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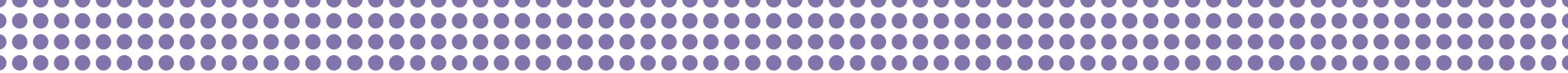
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Meaning of Death



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Meaning of Death

Sakyamuni Buddha, founder of Buddhism, saw the reality of our human life through his enlightened mind and recognized that life is full of sufferings. We humans have four types of basic sufferings – birth, aging, illness, and death & dying. The greatest fear that we encounter in our life is death. Death will come to everyone without any exceptions. We just don't know whether it will be today or tomorrow. All of us, however, will definitely experience death and dying.

Whether I go before others, or others go before me; whether it be today, or it be tomorrow, who is to know? Those who leave before us are as countless as the drops of dew. Though in the morning we may have radiant health, in the evening we may return to white ashes.

RENNYO SHONIN – On the White Ashes

Buddhism looks at this world as impermanent and interdependent. All things in this world are constantly changing and depend on others for their existence. Human existence is no exception. All things in this world, including life and death, are empty and temporary. There is no permanent self. Hence, death and dying is just a part of life and is unavoidable reality.



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In order for one to live a life of true peace and happiness, one must understand this nature of the world. However, if one does not recognize this and clings to “self” and the world as eternal things, then, one inevitably would live a life of great pain and suffering. Traditional Buddhism has taught the attainment of “non-self” or “non-ego” as a way to eliminate suffering and pain.

Here lies great difficulties for attaining such high goals for ordinary people. A person who attaches to “self” and places it as the absolute permanent thing is so deeply seated within oneself that elimination is beyond his power. For such a person, Jodo Shinshu offers salvation through the Infinite Wisdom and Compassion of Amida Buddha.

Like traditional Buddhism, Jodo Shinshu contemplates on the true nature of a man and the world one lives in. And like Sakyamuni Buddha, Shinran Shonin, founder of Jodo Shinshu, sought the way to liberate himself from the endless cycle of birth and death.

In Buddhism, death is not the end of life but is the natural condition and process of life. Death is a reality, which is beyond our control or self-calculation. Death provides an opportunity to reflect and appreciate this life which had been already encompassed by Amida Buddha. By becoming one with Amida Buddha, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life, we, as followers of the Nembutsu teachings, will be awakened to eternal life.

There is a phrase in the Jodo Shinshu tradition, “Gosho no Ichidaiji” which means the essential matters of afterlife teaches that one should live in awareness of death. As we contemplate the end of life, we begin to discover the meaning of this life given by our beloved ones.