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One Kind of Birth, A Hundred Kinds of Death



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生與死
BIRTH AND DEATH

今天誦《地藏經》，《地藏經》不只述說地藏菩薩大慈大悲大願大力，也是一部孝順經、因果經，還有一個很重要的，對生死無知的我們開一條道路，讓我們在生時，了解生死是怎麼一回事，才不會茫然一片。

剛剛聽到上人開示，修行人要「來明去白」，對自己怎麼樣生、怎麼樣走的，要清清楚楚，明明白白。在中國有很多高僧大德來明去白，有一位「高峰妙禪師」，在六十多歲時，一日上午集合全寺出家人，他問：「弟子們！世間上的死亡有幾種型態？」有弟子答道：「有火災而死，水災而死，橫禍而死，病死，刀傷死，獸咬而死，坐死，睡死，站立而死，吊死……等；就死亡之姿態來說，有大德站著自然而死，就很殊勝了。」高峰妙禪師雖然身體肉身尚健，其心已解脫生死之束縛。因此，向大家說：「這樣好了，我就來一項各位從未見識過的死法」，即表演一指禪功夫，一手指在地上，雙腳朝天。然後對弟子說：「有沒有人這樣死的？」弟子說：「師父！這個沒有看過。」他說：「好了，再見！」當下入涅槃，與世永別！

眾徒弟欲辦「後事」，要把他火化，可是高峰妙禪師身體仍然倒垂，雙腳朝天，任憑多少人去推也推不動。這時候，有人說：「高峰妙禪師有一妹妹，亦已出家，平時他最聽其妹妹的話了，我們不妨派人去找他的妹妹，來勸勸他如何？」不久，其妹應邀而至，對著他說：「哥哥！您生古怪，死也古怪，放下古怪，何等自在！」高峰妙禪師聞言，應聲而倒，他人很輕鬆地走了！

那我們人呢，是不是也會這樣輕鬆地走呢？我看過好幾個人往生的情況，其實每一個人往生都會不一樣。先談談上人的姊姊，那是一個特別的因緣，她來美國以後往生了，因為她的親人大部分在中國，所以要等他們來美國以後，才可以火化，這時已經離她往生一段時間了，這期間遺體一直都是放在冷凍庫裡。她

Today we are reciting the *Earth Store Sutra*. Not only does the *Earth Store Sutra* describe Earth Store Bodhisattva's great compassion and great vow power, it is also a sutra about filiality and cause and effect. Most importantly, it opens a path for those of us who are still living and know nothing about birth and death, giving us the chance to truly understand what life and death is all about.

Just now, we heard the Venerable Master say that cultivators have to "know where they came from and where they are going." You must completely understand how you were born and how you are going to die. In China, many eminent Sanghans were exactly like this. For instance, there was a Chan Master named Gao Feng Miao. One morning, when he was about 60 years old, he gathered all the monastics in the temple and asked them, "Disciples! In this world, how many ways of dying are possible?" Some disciples answered, "One may die in fire, die by drowning, die in an accident, die from sickness, die from wounds, die from animal bites, die sitting, die standing, die from hanging, and more. As for the posture one takes during death, it would be amazing if a eminent Sanghan were to die while he is standing on his feet." Chan Master Gao Feng Miao was very healthy physically, but his mind was already free from the bonds of birth and death. Because of this, he told everyone, "How about this? Let me show you a way of dying that none of you have ever seen before." He performed a finger-stand, with one finger supporting his entire body and with his feet up in the air, and said to his disciples, "Has there been anyone who died this way?" The disciples said, "Master, we've never seen anything like this." He said, "All right then, goodbye!" And right at that moment, he entered nirvana and was gone forever.

Master Gao Feng Miao's disciples wanted to hold a funeral and cremate his body, but it was as he had left it, upside down with his feet up in the air. When the disciples tried to move it, the body would not budge no matter how many people tried to push it over. At this point, someone said, "Master Gao Feng Miao has a sister. He always listens to her, so why don't we ask her to come and try to talk to him?" Not long after, his sister came, and said to him, "Big brother! You were born with unique characteristics, and you're still showing it off upon your death. Why don't you just let it go and be free!" When Master Gao Feng Miao heard this, his body immediately came crashing down and was easily carried away.

As for us, can we leave as carefree as he did? I have witnessed the passing of quite a few people, and actually, everyone's passing

火化那一天我去參加，那時因為某種因緣，需要我要去動她的身體，一接觸，感覺她身體非常柔軟，讓我印象深刻。1994年家父往生，家裏好像在辦喜事一樣，非常祥瑞。家父的身體很柔軟，可以把他的手隨便牽動起來。等到入殮時，需要好幾個人幫忙，才能搬進棺材裏面，因為他的身體太軟了。

因為連續碰到這樣的情況，所以我以為祥瑞而亡是很平常的事情。可是後來再見到的就不一樣了，才知道——有的遺體硬得你連幫她換衣服都沒辦法，要把衣服剪開來，才可以換衣服；也有往生以後，流膿淌水的；還有放不下，心裡有罣礙的。這放不下、心裡有罣礙，即使這個人平常很用功修行，可是臨終放不下，因為有執著，執著就不容易如意吉祥往生，身體就硬，或是起很大的變化，很快腐爛等等。這也是為我們說法，提醒我們注意：要放下、要懺悔，而且要懺悔清淨。見到這麼多種不同的死亡現象，我才知道：每一個人走的時候並不是都是一個樣子，令我深深體會到「一樣生，百樣死」這句俗話，的確，每個人生的時候，都一樣從娘胎出來，而死亡情況卻差別很大。

說來這些都是閻羅王給我送信，提醒我人生無常。送了這麼多信，以前還不是那麼認識，越送越頻繁的時候，就感受越深，自己必須深入去看一些問題，認識一些問題。我們的念頭不停地後念追逐前念，身體也是不停的一直在變化，所以說生的那一天，就註定要死亡了，這是每一個人都沒有辦法避免的。我們必須看清楚人生的真相，知道這個身體只是暫時有的，不是永恆跟著我們的。或許現在是女的，下一生變成男的；這次是個男的，下一生變成動物也不一定。

既然這個身體就像是暫時的旅館一樣，現在有這個旅館可以住，最起碼可以讓我們學習佛法，可以聽經聞法，可以修行，這比起動物是容易多了。如果落入不是人的身體，這個一失人身，就萬劫不復了。所以想到這裡，我們就不能不好好珍惜，好好把握這個人身，好好用有限的生命來學習佛法。要返本還原，這才是真的；要不了的話，浪費一生，下輩子跑到哪裡去，還不知道呢！

is very unique. Let's first talk about the Venerable Master's elder sister, who passed away unexpectedly many years ago on a visit to the United States. Since most of her relatives were in China, her body could not be cremated until all of her relatives had arrived. During this entire time, her body was kept in the freezer. I attended her cremation. As I was helping, I happened to touch her body, and I felt that her body was still soft. It made a lasting impression on me. In 1994, when my father died, it felt like we were having a happy event at our house because it was very auspicious and wonderful. My father's body was still so soft and flexible that you could freely move his arms around. Many people had to help when it was time to put his body into the coffin because his body was too soft and slippery.

Due to these experiences, I came to believe that an auspicious death is normal. My later encounters, however, showed otherwise. Some people's bodies are so rigid after death that it is impossible to change their clothes unless you cut apart the cloth. Others secrete pus and water after death. Despite vigorous cultivation and dedication in his lifetime, a person will not be able to die and be reborn auspiciously if he still has attachments and is unable to let go at the time of death. The body will become rigid and may rot quickly or experience other dramatic changes. In fact, death is teaching us the Dharma, reminding us to let go and to repent of our past offenses. After seeing so many different ways of death, I came to the realization that nobody dies the same way. I truly understand the saying, "One kind of birth, a hundred kinds of death." Indeed, everyone is born from the womb in more or less the same way, but on the other end of the spectrum, many different possibilities appear as one ends his life upon death.

These experiences stem from letters sent from King Yama, reminding me of the impermanence of human life. I did not recognize them in the past, but as they come more and more frequently, I feel ever more strongly that I must investigate questions that I have never faced before. Our thoughts come ceaselessly, and our bodies are constantly changing. It is said that on the day of birth, death is inevitable; no one can escape from it. We must clearly see the truth about life, and we should know that this body is only temporary. It will not be with us forever. Perhaps now you are a woman, but in your next life you may become a man. You may be a man in this life, but in the next you may become an animal. Nothing is permanent.

Since the body is only a temporary hotel that we currently live in, it can at least help us learn the Buddhadharma and allow us to cultivate. We have it a lot easier than animals. Once you lose the human body, you may not regain it for many eons. As such, we really must cherish and make the most of this opportunity. We must use our limited life span to learn the Buddhadharma and return to our original Buddha nature. This is the most important goal. If you waste this life, you will not know where you will go and what you will be in your next life. You will not know when you will have the chance to study Buddhism again.