

南懷瑾文化

Betwixt and Between

Life, Death, and Rebirth

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Session Five

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Master Nan: We talked about the normal course of a person's death yesterday. But there is one thing, everyone must pay attention. I often find that when most people are listening, their minds are not logical enough, and they can't grasp the main point. They get carried away by the extraneous material. Therefore, to learn, you must be scientifically minded and understand logic first. Yesterday we talked about normal human death and the dissipation of the four elements. Keep this in mind. If you understand logic, you can see that this is a small topic within the larger topic of life and death, and it is limited to the normal death of human beings. At the same time, use your wisdom to ponder whether abnormal deaths, as well as the deaths of other sentient beings are the same or not? Because time is limited, these questions are outside the scope of our discussion. Don't think that the life and death of every sentient being is so normal, and it is all too difficult to die a normal death.

We learn after teaching for a long time that if a hundred students listen to a class, what they write down is not what the teacher said. Everyone catches a little bit and runs with it. So I have come to the conclusion, education is useless theory.

The same is true for teaching in ordinary schools. Starting from elementary school, why do some students in a class have good grades and some bad? Because some students' thinking is not logical enough, they are not with the program, and can't

grasp the main idea. They are playing with their own subjective ideas while listening. This is a very serious matter, but now I bring it to everyone's attention.

Yesterday we only discussed the dissipation of the four elements and the arising of the bardo body. I used words and words to tell you, which is the so-called reasoning of spoken language. In class yesterday, I taught you four reasonings: the reasoning of spoken language, the reasoning of observation, the reasoning of verification and attainment, and the reasoning of Thusness. The reasoning of spoken language is expressed in words; for example, I asked Xu to give his account earlier. This is the reasoning of observation. Within science, this would be part of the statistics of data and cases. Therefore, the study of things is observational and is relative, not absolute, not certain.

"Bardo" is a Buddhist term, and there is another term "suspension" (lit. 'middle stop' *zhongzhi* 中止). This was in the first translation of part of the Yogacarabhūmi Śāstra into Chinese. The term was not translated into "bardo" or "middle existence." In order to talk about practice, the first translation used "suspension," meaning that life is like flowing water divided into segments, flowing from the past to the present, and now stopping him in the middle. Yesterday is yesterday, tomorrow is tomorrow, today's existence is "suspended here," so it was called "suspension".

In the past, the translation of suspension was in popular use but it was overthrown by later generations. Later, the twelve interdependent links formalized the translation of 'existence' as the character “有,” signifying 'now existing in the real world'. Another reason is because the concept of a human is a “human being.” In terms of ontological principles and concepts of Buddhism, the real world is also illusory and unreal. Therefore, since it was settled that the term "being" would be used in the twelve interdependent links, the use of "suspension" was stopped and changed to "middle existence/being".

So why is it called bardo (lit. middle yin)? Just now I said that in Chinese, this is also justified. Everything is relative. On one side, there is the obviously visible and tangible, called yang; on the other is the invisible and intangible called yin. Therefore, the middle existence is also called the “middle yin” or bardo, which we commonly call “*ling-hun*, 靈魂,” the spirit-hun or soul. For example, in Xu's account earlier, the ‘soul’ went out, he felt ‘something’ go out. Because he is Chinese, his thinking is affected by education and concepts and he calls this ‘something’, *ling-hun*, which is also a hypothetical name. This is what it is commonly called in Chinese, but not in Buddhist culture. The so-called *ling-hun* is very sensitive, knows almost everything, knows everything, has feelings, and has perception, but he is not a physical thing.

In regards to the source of Chinese characters for *ling-hun*, 靈魂, the character for *hun*, 魂, is made up of the character for "ghost" 鬼 next to the character for "cloud" 云. Ghosts are within the yin realm and are invisible whereas gods are in the yang realm and are visible. If we study these two characters carefully, both ghost 鬼 and god 神 are both related to land, to cultivated fields 田 specifically. Within the character for ghost, the field has lines that extend down into the ground representing the yin aspect of electrical current going down into the ground. On the top, there is one hair-like stroke representing the hairs on your head standing up. This is the composition of the character for the word ghost 鬼. In the character for the word god 神, in the middle of the right side is the field. On the left side is "shi," 示 meaning reveal or manifest, which belongs to the heavens. Above and below the field are lines of extension that become "shen" 申. This is the composition of the character for the word "god." When you add a line going upward from the character "tian" 田, which represents the land, it is called "you" 由 which means budding—things are starting to grow up toward the light in the field. If there are lines going both upward and downward from the field, this is the base of the character for the word "shen" 申, stretch or reach—reaching all directions, everywhere above and below. Add the character for reveal/manifest next to this, what the heavens manifest or reveal is called god 神.

On the right side of the character for *hun*, 魂, is the

character for ghost [which contains the character for cloud on the lower right hand side]. If ghosts are connected downward but not upward, why add a cloud? This is the abbreviated character of cloud. One could say, they are just like clouds and mist, which seem to exist and seem to be nothing. They are blurry and vague so they are called *hun*.

There is a difference between *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄. The "*po*" is material and physical. We have physical energy, *qi*. Just like in the north when we breathe in cold air, we breathe out white breath. *Po* are substantive, are material; *hun* do not have substance. They are invisible, and nebulous like clouds. *Hun-po* 魂魄 are two different things. When a person gets a fright, in literature this is described as "the *hun* has flown and the *po* have scattered." The *hun* flies out, the spirit of consciousness has left the body. As well, the body, the *po*, are frightened; the person pees their pants and trembles. It is the function of the physical body. The four great elements are in discord, and have somewhat separated. This is what is called "the *hun* has flown and the *po* have scattered."

So, if you look at ancient Chinese characters, every character has its scientific reasoning. Advocating simplified characters has created a big mess.

Let's not get carried away. Let's get back to the bardo. Life

sciences are now studying this and a lot of information has been found, based on the reasoning of karma over lifetimes.

The bardo person can remember many things about their life. There is a saying in Chinese which is very simple, "a soul is not ignorant." The soul has this ability to remember. There is no ignorance, and no obscurity. They still remember. This is what is meant by "a soul is not ignorant." After the death of the average person, "*the hun flies away and the po disperse.*" If there is a bardo stage, even if there is the state of no ignorance, it is only for the equivalent of less than a day in our world. After a few hours, the bardo person is ignorant again, which is equivalent to sleeping, passing out, and forgetting.

So why do you need to practice samadhi? From literature, if you have cultivated to the point that you have no ignorance, Confucians describe this as "very bright, very clear" (*zhaozhao lingling* 昭昭靈靈). *Zhaozhao* is very bright, and *lingling* is very clear. The faculties of seeing, hearing, feeling and perceiving are not obscured and there is no ignorance.

What is samadhi? It is the state of being neither distracted and confused, nor groggy. In other words, it is what Confucianists and Neo-Confucianists call *zhaozhao lingling*. It is not ambiguous, clear and clear, without delusions or distracting thoughts. The Buddha is awake. Awake means to be awakened

from sleep, enlightened, in a state of clarity. To 'awaken from sleep' is enlightenment, and 'sleep' is a state of darkness and bewitchment [literally]. The Buddha is one who is always awake, who is not ignorant, who is "very bright, very clear," and not distracted, confused or groggy. Ordinary people can't do this. So meditating and cultivating samadhi is what you need to do. This is a supplementary explanation.

After the bardo body arises and wakes up, there is some lucidity. Therefore, other practice books describe that a spiritual light shines and passes in a flash. In fact, the bardo rises up like a dream. That was where we stopped yesterday, right? At this stage, when waking up after a coma, there is a saying in China, "You don't recognize your soul when you are alive, and you don't recognize your corpse when you die." We are alive and we don't recognize our own soul, unless you meditate and work hard to achieve the state of no ignorance. It is only after "seeing" clearly that one understands what happens when one's mind goes into the state of "soul" or *ling-hun*. After most people die, their bardo does not recognize their own body.

In Buddhism, the functions of the soul/*ling-hun* fall within the scope of the skandhas of thought and volition. The skandha of thought is thinking and the skandha of volition is the range of life force. The emergence of bardo is the function of the skandha of volition, which is actually karma, and operates at an

incredible speed. At this time, just like watching a movie, you remember all the things you did in your life, the good and the bad, the virtuous and the evil, very fast, much faster than TV. The things in your life that you have suppressed into the subconscious, or have concealed, all come out. The retributions for good and evil are coming. All the times you have wronged others, have been honorable toward others, have compromised others, and been compromised by others all appear. Not only that, but even the actions of previous lives appear. At this time, the power of the volition skandha to activate thoughts and memories is called the functioning of karma, is called karma, and this power repeatedly comes forth. How to prove it? It is equal to our older people who have forgotten the current events, but the past events clearly appear. This is still alive! When it comes to the bardo, it is more serious than this. Not only did things from my childhood appear, but also from the previous life and many lives before that.

Now we ask a question, at this time, is there heaven and hell? Yes, the realm of heaven and hell can also appear. Are there any ghosts? Yes, they all appear, faster than in dreams, and many times faster than movies, television and computers.

But the Buddha tells you that there is no heaven, no hell, none of these things, that they are all functions of your mind, that all phenomena are manifestations of your mind. It is not only in

the bardo state, but everything inside and outside of our body and mind while still alive, spiritual and material, is manifested by our mind. This “mind only” is the unity of mind and matter, which is the ontology spoken of in philosophy. No phenomena exist independent of original nature. Everything is the function and change phenomenon of the true nature. Whether we think this is true or not is all relative. Assumptions of our consciousness fall into the principle of observation and the principle of action, but not the principle of Thusness.

From the perspective of observation, various phenomena appear in the bardo realm because the person has these seeds in their consciousness, and these seeds burst forth. In this life as a human, why do we become a man or a woman? Each person has a different body, experience, and environment? These are the karmic results of multiple previous lifetimes, the seeds become activated. In the past, over many lives and eons, all our behavior and every action, virtuous, evil or neutral actions create a karmic force and form seeds (*bijas*). When the conditions are fully mature, the seed will become active. What one’s lifetime entails, one’s fate and luck, experiences, thinking patterns and emotional habits are all seeds which become the current behaviors and phenomena. What we have done throughout this life plus the accumulated habits of the sixth consciousness become the seeds of future lives stored in the Alaya Consciousness. So the currently active seeds give rise to seeds of the future—cause and

effect happens like this. Many factors arise from cause and effect; cause and effect is too complicated, and even the most sophisticated computer cannot figure it clearly.

Therefore, from the perspective of the phenomenal and the observational, did the Buddha also say there is heaven and hell in the bardo at this time? Yes, both will appear.

If the person believes in Christianity, they will see the phenomena depicted by Christianity because these impressions exist in the consciousness. People of other religious beliefs see phenomena of other religious faiths. If the person is an atheist, they will see the images that normally occupy their consciousness. So it's not like, when the bardo rises, a certain bodhisattva will appear during the first seven days, and something else will happen during the second seven days... This is for people who study Buddhism or a certain sect because they grew up only seeing this, their environment is such, and they are accustomed to this. If the person didn't study this religion, and those paintings or statues weren't in the environment, what they see will not be this. Like Americans, they will see white angels appear, Mother Mary appear, or whatever ideal realm they have been imagining.

There is a problem in this, the Buddha said "not god, not nature." There is no Hades, God, Bodhisattva, or Buddha as your

ruler. Your life all depends on the maturing of your own karma. The main point here is past, present and future causal relationships. Therefore, the Buddha has one of the most important instructions. The basis of the three-time-period connections of cause and effect is your psychological behavior and your day to day social behavior and deeds. The driving force behind this is the accumulated actions and behavior of countless lives from the past to the present. In modern terms, it is neither materialistic nor idealistic, but it also includes both materialistic and idealistic forces. This is called karma. As mentioned earlier, "karmic creation" includes three types of karma: virtuous, evil, and neutral. Neutral karma is ambiguous and sometimes we have no memory of it. Don't think that if you have no memory of something, it does not actually exist. It does exist and there will be retribution.

So why do we need to cultivate precepts, concentration and wisdom when studying Buddhism? This is a basic principle, and there is a verse everyone should pay attention to:

"Even though hundreds of eons have passed, karmic deeds are not forgotten; When the right conditions gather, the karmic results will still return to yourself."

Even after "hundreds of eons," no matter how long ago, how many tens of millions or billions of years, "karmic deeds are not forgotten." Your actions did not become forgotten or disappeared. "When the right conditions gather, the karmic

results will still return to yourself." The actions we do, whether in the physical world or in the spiritual world, everything that has been done, all things, are recorded. For example, when we were young, the most painful thing we encountered, our favorite things, things we will never forget, even if we don't usually think about them, still exist subconsciously. This is to say that if after a hundred eons, karma does not perish. There are no forgotten mistakes, they will always exist and so this is called "all existence," not "all emptiness." When the right conditions gather, you will receive this karmic result. This is how life and death come about.

There is also a verse in Buddhism:

"If you wish to know what happened in your past life, what you receive in this life shows it clearly. If you wish to know about your future life, the person of this life is its creator."

"If you wish to know what happened in your past life, what you receive in this life shows it clearly." He said that by observing your personality and experiences in this life, you will know what you have done in your previous life or however many previous lives before, so that you have these results in this life, and you can see the causes of the past by their fruits. "If you wish to know about your future life," people want to know about the next life or the next few lives? It is also very easy, "the person of this life is its creator." It depends on what you have