

## *Suffering Comes from Those You Love*

*March 19, 2022*

It was through our parents that we entered into this world, both physically and mentally. Physically, in the sense that it was because of their bodies that we have a body. Mentally, in terms of what they taught us about the world: how to sit up, how to walk, how to speak, how to engage the world, what's right, what's wrong, what's good, what's bad. They're our entry into the world. So when they pass away, it's as if one of the most important parts of the world has gone.

There's a big sense of loss, and the grief that goes along with that is a combination of concern about them, where they're going, and concern about ourselves because they were a big part of us. It's almost as if a part of our body was cut off. So, we have to recognize that. We have to honor that.

Which is why, even though the Buddha didn't encourage grief, he did say that it is wise to give expression to grief. If you see that anything is accomplished by eulogies, Dhamma talks, and meditation, go ahead and do that—because admitting our grief, feeling our grief, is our entry into compassion, both for ourselves and for those around us. If you deny that there's any loss, then it's as if you deny your own suffering. If you deny your own suffering, then you deny the suffering of others. And if you were to live in a world where you were denying the fact of suffering, you'd be a sociopath.

So it's good that we stop to take time to feel the grief, express it, but then move on to compassion. Think about all the other people who've lost parents, lost children, lost brothers and sisters, lost friends.

There's that story in the Commentary about the woman whose child had died, but she couldn't admit it had died. She needed some medicine, that's what she thought. So people directed her to the Buddha, and the Buddha said that the medicine would be something very simple, mustard seeds, but it would have to come from a household where no one had ever died, a family where no one had ever died.

So the woman goes around and asks for mustard seed, and people are willing to give it because it's something very cheap in India. But then she says, "Oh, by the way, has anyone died in this family?" And of course there are grandparents, parents, sometimes children. The story goes that at the end of the day she realizes that death is everywhere, her child is dead, and she's willing to move on.

But what does it mean to *move on*? Part of us hopes that we'll meet the person who's passed away again. The fact of rebirth makes it likely that we could, and we can take some

comfort in that. But then you stop to think about it: You meet again, and you're going to lose each other again. Then you meet again and lose each other again.

Think about what the Buddha said about all the tears we've shed over having lost a mother, lost a father, lost a sister, a brother, son, daughter. In each case—just, say, all the mothers you've ever had or all the fathers you've ever had—the amount of tears is more than the water in the oceans.

That's in the past. Then you can ask yourself: How much further into the future do you want to shed another ocean or two?

The same with the contemplation of the fact that there's hardly anybody you could meet that hadn't been a mother at one time, hadn't been your father at one time, hadn't been a sister or brother, son, daughter. And what are they now? You meet them and either you feel nothing much at all, or there may be cases where you feel a rapport, and other cases where you feel the opposite of a rapport. A relationship that was once so close now becomes very far away. You think about this and you begin to get a sense of the meaninglessness of it all. We're kind and good to one another, but the thirst for that kind of relationship is just is a thirst for more and more suffering.

It's good to think about these things because, as the Buddha said, when you think about them it inclines the mind to release. You see that getting out of this system would be a good thing.

Often it's hard to admit. A couple of cases in the Canon: A man who's lost his only son goes every day to the charnel ground, crying, "Where are you my son, where are you my son?" Then one day, after having done that for a while, on his way home he stops off to see the Buddha. Here he's been suffering, suffering, suffering, for days over the loss of his son, and yet when the Buddha says, "Yes, loved ones are the source of suffering," the man replies, "How could that be? Loved ones are the source of pleasure and joy."

He goes off and talks to some gamblers. The gamblers hear what he has to say about his conversation with the Buddha and they agree with him, that loved ones are the source of joy. This is after he's been suffering over his son for days.

Word gets to the palace, and King Pasenadi hears of it. At that point, he hasn't yet become a student of the Buddha, but Mallikā his favorite queen, has. So he asks her, "What is this, this Buddha of yours, teaching that suffering comes from those we love? How can he say that?" She's not sure what the Buddha means, so she sends a messenger to ask him.

The Buddha tells the messenger about all the people in the city of Sāvattihī who'd lost a husband, lost a wife, lost a mother, a child, father, brother, sister, and they go mad. They go wandering through the city, "Have you seen my wife? Have you seen my wife?" "Have you seen my son? Have you seen my son?"

There was the case of one woman who was married to a husband, but then the parents decided—this was back in the days of arranged marriages—that they could make a better deal,

make a better match. So they invite her home for a visit, and then they tell her they're going to give her to someone else as a wife. She, however, is in love with her first husband, so she sends word to him. He sneaks in, kills her, and kills himself, in hopes that they'll be together in the next life.

The Buddha said, "This is what I mean when I say that loved ones are the source of suffering."

So the messenger goes back to the queen and tells her what the Buddha had to say. She goes in to see King Pasenadi and starts asking him, "Your number one queen, do you love her?" "Yes." "And what if something were to happen to her and she died, how would that affect you?" He replied, "My very life would be altered." "How about your favorite son, your favorite daughter, what if something were to happen to them?" "My life would be altered." "How about me? If something were to happen to me?" "My life would be altered."

Then she said, "This is what the Buddha meant when he said that suffering comes from those we love." It's at that point that the king washes out his mouth and, for the first time, pays homage to the Buddha.

There's another case with Lady Visākhā, who had many grandchildren, but one of them dies. On the way back from the funeral, she stops in to see the Buddha. And here she is, a stream-enterer already. The Buddha asks her, "Would you like to have as many grandchildren as there are people in Sāvattihī?" She says, "Yes, I would love to have that many grandchildren." He says, "But Sāvattihī is never without people dying. At least one person dies every day, sometimes two, three, four, five. There wouldn't be a day when you wouldn't be going to the cemetery." So she comes to her senses and says, "Oh yeah, I forgot about that."

It's when we come to our senses that we realize that the best option is not to hope for another round of the same relationship again, but to look for a way out.

So, it's good to keep these things in mind. We admit that there's a loss when the people we love have died; we also have to realize, though, that if we don't train the mind to look for its happiness inside, in something that doesn't change, then these losses are going to come again and again and again. More oceans of tears. Think about that until it hits home, and then use those thoughts to practice. They give you motivation.

We often hear that the practice is all about just being with the present moment, finding your satisfaction in the present moment. Well, the Buddha does say, yes, be with the present moment, but not for its own sake. We're here because there's work to be done here. The things that cause us to want to come back are *here*, but the skills we can develop so that we don't have to come back can be developed here as well.

Right here is where the work has to be done.