

BUDDHA DHARMA CONVERSATION



BUDDHIST CALENDAR 2566 – 2022

LEARNING ABOUT DEATH

FOREWORD

Human life consists of life and death. Everyone wants to live, but no one wants to die. Therefore, people only focus on investing in life such as money, material, family affection and other forms of human enjoyment. Therefore, people do not want to think about death, because it is separation, because it causes fear and suffering to everyone. Buddha was born to guide people to understand the truth of life and death. The goal is for people to be free of fear, have confidence in themselves. Particularly, people can liberate sufferings toward impermanent law. So, do you want to know these?

Today, October 22, 2022, ZDF TV reporter Saadet came to interview us at Vien Giac Pagoda, Hannover about death and filmed it to be introduced on German television in December 2022. Questions below is very practical for people in general and for Buddhists in particular.

You want to learn about religion or Buddhism, but you are stubborn, extreme, conservative, you can't identify right and wrong, negative and positive. If you want to identify the problem correctly and properly, you must open your mind, you must use your knowledge and wisdom, especially you must have an objective view like Western studies. From there, you are the key to open your own doubts.

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BUDDHA DHARMA CONVERSATION

1. How does Buddhism say impermanence and what is the purpose?

+ Ask:

How does Buddhism talk about impermanence?

+ Answer:

Buddha is the founder of Buddhism. Buddha taught: "All things in the world are subject to change and impermanence." As we know this earth is always rotating and moving around the sun. Therefore, the weather also changes, when it is sunny, sometimes rainy, sometimes hot, sometimes cold, and over time, it changes from spring to summer, autumn to winter. The grass is sometimes green, sometimes wilted. Environmental circumstances at times of peace, at war, at times of natural disasters, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc.

The human mind is happy and sad at times; sometimes love, sometimes hate; sometimes jealous, envious, sometimes selfish, sometimes generous, etc.

The body of a person is born young and beautiful, and then, over time, gets old, gets sick and dies.

Everything in the world changes over time as mentioned above. Therefore, life is impermanent.

+ Ask:

Who created the law of impermanence? And what is the purpose of Buddha's teaching on impermanence?

+ Reply:

No one created the law of impermanence. Impermanence is a common principle of the universe, human life. This is the truth. Therefore, Buddha taught people to understand the above truth so that people can accept it and be peaceful when they encounter impermanence coming to themselves.

2. Where do the dead go?

+ Ask:

Where do the dead go?

+ Reply:

Buddha taught that people after death will change form to another life in the six paths of reincarnation. These are the heaven realm, the Asura realm, the human realm, the hell realm, the hungry world, and the animal realm.

3. Why do people have to reincarnate forever?

Buddha taught that people are reincarnated because of karma. Karma is the act of creating body, speech, and mind. What we do, what we say, what we think is called karma. If we do good deeds, it is called good karma, if we do bad deeds, it is called bad karma. So, good and bad karma depends on our creative actions. If we create good karma, then good karma is positive cause, positive cause will lead to good results. On the contrary, if you create evil causes, then you will receive evil results. Because people create immeasurable good and bad causes, they must receive good and bad results now or in the future, or in the next life. That is also the reason, humans have to reincarnate forever.

4. How do you know that? Did you see them being reincarnated?

+ Ask:

How do you know that? Did you see them being reincarnated?

+ Reply:

We don't see people reincarnating. We can know through the teachings of Buddha. Only Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Arahants can see and know it. Why? Because they have attained concentration power and have divine powers. If you are an Arahant, you can also see the reincarnation of living being. Particulally, we base on cause and effect law. If man create bad cause, then man surely get negative effect. Thereby, we remark that no one escapes the law of cause and effect. Do you believe in the law of cause and effect?

5. What is one's state after death?

+ Ask:

What is one's state after death?

+ Answer:

If you were killed by a robber, would you be sad and angry with this robber? So, after you die, do you feel sad, angry, and remember your enemies? And do you go looking for enemies?

If the mother has a 3-year-old baby, but unfortunately, the mother has a traffic accident and dies, do you think the mother is worried and misses the baby? Surely the mother will miss the baby and will find a way to be with the baby.

If you live sometime happy, sometime sad, then when you die, you are happy or sad, don't you?

When you are alive, you like to eat well, dress beautiful, you like to get married and have many children and grandchildren. When you passed away, did you still think about your family? Those reasons are one's state after death.

6. How do you know someone is born as a human in the next life?

+ Ask:

How do you know that someone is born as a human in the next life?

+ Reply:

Buddha taught human beings should keep 5 precepts such as 1) No killing, 2) No stealing, 3) Not engaging in sexual misconduct, 4) No lying, 5) No drinking alcohol.

The precept is to help people stop sinning. If anyone keeps these 5 precepts, then 1) he will not be arrested in this life by the police, 2) after death he will not fall into hell, hungry ghosts, or animals, 3) in his next life he will be reborn as a virtuous person. These 5 precepts are the basic moral foundation of human life.

7. How do you know people are born in heaven in the next life?

+ Ask:

How do we know that people are reborn in the heavens in the next life?

+ Reply:

According to Buddhist teachings, those who are born in heaven are called heavenly beings, and those who lead the heavens are called heavenly kings. People from previous lives created many blessings. Therefore, they have a beautiful body and live a long life. Whatever they wish for, it will come true. Therefore, they are leisurely and enjoy the blessings. However, they do not eat animals, because there are no people who fall as animals. There is no hell in heaven like the earth. Anyone who violates the precepts will fall to the earth.

Those who want to be reborn in the heavenly realms must practice almsgiving and observe the 10 precepts. The 10 precepts include 1) No killing, 2) No stealing, 3) No sexual misconduct, 4) No lying, 5) No double-tonguing, 6) No cruel words, 7) No cheating, 8) No greed, 9) No anger, 10) No delusion.

Through this, we see that Buddha taught to practice the precepts, the main precepts to purify the three karmas of body, speech and mind.

8. How to know the dead is still in the invisible world (In formless world)?

+ Ask:

How to know the dead is still in the invisible world?

+ Reply:

We cannot see the dead in the invisible world, because we are not Buddhas. Only Buddhas can see and know that. However, we also understand that a living person has a body, also known as a visible body. When people die, it means they don't have a human body, or are called invisible, people call the dead a ghost. In Buddhism, it is called the bardo body, the bardo body means the body after death and before reincarnation. People in the invisible world are from the visible world, and conversely, people in the visible world are from the invisible world.

We can't see our loved ones after they die, but we know that they just died and they fell into the invisible world, they were alone and sad, because no one wanted to die.

9. How will we help the dead one?

+ Ask:

How will we help the dead one?

+ Reply:

We do not fully know where the dead is, but we have a duty to show them love. We have a responsibility to support them, especially parents. This case is an opportunity for us to be grateful of our parents. We help by:

We pray Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to bless them.

We teach about impermanence and recite sutras to them.

We give alms as a dedication to them.

They release living beings to dedicate to them.

Here are a few of these that perform practical spiritual affection for the deceased.

According to Vietnamese Buddhist tradition, monks and relatives usually hold a ceremony to pray for the dead and offer rice for the newly deceased every week, lasting up to 7 weeks (49 days). The teachers use each week to remind the family to support their loved ones. After that, there is a ceremony to pray for 100 days and an annual death anniversary. However, relatives who have free time can still chant sutras daily for the dead as possible.

Usually, exception prayer, there is a ceremony to offer rice for the deceased. The rice offering ceremony is an opportunity for children to show their gratitude to parents. We grow up thanks to the care, eating and teaching of our parents, but sometimes we have not had the opportunity to repay our parents' birth. Offering rice and water shows a little gratitude, this is also the basic human morality that cannot be ignored.

10. When a loved one dies, should we do a cremation or burial?

+ Ask:

When a loved one dies, should we do a cremation or burial?

+ Answer:

The ancients used to do cremation, burial, water burial, bird burial (Feeding birds), etc. The funeral ceremony according to Vietnamese custom is burial and cremation.

+ Burial:

People in the suburbs and countryside are often buried in the land of their house, in the garden, or in the fields, etc. Is such burial good? Not good. why?

The livings and the dead peoples can not be mixed. Many families build graves in front of the house and behind the house, making the house look less beautiful. That is not a civilized

way of life. There are many families that build toilets and pig pens behind the house near the tomb. So, is the deceased satisfied or not?

When a person's body is buried in the ground, that soil becomes negative soil (dead soil) and those areas affect the well water source. Meanwhile, the countryside often uses well water. So, is that well water good? Besides, the fields have a lot of graves, which is not good. The field is a place to cultivate rice, but such burial is inappropriate, losing the beauty of the country. Preferably buried in the Cemetery. In Europe, when Westerners die, they burn them and put them in the urn. They were then buried in the cemetery. Such burial does not occupy an area and does not pollute the environment.

When building the tomb, we only build four walls around it, high about 50 cm, and fill the soil, plant grass or flowers upper etc. . There is no need to build at the bottom. In this way, water enters and causes the body to disintegrate and return to dust. Building such a tomb is suitable for the dead one. After funeral ceremony, the Buddhist family guide the dead peoples rely on the temple to listen to the Sutras and recite the Buddha's name every day.

+ Cremation:

Cremation is convenient, cleanest, and less expensive. In particular, the deceased no longer clings to the body. After funeral ceremony, the Buddhist family guide the dead peoples rely on the temple to listen to the Sutras and recite the Buddha's name every day. The remains are dust, we can take them to the sea and scatter them. Man depends on this body to live. When this body ceases to function or in other words dies, the mind of the dead person still follows this body. Because the human mind always needs a place to take refuge. Therefore, when we bury the dead at the grave, their consciousness will depend on it and it is their home. If relatives build a beautiful tomb and spend a lot of money, the deceased may be attached to not thinking about reincarnation, and the deceased will stay there as a ghost guarding the tomb forever. If the deceased can rely on the Triple Gems to practice, then after a while, they will be reincarnated into another life.

This body from the four great elements earth, water, wind and fire is returned to dust. After 49 days or 100 days, we can release the remains. The remains can not let in the temple for a long time, it will affect the living. Furthermore, the remains are not objects of worship; unless the body relic of the enlightened ones.

11. What is hell? And how do you know who died in hell?

+ Ask:

What is hell? And how do you know who died in hell?

+ Reply:

According to the concept of the human being, hell is a dark place, a place to imprison and punish sinners.

We cannot see or know who is in hell. According to our thinking and understanding, if someone commits robbery or murder, this murderer must be imprisoned as a retribution. Is this prison hell on earth?

For example, if there are people who are angry, hateful, and want to kill their enemies, is their mind light or dark? Surely it's dark, right? So, this dark mind is hell.

Humans makes weapons and creates wars, the two sides slaughter and kill each other in many ways. The scene of war is hell on earth or not?

After death, humans become ghosts in the invisible world. According to the human concept, ghosts in the invisible world cannot eat well, dress well, be warm, have no affection for couples and descendants, have no reputation, no status, etc. So, is the invisible world light or dark for the deads? This darkness is also hell.

Some people live on earth, they only know how to harm others, create wars to kill many peoples, etc. Where do we think this person goes after death? According to the concept of the human being, the hell king will imprison and punish this wicked person and they may not be reincarnated forever. If they return to earth, they will continue to harm human life.

Where is hell?

Hell is not far away, Hell is within us.

12. What factors are people born as animals?

+ Ask:

What factors are people born as an animal?

+ Reply:

We can learn the similarities and differences between humans and animals.

Similarity: Humans and animals are the same living beings, having life, having feelings of love, having feelings of pain and suffering, and it can be said that both have the same consciousness.

Different: Humans can laugh, but animals don't laugh and can only cry; people can talk and sing, but animals are dumb; people can get married, but animals can't; people can get good food, dress well, but animals can't; people can learn knowledge and progress the life, but animals cannot learn; people identify right and wrong, clean and dirty, but animals do not; etc.

Thereby, if people do not keep the precepts, live in ignorance and create evil karma, they may fall as animals.

13. How to know the dead who liberated already samsara?

+ Ask:

How to know the dead who liberated already samsara?

+ Reply:

Most people don't want to die. Therefore, people die because of diseases, which is an unexpected reason. But for those who have escaped from birth and death, we do not say that they died, but we can say that they entered Nirvana. Why? Because, they have attained concentration and wisdom. They all live in samadhi, they control life and death. Therefore, they want to live or die as they please. When He wanted to leave, they entered samadhi, or in other words entered Nirvana and then left. There are many Masters who have entered Nirvana and still have their whole bodies for more than hundreds of years, such as in China, there are the Six Patriarchs Hue Neng, Master Dang Dien, Master Ham Son at Tu Hieu pagoda, Thieu Chau city, Quang Dong province. Master Hue Neng entered Nirvana in 713, it is now 1309 years in 2022), Vo Ha Zen master at Cuu Hoa Son mountain; In Vietnam, there are Dao Chan Zen Master and Dao Tam Zen Master at Dau Pagoda - Thuong Tin District, Hanoi City, and Chiet Tam Zen Master at Phat Tich Pagoda, Bac Ninh Province.

In the following, we can learn more about the liberated one. In Buddhism, the one who is liberated from birth and death is called an Arahant, people in the world call an Arahant as a Saint.

13.1. What is a Saint?

- A saint is a person who does not kill people and animal, does not steal, does not have sex, does not lie and does not drink alcohol, etc.
- A saint is a person who does not break the national law.
- A saint is a person who is free from afflictions and suffering.
- A saint is a person who is not greedy, angry, delusional, selfish, stingy, does not love, does not hate, does not envy, does not lie, etc.
- A saint is a person who realizes the truth of life and the true mind.
- A saint is completely pure and has attained concentration and wisdom.
- A saint want to live or die as they please, because He attained Nirvana.

13.2. There are four levels of Saints:

Saints include 4 levels: 1) Tu Da Hoan; 2) Tu Da Ham; 3) A Na Ham; 4) Arahant.

13.3. What does the saints cultivate?

The saints practice three points: 1) Cultivating precepts, 2) cultivating samadhi - concentration, 3) cultivating wisdom.

- 1) Cultivating precepts is the elimination of all evil, the cessation of the karma of samsara.
- 2) Cultivating concentration is to purify the mind.
- 3) Cultivating wisdom is the eradication of ignorance, afflictions, suffering, greed, hatred, delusion, etc.

14. Do you feel you are close to attaining samadhi or becoming a saint?

+ Ask:

Do you feel you are close to attaining samadhi or becoming a saint?

+ Reply:

Buddha did not teach people to think about this. If you want to be a doctor, you just need to memorize the theory and practice. Similarly, you just need to practice so that it is peaceful.

15. If you are peaceful or you become a saint, will you be cancer free?

+ Ask:

If you are peaceful or you become a saint, will you be free of cancer?

+ Reply:

Buddha taught that no one can escape the suffering of old age, no one can escape the suffering of sickness, no one can escape the suffering of death. Because this body is formed of earth, water, wind, and fire, this body is temporary and the end of life is death, death is real. Therefore, Buddha aimed at our mind. If our mind attains samadhi, wisdom, and peaceful, then life and death are the same for us.

16. How to prepare for death?

+ Ask:

How to prepare for death?

+ Reply:

Why must we prepare for death? Because, after people die, they no longer have a human body, they only have a mind (or soul). Therefore, they cannot help anyone, nor can they do charity or create good karma. They don't even want to learn and progress anything. They can't even learn the Way and cultivate it, because in the invisible world, there are no Three Jewels (Triple Gems). Therefore, the living people never expect the dead to pray for peace or to dedicate merit to them. Only the living people do blessings and pray for the dead. So, the dead always rely on the living people. That's why, Buddha taught "The human body is precious". Although the human body is temporary, but we know how to use this temporary body to do charity work, benefit human life, our life is extremely precious and valuable. In particular, we need to know the following:

Tomorrow, you want to travel far, it is important today to prepare money, food and everything you need. Likewise, if you want to prepare for a peaceful death, it is important that you prepare in this life.

First, you must learn and accept the law of impermanence, you must understand the truth of life and the truth of body and mind. Only then will you overcome the suffering of life and yourself.

You must stop doing any evil.

You must make a good karma.

You must create peace and happiness in your own mind through the practice of meditation. You should not pray and expect happiness to come to you. Because happiness may not come naturally to you. You want money and you keep expecting money, then money cannot come to you easily. You have to work, then you naturally have money. Therefore, if you want to have peace, you must create your own peace and happiness through practice. That way, you can share peace with everyone. If you control your mind, you will control your life. You are able to control the life, you know what you want to do and where you go after death.

You ought to develop your knowledge, understanding and wisdom. Thereby, you can open your mind and remove suffering forever.

17. Do you see the past?

+ Ask:

Do you see the past?

+ Reply:

Buddha taught that if you want to know the past then you should see whether your present results are good or bad. If you want to know your future, then see if your present cause is creating good or evil. However, Buddha does not encourage you to look for the past and the future, because the past is gone like a dream and the future has not yet come. It is important whether the present is peaceful or not, because the present is the future.

18. What is the concept of Buddhism about the present life?

Buddhism helps people always to try their best to progress the life. With that, your life is extremely precious, meaningful and valuable. Buddhism brings benefits to people as follows:

1) Buddhism teaches people how to know the truth of life and the truth of the mind to overcome all difficulties and hardships. In particular, Buddha taught through the sermon "Four Noble Truths such as 1) The Truth of Suffering, 2) The Cause of Suffering, 3) The End of Suffering, 4) The Method of Ending Suffering.

2) Buddhism teaches people how to cultivate morality with the five precepts. These are the moral foundations for human being.

3) Buddhism teaches people how to recognize what is right and wrong, what is positive and negative through precepts. For example, there are people who say that to practice cultivation

is to grow a beard and long hair. We can find out, “Does long beard and hair make them free from suffering? Will long beards and long hair make them free from greed, hatred, and delusion? Do these forms help them stop lying and increase their morality? We base on the precepts, then we determine that these forms only constrain human beings to not develop wisdom.

4) Buddhism teaches people to strive to practice giving alms to benefit people and society. We benefit everyone, it means that we increase positive karmas.

5) Buddhism teaches people how to live peacefully and happily through practice of Samatha meditation.

6) Buddhism teaches people how to control their mind and control their life. Only then will they have self confidence and they know what they do in this life and where they will go after death.

7) Buddhism teaches people how to develop compassion and show love for all sentient beings. Especially the practice of generating great compassion to save all sentient beings. Through this, we can expand our compassion. Our compassion is immense, but because we think only of our own interests, we are selfish. Therefore, if we generate compassion and show it to all sentient beings, then this compassion is our true mind. We are Buddha and Buddha is us.

8) Buddhism teaches people how to develop wisdom through practice of Vipasana meditation such as contemplation of the body, contemplation of feelings, contemplation of mind, contemplation of cause and condition, contemplation of compassion, etc.

9) Buddhism teaches people how to be free from the sufferings of greed, hatred, delusion, the sufferings of old age, illness, death, and the suffering of samsara.

12) Buddhism teaches people how to become an enlightened being like Buddha. Buddha taught through practice of "The Six Paramitas such as 1) Giving, 2) Precepts, 3) Patience, 4) Effort, 5) Samadhi - concentration, 6) Wisdom" These are the way to go to the true happiness.

The life is so short, the life is temporary. If we use these temporary bodies to develop wisdom, to open compassion, and to benefit the living beings. Our lives are so precious, valuable, meaningful.

"The mind is peace, the world is peace"

Namo Shakyamuni Buddha!

Vien Giac Pagoda on October 27, 2022

Abbot

Bhikkhu Thich Hanh Dinh