

Give a brief description of the Four Causes of Death (Fourfold advent of death) as given in the Process freed chapter.

Death is due to four causes, namely,

- 1) expiry of life-span,
- 2) the cessation of kammic forces
- 3) combination of the above 2, and
- 4) untimely death due to an intercepting kammic force, upacchedaka kamma

An apt analogy of the four causes of death is the extinguishing of the flame of an oil lamp. The possible causes are :-

- 1) exhaustion of the oil
- 2) the burning up of the wick
- 3) combination of the above 2, and
- 4) external cause such as a sudden gust of wind or intentional blowing out by someone

1.. The Expiry of Life-span

Different planes of existences have different life-spans. In the human plane, the life-span varies according to the world cycle. If the world cycle is on the increase gradually, the human life-span also increases to as much as 80,000 years, while in the decreasing world cycle human life-span can go as short as ten years. When Lord Buddha appeared in the world, the average maximum age was said to be one hundred . Today, it is about seventy-five. Persons with ordinary kamma cannot live beyond this maximum limit. However, those who are born with specially powerful kamma may live beyond that limit. Death of this type is called "the expiry of normal life-span", just as the exhaustion of oil extinguishes the flame of an oil lamp even though the wick is still there

2. Death due to Cessaation of Kammic Forces

The kammic forces which promote one's life will support that life-span from the embryonic stage onwards until the day the forces cease to exist. There are also other kinds of kamma which enhance the principal life-supporting kamma and when all these kammic forces are exhausted, a person dies even though his life-span has not expired. So, if the kammic forces cease at the age of 60, that person will die at that age even though his life-span is up to the age of 75. This is likened to a flame dying due to the wick burning out though there is still oil in the lamp.

3. Death due to Both Factors.

Some sentient beings die because of expiry of the life-span and exhaustion of kammic forces, just like a flame dying out due to exhaustion of both oil and wick at the same time. Therefore some may live up to 75, if they also have the support of kammic forces up to that age.

The above three types of death are called, "kala-maran" (timely death).

4. Untimely Death (Upacchedaka death)

Upacchedaka death means untimely death or unnatural death. Some sentient beings are destined to go on living since the life-span and kammic forces allow them to do so, But if some evil deeds done in the past come to fruition, evil effects of kamma cause them to die an untimely death.. This type of death is like the dying out of a flame by a sudden gust of wind or the intentional blowing out of the flame by someone, though the wick and oil still remain. Such a death is due to upacchedaka-kamma, close interruption by powerful evil kammic effect.

It must be reminded that the mind-body continuum of every sentient being is accompanied by bad kammic forces of the past. The bad kammic forces though by themselves cannot produce effects severe enough to kill a being. However, when that being has no intelligence or knowledge of how to look after himself, is not mindful of his health and daily living, these kammic forces would get the opportunity to bring danger or death to that being. Therefore, negligence in one's living habits invites bad kamma of the past to take effect.