

DEATH, The Story of Life

Phra Rajsuddhinanamongkol

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There are several schools of thought concerning life after death. Some believe that the human body consists of materials that perish after death and cannot be reborn. Some believe in reincarnation, but again there are several divergent ideas in this group. Some believe that the dead person will go to heaven or hell, depending on their actions while they were alive. Heaven and hell are created for eternal reward or punishment, without opportunity to return to the human world.

Some believe that dead persons will be reborn as humans only, and never be born as animals. Some believe that the mind or the spirit is immortal. After the body has died, the spirit will leave the body and float around to find a new place to be reborn.

Some people study a lot of science and understand that people can be reborn through their offspring. According to biology, the offspring carries genes from their parents and grandparents and so on. Somewhere along the heritage lines, an earlier life will exist again after many generations.

Some have an idea that the body consists of form and material. Feelings and thoughts are the function of the brain that have gradually evolved since ancient time. When the body dies, the brain stops functioning and that is the end of it. There is no rebirth.

People can think whatever they understand or believe. Even the leaders of many big religions have different ideas about this topic. We can easily witness birth and death, but life after death is still a mystery. It is an unresolvable problem.

In Buddhism, the Buddha taught that a human can be reborn as human or animal. He described the details of each step of life after death: the method of birth or existence, how to go, how to be born or exist, the different kinds of worlds. He explained it both in a simple way and in detail. It is up to the intelligence of each person to study and understand what he taught.

The only part of the Buddha's teaching that agrees with other great religious leaders is that humans can be reborn. According to Brahmanism, the spirit leaves the dead body and floats around to find a new place to be reborn. So the spirit is immortal. It can always find a new body. This can be compared to a tenant who has to find a new house after the old house is ruined.

The Buddha's teaching is opposite to the Brahman principles in the sense that the spirit is not immortal but arises and ceases continuously all the time. The spirit or the mind cannot float around to find a new place for rebirth. Moreover, there is another form called "Kammajja-rupa" that can be reborn along with the mind or the spirit. Kammajja-rupa means karmically grasped materiality or cling-to materiality. This is the wonderful point of Buddhism. Other prophets or religious leaders have said that the dead person can be reborn; however, they did not clearly explain the death and rebirth processes.

The Buddha taught that the mind does not float about to find a new life, but there are certain kinds of "**rupa**" or materiality that can be reborn. What kind and how? Please continue reading and find out what kind of materiality is reborn, how it can leave and what the evidence is.

Before you can understand the rebirth of the dead, you should clearly understand the following topics: state of consciousness or mind, corporeality or materiality, karma, death, kinds of death, reason of death, what happens near death, the feelings near death and the way the mind works. **Without this understanding, it is not possible to discuss even briefly and have full understanding of rebirth and death.**

First of all, I have to refer to the state of consciousness or the mind again. I have mentioned earlier that the **state of consciousness** or the mind can naturally sense visible-objects, sound, odor, taste, tangible-objects and mind-objects. It can think and remember.

The mind naturally arises and ceases continuously without stopping. The mind is subjective, it cannot be seen or touched, but it has the power of collecting different senses and displaying them. The mind works in two ways simultaneously.

1. **Working.** The mind is in the track of receiving senses through the internal sense-fields, i.e., the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind.
2. **The Bhavanga mind.** The mind is not in the track of receiving any sense from the internal sense-fields, but it still arises (birth) and ceases (death) **continuously all the time. The sense is recorded in the mind and can be carried through rebirth.**

I divide the functions of consciousness in two ways because I want to show that the mind works both ways when it receives sense-objects through the internal sense-fields, and it also works when it does not receive sense-objects.

Number one, in the receiving track, the mind can receive sense-objects by contact. Without contact the mind or contact the ears, we cannot hear it. If the

materiality does not contact the eyes, we cannot see it. If the story does not contact our mind, we cannot think about it.

Number two, most people thought that the Bhavanga mind has the meaning of a peaceful mind or staying quietly without thinking. But it is the opposite, according to the Buddhist Dhamma.

Bhavanga means **life-continuum or factor of being**, which is the **function of consciousness from rebirth to death**. Whenever the mind does not receive sense-objects through the internal sense-fields (the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind) it is in Bhavanga or the life-continuum. The simple example is sleeping. When people are soundly asleep, they do not receive any sense-objects (do not know or feel anything) but the mind is still working in the Bhavanga state. Whenever we receive sense-objects from the internal sense-fields, the consciousness is not under Bhavanga. Actually, while we see or hear or think, the consciousness is already in the receiving track, but the Bhavanga also works intermittently. This happens so fast that we do not know it.

The reason I want to introduce you to the function of consciousness receiving and life-continuum, is that I am going to explain about death. What does the dying man's consciousness do? It is comparable to a tape recorder that records those good actions one has done in his life.

I am going to talk about the death of Mrs. Pongsri Chatasupon, who died on January 28, 1973.

Mrs. Pongsri Chatasupon was the wife of Mr. Piriya Chatasupon, the sheriff of Amphur Tawoong, Changwat Lopburi. This couple was very religious. They performed lots of merit and charity. People loved them. They also had a happy family life because they behaved well toward each other. They shared their happiness and sadness.

Both of them helped every charity work, every temple, especially as Mrs. Pongsri was a great cook. She heartily helped with other volunteer work and sometimes she worked so hard that she fainted. I have seen her helping on several occasions, including at Wat Ambhavan.

Before she joined Wat Ambhavan's activities, she had a malignant tumor in her womb. The doctor diagnosed it as cancer and said she needed an operation in order to extend her life. But she came to ask for my advice. I gave her medicine, sacred oil, to drink.

Sometime after that, Mrs. Pongsri had an x-ray and the doctor told her that she did not need any operation because the malignant tumor was gone.

Mrs. Pongsri was able to live longer. She came to the temple and helped with the preparation of sacred oil. She also helped with the renovation of the temple which

took one and a half years to finish, between 1968 to 1969. She persuaded others to help with this renovation. There were other people who helped, e.g., Police Major General Samard Wayamanon, the governor of Changwat Lopburi, Police Colonel Prajan Brahmphan, the chief police of Lopburi, Colonel Sawad Lekchom, the chief of the army general staff of Lopburi Army Region. Their names are recorded in the temple book.

After that, Sheriff Piriya was transferred to Amphur Muang, Changwat Chainart.

I had blessed Mrs. Pongsri to live as long as 100 years. Sometime later, she came back to me in order to “return” the blessing because she had seen a woman who became paralyzed and her husband had to do everything for her, including cleaning her and laundering. Their children also had hard time for 2-3 years.

“I would like to return your blessing. When my final time comes, please let me go quickly. My all the good deeds and merit I have done, bless me with this wish,” she said and asked for a new blessing.

“Please bless me to have a simple death, not a long and difficult one like the other woman I have seen. I do not want to cause suffering to my family. I always wish for this. Please bless me to have a peaceful death,” she said.

Mrs. Pongsri regularly donated white muslin to the nuns at Wat Ambhavan. She also made merit and presented offerings to the monks.

At the beginning of January 1973, Sheriff Piriya and Mrs. Pongsri came to Wat Ambhavan and invited me to perform a religious ceremony on Sheriff Piriya’s birthday on April 30, 1973.

“Last year you did not attend our ceremony. Please come this year. I really want you to come,” she said and continued speaking.

“What’s wrong with me for I have been restless since the New Year. Could you help me find the reason? Did I do something wrong in my new house?”

I concentrated and knew the nimitta (sign) of her departure from this world. Death is coming. I did not tell her but I believed she would die that year. I recommended her to heartily pray, make merit, present food and other offerings to the monks.

“Don’t worry. You will be all right.”

They also asked for the boiled medicine that nourished the nerves and heart. I obtained the recipe from Krom Luang Chumporn. They would take it to Mr. Tawee Rangkam. I gave the medicine to them.

On January 28, 1973, I joined some religious function outside this temple and came back at 8 p.m. After taking a shower and finishing some work, I went to bed, but I could not sleep, so I came downstairs at 10.17 p.m. I saw Mrs. Pongsri driving into the temple alone.

Mrs. Pongsri Chatasupon was dressed in white, wearing a white glistening blouse with long sleeves, with a sailor-style collar, and white sarong (tube fabric wrapped around the body from waist to ankles). She carried a purse and crawled towards me on her knees holding a flower garland. She paid respect to me in the five-point prostration manner and presented the flower garland to me.

“Didn’t the sheriff come? You normally come here with your husband. Why did you come here alone?” I asked her.

“No, he did not come but I came here by myself,” she answered.

“Why didn’t you shave your head if you want to become a nun,” I continued asking.

“The hair style is not important if the heart wants to practice Dhamma. I came here for two reasons. First, I invite you to perform a religious ceremony and have lunch on the sheriff’s birthday on April 30. But I cannot be there for I have to go and make merit.”

“Oh! Where will you go?” I interrupted.

“I am going to make merit. My suffering is now finished. Please ask my husband whether he still wants to have the ceremony on his birthday or not. But I, the cook, cannot be there. Please ask him before you go to our house or you’ll waste your time. I am the one who invited you, so I have to come here and inform you. I am worried about this invitation. Second, I have given your medicine to Mr. Tawee Rangkam and his wife. They are fine now. I don’t have to take any medicine because all the diseases are gone. May I please say goodbye.”

She told me two other stories and left.

“I have to go now, so I can be in time for the merit making and I have to visit my son because I have promised him.” (Her son was the sheriff of Amphur Bang Hong, Changwat Lampoon)

She sadly paid respect and left me. Phra Palad Prasit who was behind me saw and heard everything she said.

After saying goodbye, Mrs. Pongsri stood up and went outside to her car. There was the sound of the car ignition. I walked out of my lodging to look at the car, but I

could see nothing. I was frightened. When I came back inside I noted down this event. Such a thing had never happened before. The flower garland was gone too.

On January 31, 1973, at 8 a.m., I read my note to the people at Wat Ambhavan. At that time, I received a letter dated January 30, 1973, at 10.15 p.m. at Chainart Hospital. The letter was sent by Khun Somporn Thaimanee, the owner of Maneephan Store in Changwat Lopburi. I thanked Khun Somporn very much for sending the news. The people at Wat Ambhavan were all sad and were sorry that Sheriff Piriya Chatasupon for he would be very lonely. The deceased was happy but the living was suffering.

This is it, dear fellows. Only the mind can accumulate merit. Whoever makes the merit will receive it. It is the same as a tape recorder. The mind is very fast like electricity. If you think of something or somewhere, the mind is so fast that it can reach that thing or place before another means. If you were worrying or thinking about suffering at the moment the mind is dying, the mind will go to an unhappy existence. Thinking of merit you have made, the mind will be in heaven.

While Mrs. Pongsri was leaving this world, she was cooking and preparing the offering to present to the monks on the following morning. Her mind was in the state of merit and would definitely go to heaven. She had a habit of doing things neatly and completely. Even when she was about to die, she had concerns about her merit making. So she had to finish it before she went on. That is why she came to see me to arrange her invitation and two other things that I had noted down, but will tell you in the future because it is not time to talk about that secret yet.

The sheriff arranged the funeral at Wat Sriwichai Wattanaram, Amphur Muang, Changwat Chainart. I went to the funeral on the third night. After my students bowed to the dead and the monks finished chanting, I showed my note to the sheriff. He cried after reading it. Everybody was interested in this event. So I told them about it. They recorded my preaching and put it in the memorial book.

When Mrs. Pongsri was alive, she visited her son at Changwat Lumpoon in the north. She liked the cremation structure there, for they had constructed a miniature northern style palace at the cremation site.

“Can you promise me one thing?” she asked her son.

“Yes, mother, what is it?” he answered.

“I want this style of cremation at my funeral,” she said.

When her final time had actually come, she went to see her son.

“Dear son, don’t forget your promise.”

The following morning, he received a telegram informing him of her death. He came down to the funeral and told his father.

“Father, I have to arrange the cremation site in the way I have promised mother.”

He bought a miniature Lanna style palace structure from Changwat Lumpoon for 20,000 Baht, then brought it to the temple at Changwat Chainart. The cremation took place on Saturday, May 19, 1973. For this Lanna style funeral, there was a small flame that flashed at the beginning of the ignition. When the cremation was finished, the relics were brought to the river and scattered and they floated away.

Dear good fellows, please always make merit, perform good deeds. The merit can follow you on your final journey. As the Pali Canon say, “Merit is a treasure that belongs to you only, not the public. A thief cannot steal it from you. Wise man should perform good deeds and they will follow him to the next existence.”

Mrs. Pongsri Chatasupon was a good example. She performed a lot of merit. She could not carry anything else with her except the merit she had performed.

Phra Rajsuddhinanamongkol

AN EVIDENCE NOTE FOR MRS. PONGSRI’S STORY

BY
PHRA PALAD PRASIT SIRIPANYO
The Vice Abbot of Wat Ambhavan
MAY 6, 1988

Many people asked me whether it was true that Mrs. Pongsri Chatasupon appeared at Wat Ambhavan after her death. I remember the event when Mrs. Pongsri, the wife of Sheriff Piriya, shown up and said goodbye. She was concerned with her invitation, that she had invited Luang Poh Phre Khru Bhavanavisuddhi (Phra Rajsuddhinanamongkol) to her husband’s birthday ceremony. She said:

“ I have to leave, but the religious ceremony is up to Khun (she meant Sheriff Piriya). It is time that I have to say goodbye to you (she meant Phra Khru Bhavanavisuddhi).”

Mrs. Pongsri dressed in white and carried a purse.

This is a very strange story, the like of which I have never experienced before. There are still some strange and unknown things hidden in this world. It is such a mysterious and miraculous story.

I guarantee that this is a true story, which I have actually witnessed.