



The four causes of death are:

1. Expiration of life span
2. Expiration of productive kamma
3. Simultaneous exhaustion of above factors
4. Emergence of destructive kamma that causes untimely death

The Three Signs at the Moment of Death

When a person is dying, one of three signs will appear vividly before his mind’s eye. This sign is due to the maturing of the kamma done by the person in the past:

1. **Kamma**: wholesome and unwholesome deeds done in the past, which appear as if they are being performed in the present moment.
2. **Kamma nimitta**: sign of kamma, any instrument used when performing wholesome or unwholesome kamma, such as a flower for offering or a knife for slaughtering animals.
3. **Gati nimitta**: sign of destination, which indicates where rebirth is to take place, such as hell fire or a heavenly mansion.



As the dying person grasps at one of the three signs, rebirth takes place.

Order of Ripening of Kamma

There are four kinds of kamma which bear results in this order:

1. **Weighty kamma (garuka kamma)**: kamma such as causing a schism in the Sangha, wounding a Buddha, murdering an Arahant, matricide, or patricide.
2. **Death-proximate kamma (āsana kamma)**: kamma that is performed or remembered shortly before death.
3. **Habitual kamma (ācinna kamma)**: kamma one habitually performs, either good or bad.
4. **Reserve kamma (katattā kamma)**: any remaining kamma potent enough to cause rebirth.



Proposals for Skillful Dying

A person’s last thought moment is usually conditioned by one’s general conduct. An unwelcoming sign before death, however, can be changed, so it is important that we remind the dying person of his good deeds and turn his attention away from all worldly bonds and worries. We can also provide the dying person with the opportunity to listen to Dhamma talks, remind him of any good deeds he has performed, or encourage him to be mindful of the breath or to mentally recite the Buddha’s name continuously.

Sayalay Susilā