spin is desire, a clinging And there's various things which feed into that spin and your wholesome habits, that you have built up your wholesome activities of karma, your intentions, put a certain spin on that. And your unwholesome, your unhealthy, unethical things puts a certain spin on that. And the balance of that spin are various ways who know who knows how the tech works out. But somehow that spin that consciousness has at the moment of death,

in a sense, strikes a conscious of somewhere else that's arisen somewhere else, and then passes on that spin. It's not an adequate explanation in the Buddhist view, but it's probably closer than anything else. The Buddha had would actually explained this. So we're kind of left without any Buddha It authority for what actually goes on. However, the junior Trungpa was once asked, Where is it? What is it that gets reborn? And his answer was your bad habits. And in a terabyte in view, the thing is more appropriate answer is it's just your habits, good or bad. So even if you have a very low, cultivate a lot of good habits, you're still moving in the cycles of rebirth. The goal in classic Buddhism is to stop the cycles of rebirth. So there to get out of that cycle. And then ultimate peace, ultimate happiness is not found in the cycles of rebirth. Because even if you've managed to get reborn as you know, 400 million years as a god blissful states that's in the big scheme of time, that's just a blink of the eye. And that's not such a big deal. And the real thing we're do is to step off the wheel.

And so both are good and bad habits keep us on the wheel. And it's not a habit. It's not our deeds that get us enlightened. But it's just a transformation of consciousness that somehow touches the unconditioned relates to the unconditioned. Let's go entirely. It's a process of letting go. So what happens at so then depending on so the moment of death, that is very important, because the shape of the spin and the consciousness at the moment of death affects how that spins strikes the next consciousness when it takes birth again. And, and so in a terrible tradition. There's a lot of emphasis and put on trying to have the best possible state of mind at the moment of Death to optimize that process of rebirth. And we'll talk more about that later

with Theravadan teachers have been asked about to reconcile their view of what happens in depth with the Tibetan view where there's long Intermediate Period. What I've heard them say is that they said basically saying the Tibetans a little bit confused. Who knows who's confused? I don't know. And what they say is that what is what's happened is that the person is not an intermediate state, but the person who has been reborn as a pet, pet the hungry ghost, and hungry ghosts are these beings. I kind of think He's kind of intermediate stage, he's kind of like ghosts are kind of hungry ghosts are, can still are still very closely connected to this world, the world we live in, and very closely connected to the place that they died and the people that they loved. And, and so there can still be a relationship there. And so what's happening, I say in the Tibetan tradition is they're relating to the hungry ghosts in their

This transcript is machine generated and may contain errors
Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License
audiodharma.org
states. And those states can what can be 49 days it can be, you know, three days, it can be various times. And that's what they've tuned into. I don't know. I'm very impressed by some of the descriptions I've seen in the Tibetan view what happens and it seems to correlate very well with some of the experiences that some people have in near death experiences. And it also correlates well with some of the experiences people can have in very deep meditation, where letting go in very, very deep places in the psyche. Bring some of the same kind of experience. As a lot

My own kind of opinion or belief, my opinion, I don't have any good evidence for this is that the process of meditation, the process of meditation, the very deepest experiences in meditation, the process of letting go and meditation is very, very closely akin to the process of letting go, that happens as a person dies. And, and so, that doesn't happen over 49 days, or does it happen, you know, over 49 seconds or less, you know, time becomes maybe kind of relative thing, right. Then, at the dying moments, people had reviewed life reviews, reviewed their whole lives, sometimes in a, you know, fraction of a second when they thought they were going to die. And so, you know, time kind of changes its meaning somehow those those times. So it could be that maybe Both traditions are kind of right, that the Tibetan tradition describes a process that but just much more truncated. And there's real opportunity in that in that process. I don't know. So that's kind of you have to work your way through this. I apologize that I don't know better. I wish I did. Because some people would expect from a Buddhist teacher a lot more clarity so that they get to their deathbed, they can get a clear answer and have the peace of certainty. Yes.

Me? Yeah, I don't know.

I don't know.

Yeah, I'm sorry.

What?

I think about it, I think about a lot. I think very seriously the process of dying. I see that process of dying for myself as being a very important opportunity from the things I've learned from meditation, I, if I'm lucky, in the process of death, if it's slow enough or something, then I anticipated it will be very comparable, it might be very different, I don't know, you know, but I kind of have this space, this belief that probably be very similar. And that what I've learned in the process of meditation will be very useful for me in the letting go process that will probably be there as I'm dying, it probably has to be the similar letting go of, you know, you have to let go of so much when you're dying, including your ego. And to have gone through process of letting go and meditation and the kind of rarefied states and meditation that can come from letting go. So I'm very keen I'm very interested in this process and have a very
intention is very Bury the mind. bear, bear, bear, bear, bear, bear bear in mind, oh sorry, I still have a cold sickness, old age and death is always present. And so bearing in mind what my hope for my debt dyeing process is I can continue practicing mindfulness. Mindfulness is considered in the Harriman tradition to best preparation for dying. And if you're able to practice mindfulness, right, because because again, there's a kind of sense that there's no intermediate stage in Paragon, you know, after death to work with, but that process of dying itself does offer an opportunity for the practice for liberation. And one of the best things you can do for your psyche is this practice of mindfulness itself. So if you have that under your belt, if you have strengthened develop that when you still can, then hopefully you can use that In the process of dying, so bearing bearing and kind of bearing in mind means I'm hoping that I can practice in that process if that's what is my destiny one has one cancer

Well, I'm dying, you know now, you know it's kind of like everything else kind of falls away, you know the career the appearance to the my shirt button, cancels it on my shoes. I just can't really concentrate really have your own undivided attention I hope so.

You know, I keep thinking, I think about this subject. And I do I have for, you know, probably a healthy amount of time because I used to think about it as a child very well from my experience, a fairly large percentage of us are not going to have this is not going to be available that our minds will go before we die, we will develop some level of simulating full on Alzheimer's stroke. There's, there's any vast numbers of ways that that the clarity of mind will not be present
and these seem to be near absence of pain

and

And therefore

given a perfect situation, you it's kind of like the old indian chiefs in the, in the stories in the movies, it's time to die. So you sit down and you know you you enter the state and very much like the Buddha did to the story of the Buddha which is that you know, he goes through all of these various levels of meditation and finally comes back up to a level before we absolutely die

this will be available to us because

be

there's a lot of mystery you know what happens? You know, so you're making some conclusions about what the price even in process in commerce and ality some conclusions about what is or is not available. There's a kind of cliche and in the death and dying industry work Where people die in character. And how I interpret that is that the habits, the dispositions that we've cultivated and acted on in our life often carry along with us into even dementia or Alzheimer's. And if you've managed to resolve some of your issues, some of your attachment, some of your clinging some of your fears earlier on, then perhaps some of those things will pass away, you know, we won't be there to plague you at times of more incapacitated. I don't know if that's true or not, but it's a nice operating principle. So So, you know, we, it seems there's lots of experience of seemingly making big difference. speaking to people in comas and kind of helping them in their process, where they seem to be able to listen and process things in a way that doesn't seem to be the normal cognitive mind. Perhaps I kind of I don't know what happens when, when we're incapacitated in various ways. But I'd like to practice and operate now. As if I can make a difference. Kind of like the Pascal's Wager kind of thing.

Something that occurred to me is generally speaking, is that

what you're talking about and what what YouTubers have is a great argument for

arriving

at a place where you are oppression all the time, because if you were present all the time, and you'll never buy a truck, and you weren't there and present for your death, and you'd have to worry about whether whether you have time to think about it or not. Right.
And let's see the Steven you're questioning in most Good I answered Are you want to ask it again, I think

about the relationship, okay.

So, so there are two strategies that we take when you take the classic Buddhist view of what happens with death and rebirth. There are two very general strategies that Buddhists will have. One is to focus on liberation. And the other is to focus on creating conditions for a good rebirth. And the process of the by the, how you emphasize how you help someone in the process of dying depends which of those two you're trying to help person do. And for most in Thailand, for example, for most lay people who don't have a practice background, when the monk comes along to administer someone who's dying, what the classic thing they do is they they're not trying they're not trying to help them. become liberated. They're trying to condition the consciousness and create merit create good deeds and stuff to sort of get get reborn in some optimal conditions. Other questions? Yes.

A few years ago,

a group with a relatively small audience with the Dalai Lama. He was asked that exact question. Do you think that your life and your practice will help you?

Smile

you'll see

me struggle with even the Buddhist way of paper or thinking or paper. If not See?

The

I think that the whole question of what is kind of not some, there's a lot of really good questions that the normal obvious questions to ask that the Buddha kind of said it shouldn't bother with these kinds of questions that aren't necessarily necessary for the process of liberation. But what gets liberated? One way of saying that is that what gets liberated is our clinging.

Enough. Very unsatisfied.

I just wonder if there isn't somebody who was taking you

Our
probably a question is can be very good. And there's a lot of very deep existential questions about
identity that come into play around all this and, and certainly a lot of Buddhists have tried to make
various answers and offer resources for it. And for myself, I've been very inspired by the historical
Buddha, where he was actually so many of these extensive existential questions, which he pointed out
as being not useful to spiritually useful to address and, and more important thing to do is spiritual
practices are more important than certain kinds of questions and answers and certain kind of
questions don't have don't lend themselves to useful answers. So just avoid those kinds of questions.
And it's an obvious thing to ask Because we want you to have personal continuity, and it's very
reassuring for some people and they would like to know how it works. If it's if it really happens in a
particular

way

who or whoever wants it. But the reason I'm doing what I'm doing is that something is rewarding them
in a better state. There's a good birth last reason. And there's a liberation one more liberated soul and
that's a good reason to practice with me, myself as such, but since we are all connected, that those
are good enough reasons for me to say, Great.

Yes, please.

I was wondering what the difference is in English

Preparing for liberation is a mindfulness practice is understood to be the key for liberation. And so
doing either doing mindfulness bypass their practice directly, or doing supportive practices for that in
preparation for doing Vipassana for doing in a better rebirth kind of practices, certainly mindfulness
also helps create a better rebirth. So you kind of do both at the same time if you'd like. But
concentration practices, rather than the past mindfulness practices tend to be the ones who, what are
the ones that in terms of meditation practice that are conducive to a good rebirth? If you can get into
really deep states of concentration to the jhanas, for example, on a regular basis, doing loving
kindness, practice, for example. There's also practices of Reflecting on the qualities of a Buddha,
reflecting on your own good deeds, and reflecting on the things that kind of brighten up the mind and
make you happy and delighted. It's often your actions which have a big impact in how you're reborn.
So there's a practices of generating merit, doing good deeds, and living a virtuous life. And so you find
Buddhists all over the world will class it will spend a lot of time making donations, or doing good deeds
or helping the poor or various things. Not just because it's humanistic thing to do, it's helpful to people
to do because it's a way of generating merit for themselves. And then they either use that merit for
their own rebirth, or they'll take the merit that merit they'll give it to their dead parents. It's very
common in Thailand for people like for example, to go off and become ordained as a monk for a while
for a couple of years or some period of time. It's because you you produce a lot of merit By being a
monk or a nun, because then you take that narrative and dedicated to your parents to help them out to return the debt you owe them. That answer the question.

No, there's a there's a big overlap where they mutually supportive of each other. So that in order to in order to do the more liberal liberating practices, it's very helpful to have a foundation of strong ethics and virtue and to have the good feel, feel good about yourself have a lot of good merit behind you and to develop these good qualities and quieting the mind through good works, to practice compassion and all these things. That's also very supportive creates the foundation for that. And also practicing mindfulness is very helpful for the kind of practices that get produces good works, it has to produce good, good merit probably depends a little bit on which you're emphasizing, you know, what's the purpose of what you're doing. If your purpose is to get reborn, the optimal world to optimal rebirth, then you want to choose certain kinds of practices predominantly separate isn't the predominant is the predominant direction of your mind, predominant channels and activities of the mind over a lifetime. That are the ones that kind of follow you into the moment of death that have put the big biggest spin and where you're going to get reborn. So if you spent a lifetime being very virtuous, you could completely virtuous you never harmed any being at all and, you know, then that's a very powerful momentum and psyche, getting reborn and those kind of heavenly realms Said virtuous people get reborn in

purpose.

What was the purpose?

No, no, there's there's five questions. The I'll try to be brief because it's running kind of late now. The classically, liberation has no purpose beyond itself. However, in the West we often talk about once you once you're liberated, then you can be of greater service to people. You have greater compassion, compassion, and you can work with you know, you can be more service because we have such a strong emphasis on Western service. And it's probably true that that's the case but all classically liberation has no Purpose beyond itself. Why would a person want to get reborn? There's a number of reasons, some people feel they have no choice. Because it's a, it's takes a lot of intense spiritual practice to take the practice far enough to get liberated enough to no longer be on the wheel. So they feel that, you know, they're not gonna do that without that level of practice. So, okay, so they can't do that level of practice, at least they'll do the kind of things I can do to give myself a better rebirth next next life. Maybe next life, I can be a monastic, maybe next time, you know, you know, something? That's one reason. And another reason is that people have certain strategies, where they need to be reborn a number of times to fulfill those strategies. And the Mahayana path of the Bodhisattva is one such strategy there but it's not the path requires many lifetimes of spiritual preparation. And there's a vous part of the bodhisatta that involves selling To come back in order to help people so in order so people will come back in order to fulfill certain practices they couldn't do this lifetime or in order to be of service to other people. Sometimes people will people will will focus on certain reverse because
part of the strategy is to be born at the time of Maitreya Buddha, the next Buddha and so they want to get fully liberated but they want to do it in the presence of next Buddha. So, okay let's let's figure out a way to get reborn appropriately for a few billion years, million years until this next guy comes along. So they're they're strict, you know, strategies people have been negotiating the cycles of rebirth. So this is all part of classic Buddhism. I think that lot of the people I always assume that a lot of people are Just in the past tonight in the West, and not that keenly interested in this is not that relevant to the cosmology, the mythology, the worldview, the metaphysics of this is not that important for their, with their engagement in practice. For some people, it is very important. The resources for that kind of understanding are in the tradition. For some people, it's very motivating and very important to understand it. And for other people, there's much more of a dis world this this life kind of focus of the practice, and kind of focused on not adopting beliefs and views that they have no way of verifying for themselves. And so they feel well, that's fine for those Buddhists who want to believe those things, but since I can't believe them, because I don't have access to the evidence. I'm very content for the resources that Buddhism has to offer for the practices of this life. Time right here.

So hope that was an adequate job. And I hope it was appropriate for this context to kind of lay that in the background for what you're doing. I don't think we'll talk too much more about this kind of angle on this topic. There'll be a little bit we'll talk about it as we go along, but is not going to be the main thrust of it. What I didn't have time to talk about today, which I want to spend a chunk of time talking about, is a whole other level of preparation work that can be done besides practice Buddhist practices for preparation. And then are there logistical preparations that I encourage people to do and that kind of thing that Kate was very interested in doing? And maybe next week, we'll talk more about that, but there's really important things you can do both for your sake, and for sake of others that some people talk nicely about earlier, doing a. There's various kinds of documents you can write about your wishes, about what kind of medical care you get when things get kind of serious or you don't have the capacity to talk for yourself. Who can sign and make decisions for you that power of durable attorney, things like that. It's very helpful to plan can be very helpful in the people you leave behind. If you tell them what you'd like to do, in terms of a funeral memorial service to your body. I've been to I've attended to some people's death where I've been around they were number one where this woman was kind of a closet Buddhist. She'd been involved very many years with a Buddhist group was very intensely involved in it was very primary for her. But she kind of more or less kept it away from her family and they were Christian of some denomination and all closest friends were the Buddhists and they knew how important Buddhism was and how much they want, she would have wanted to have a Buddhist memorial service and the Buddhist teacher there to do it. But she never told her family that. And so they didn't really understand the depth of how important Buddhism was for her. And so they just brought it brought her to the, you know, the Christian church that the family was part of and, and, and did you know in Christian memorial service for her and it was probably lovely, but at least our friends felt that something was amiss there because she hadn't told anybody but what her wishes were. And also a lot of people don't know what to do. I think a lot of people there's a fair number of people I've helped in our extended community who don't come don't have a really grounded you know, don't anymore in maybe their religion of their birth. I mean, they never had a strong religious tradition. So
they don't have the resources that are come with their own church or their synagogue, or temple. And so they could they're kind of haven't really been that religious. That, you know, in many ways, and so they come to the Buddhist tradition here and they're practicing, it's very important for them, but they never really thought about it much about what you know what kind of memorial service they want. And so the loved ones who are left behind, you know, they're kind of Buddhist and Buddhist practice, but they don't know quite what to do with. And the person won't be cremated or buried, person will be thrown to the birds, you know, you know, all kinds of options that are available, at least in some cultures, and sort of plan ahead with that, you know, what was your wishes for more memorial service, what are your wishes, what to do with your body to write these things out. And so I was going to cover this little bit of that and maybe I can talk more about that next week. And bring some documents for you that you could maybe find useful.

So I hope this has been useful. I do must admit that I feel usually I feel a little bit tentative about this kind of teaching when I just teaching what I think is information on and on and on. I feel you know, I'm not so sure how useful it is but so if we'll see how it goes and if the next week will certainly be quite different and I'm very appreciate that so many people were interested in, in looking this issue, more head on and then we usually do and so have a wonderful week and thank you