

Training Guide to the Bardos of Dying, Luminous Dharmata, and Karmic Becoming

Everyone who dies experiences the bardos,
but not everyone recognizes them as their own mind.
Recognition depends entirely on the quality of my prior practice.

“Not everyone goes through the bardos in the same way. Only a few teachers assert that the journey is universal and that everyone will, for example, experience the deities of the bardo of dharmata in a similar way. Most teachers say that cultural differences and personal idiosyncrasies generate a variety of experiences. Why would a Christian or a Muslim, with very different beliefs, experience death the same way as a Buddhist?”

As we will see, the journey through the bardos is a journey through the mind. In the Buddhist view, the essence of the mind is the same for all sentient beings. But the surface structures that cover that essence are different. Hence the journey through the surface structures (the bardo of dying), into the essence of the mind (bardo of dharmata), and then out of it (bardo of becoming) is not the same. But the general pattern of this three-stage process is universal, at least according to the [Tibetan] Buddhist view. *Holecek, pgs. 6 - 7*

The key to smoothly negotiating the difficulties of death is familiarity. If you deal with some of the details now you can relax at the time of death, and relaxation is the best instruction for how to die. Relaxation is born from familiarity.” *Holecek, pgs 10 - 11*

An Introductory Discourse by Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche

Why should one learn about the bardo state? Usually we talk about three aspects: the present life, the bardo, and the next life. In the next life, following the intermediate state, we either wander further through samsaric existence, going to one of the higher or lower realms, or attain liberation and enlightenment. Right now we find ourselves in the present life, and the intermediate state, the bardo state, is between the two.

Sometimes six kinds of bardo states are discussed, but they can be condensed into four basic states. The first, the natural bardo of this life, continues from birth until the time of death. The second, the bardo of dying, is the period that begins when we meet with a fatal illness or expire. The third, the bardo of dharmata, occurs when we

have fully passed away... Finally, the bardo of becoming is undergone if we have not recognized our nature in the bardo of dharmata.

In addition to these four bardos, two other bardos occur during this life: the bardo of meditation and the bardo of dreaming. The bardo of meditation is the experience of the meditation state. The bardo of dreaming is the dream state during sleep.

Literally, the Tibetan term for “bardo of this life” means “born and remaining.” We have been born from our mother and have not yet passed away. It is the period between birth and death. Here the important point in this lifetime is the bardo of meditation, which depends on receiving the oral instructions from a master and training oneself in them. Then, during the nighttime, one trains in the bardo of dreaming. If in this way one remains in the bardo of meditation throughout day and night, should one worry about any of the other bardo states? Being adept in the bardos of meditation and dreaming is sufficient. Nothing more remains to be done. But without reaching some degree of stability in meditation and the ability to recognize dreams, I am sorry to say, one cannot avoid enduring the bardo of dying.

A good Dzogchen practitioner, on the other hand, is liberated into the expanse of primordial purity during the bardo of dying. He departs through the Secret Pathway of Vajrasattva before expiring. If one is not stable at that point either one will arrive at the bardo of dharmata. Here the natural sounds, colors and lights manifest. *Dharmata* means nature, the unconditioned. The sounds, colors and lights are unconditioned; they manifest yet they are devoid of self-nature. If one also lacks stability in the bardo of dharmata, sadly enough, one will wander further down into the samsaric circle of seeking another rebirth within the six realms.

As I mentioned earlier, being liberated into the expanse of primordial purity at the moment of death is the best. At this point, one will go through the experiences of appearance, increase and attainment. The first of these three experiences, the whiteness of appearance, occurs with the descent of the white element obtained from one’s father. The second experience, the redness of increase, occurs with the ascent of the red element obtained from one’s mother. The third experience is the actual moment of death.

What follows the moment of this third experience is the fourth experience, the so-called ground luminosity of full attainment. A scripture states: “Then dawns the unconditional wakefulness of bliss and emptiness.” The wakefulness is empty as well as blissful, and if one can recognize it, it is exactly the mahamudra of bliss and

emptiness, the mahasiddhi of awareness and emptiness, or the madhyamika of appearance and emptiness.

In most cases, however, following the three experiences of the whiteness of appearance, the redness of increase and the blackness of attainment, one's consciousness, also called prana-mind, faints in the black experience of the white and red elements meeting together in the heart center.

This moment of unconsciousness is for all ordinary people simply an oblivious state, lasting for the most part for about three and a half days. On the morning of the fourth day, manifestations suddenly unfold as if the sky and earth were rent asunder. One has been unconscious, totally oblivious, not noticing anything up to this point, so one will wonder, "What happened?"

Conventionally, this is of three days' duration, but actually there is no fixed measure. For those familiar with meditation, it lasts as long as their meditation state, the duration of non-distraction from mind-essence. For people without training in recognizing mind-essence, these "days" just flash past. For those with virtue and evil in equal measure, the duration is approximately three days. What actually happens at this point is that the fourth experience, the ground luminosity of full attainment, is not recognized and one falls unconscious. That happens for most beings. Quite a few people suffer at this moment because of their intense panic and fear of death. A cry of anguish follows, and then they lose consciousness.

After the passing of three and a half days, one awakens from this oblivious state wondering, "What happened to me?" The consciousness leaves the body through one of the eight or nine apertures. It seems quite strange that the mind, which is without any concrete substance, must leave through an opening of the body. If the mind departs through the top of the head, it is said that one goes to the higher realms or continues on the path of liberation. In fact there are several openings on the top of the head. One leads to the Formless Realm, another to the Realm of Form, and yet another to the Pure Lands.

After the consciousness has separated from the body, it will, in the bardo of becoming, go to one of the six realms in keeping with one's individual karma.

According to the system of Karling Shitro, everything happens within the time span of forty-nine days: the peaceful deities manifest in the first week, the wrathful ones in the second week, and so forth. For some people everything just flickers by; for others it might happen slowly. Time and occurrence remain unfixd.

On the other hand, if one is a trained practitioner, one will recognize, "This is the experience of appearance!" when the whiteness appears, bright and vivid. And when

the redness occurs, one will know, “This is the redness!” Finally, when everything goes black, one will acknowledge, “This is the attainment, the blackness!”

After these three experiences, one will also recognize when the ground luminosity of full attainment manifests like a lamp within a vase. At first there is an instant of fainting while the eighty inherent thought states cease. Nothing accompanies the cessation of all thought states but nonconceptual awareness as bright as a lamp in a vase. It is cognizant, nonconceptual, and remains one-pointedly, the union of luminosity and emptiness. That is the ground luminosity, which is like a mother. This means that dharmata, self-existing wakefulness, the sugatagarbha, is like a mother. The recognition of it, which one’s master has pointed out, is like a child. At this moment, the mother and child reunite. The traditional analogy is that it is “like a child jumping into its mother’s lap.” People who are experienced in such practice understand this, and everything stands and falls with that understanding.

At present, the vital point in our practice is to recognize the nature of awareness. We hear statements such as “Recognize your awareness!” or “He has recognized rigpa, the awareness!” Having recognized awareness during one’s lifetime, the key point here is to remain in it – to refrain from losing its continuity. At the instant of the cessation of the eighty thought states, self-existing wakefulness is vividly present – like pure and refined gold, the purity by itself. One can recognize it fully and completely. That is how it has been taught.

This moment has been spoken of thus: “One instant makes the difference. In one instant complete enlightenment.” In the moment of recognition one can attain full enlightenment. That is the meaning of the statement: “The best practitioner attains buddhahood in the dharmakaya at the moment of death.”

If one cannot recognize in that way, however, the next bardo, the bardo of dharmata, will manifest. After the elements and the consciousness have dissolved into space, the stages of space dissolve into luminosity, luminosity dissolves into wisdom, and wisdom dissolves into unity. *Unity* here means the peaceful and wrathful deities. Following that, unity dissolves into spontaneous presence.

Spontaneous presence refers to that which is originally or inherently present within the ground of primordial purity. Some people wonder, “Where do all these deities and lights come from?” They are the manifestations of the wakefulness spontaneous presence. In the practice of Thogal, as well as in the bardo of dharmata, many deities appear. Those deities are dharmata. They are not conditioned entities but are of an unconditioned nature. Having neither flesh nor blood, they consist of

rainbow lights. The key point in the bardo of dharmata is simply to rest in awareness. Without such ability, this bardo lasts no longer than a few flickering moments.

Bardo teachings may sound very fascinating and colorful, but the vital point is one's individual practice now. Why have medicine when sick, if one doesn't use it? Without training, our studies become mere intellectual understanding. If study were sufficient, we could simply lean back and read a book about Dzogchen. In fact, there is no way around actual training.

The reading of *The Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo* aloud for a dead person according to the system of Karling Shitro, is to remind a practitioner who possesses prior training. It is definitely necessary. The most important point is that the reader be someone close to the dead person, one with shared samayas. If the deceased becomes irritated with the reader, there will be no benefit. The two people should, at best, share the same teacher and be compatible. In that case there will be tremendous benefits.

On the other hand, without prior training in recognition of mind-essence, one will be unable to attain stability in the bardo state. A person who never recognized his mind-essence will, in the first place, fail to cut through the misery and fear of dying, and later, when the intense and overwhelming experiences of the sounds, colors, and lights occur, he will be paralyzed with fear. The sounds will roar like one hundred thousand thunderclaps and the lights will shine more brilliantly than one hundred thousand suns. It is not just a dim glimmering light. Those are the sounds, colors, and lights of the bardo of dharmata. One will feel drawn to them. One therefore must attain at least some degree of stability through practice right now.

It is also important to have confidence in these teachings and to develop the determination to be clear-headed in the bardo and recognize what takes place. One must have confidence or all will be lost.

At best, one should receive the pointing-out instructions from a qualified master. Success in the bardo comes from applying one's present practice of mind-essence at the time of death. Only training dispels the confusion that arises during the bardo state. That is why one must practice the stages of development and completion right now. Recognize this, and then one will experience at death what one is already familiar with through practice.

.....The whole reason for receiving bardo teachings has been traditionally described as that of "connecting a broken water pipe." By training right now, one will be able to continue the "flow" of practice through the bardo state to the following life. In the Dzogchen system bardo training is indispensable. If one has already reached

perfection in the practice of Thogal, then there is no need for bardo teachings. In this age, however, life is short, diseases are many, and diligence is feeble. Although one may have entered the path of the Great Perfection, without attaining stability in one's practice and not being able to know whether the time of death will arrive suddenly, one definitely needs the instruction on how to "connect the broken water pipe." One will then be able to attain enlightenment in the bardo state, to proceed to a buddha field, or at least gain a rebirth in one of the higher realms. So these are necessary teachings, especially if one meets an untimely death.

When practicing these teachings one must have confidence and trust and be free from doubt. This teaching is like a guide leading the blind in the right direction. To take the hand of such a guide, one needs trust. Without trust, one might lose one's way. With trust, one will reach the destination. *Mirror of Mindfulness, pgs. 2 - 11*

Before death is upon me it is important for me to set my intention on training my mind to maintain stability in my dzogchen practice. It is so easy for me to get distracted in this life and, if not corrected I will be swept away in the coming bardos as easily as I can be swept into thought, emotion and action right now.

The Bardo of Dying

"The painful bardo of dying is painful because it hurts to let go. But now is the time when we have to. Letting go is just a euphemism for death, and releasing our grip is what transforms the painful bardo of dying into simply the bardo of dying." Holecek, pg. 68.

Now is the time to:

- Realize with certainty that the whole purpose of the path in this lifetime has been to cultivate bodhicitta, correct my misperception and uncover self-existing wisdom so that cognizance (sambogakaya) knows its own empty nature (dharmakaya). At the time of death, with the dissolving of the elements and consciousness into space (dharmakaya), and space into luminosity, nothing of this conceptual mindstream remains to obscure natural mind's empty radiance. My intention as a practitioner is to rest in ground luminosity of full attainment, and so reach the destination of enlightenment via the shortest route.
- Make my Dharma Box & finish my legal papers and directives.

- Tell my Dharma friends that before I die I need to be seated upright or in the Lion's Posture. Direct them to burn my Dharma notebooks and journals with me upon my death.
- Plan my last thought, for it will influence my journey through the bardos. For example, I intend to think: "Now death is coming. It's my time to die and my intention is to have a still, clear mind. I will supplicate my precious teachers, Tsoknyi Rinpoche and Guru Rinpoche to be with me as I transit the bardos."
- I intend to rely upon the stability of my practice. By practicing diligently right now, I will establish the ability to sustain rigpa. It will be invaluable in transiting the bardos of death and dying.
- Prepare for the journey so that my heart will be filled with bodhicitta and there will be a calm atmosphere. I know friends & family may be upset, but since I will need to focus, the kindest thing they can do for me is to remain calm, loving and supportive as I concentrate on my practice. I would be grateful if they could participate in the calm atmosphere of the room, which will be silent except for the prayers and mantras I have selected and the instructions whispered in my ear by my lama or Dharma friend. If it's not possible for them to be calm and quiet, I cannot have them in the room and hope they will understand why.
- Understand what is dissolving. When elements composing the body dissolve, it is just the impure aspects that dissolve, leaving the pure aspects to move into the central channel. This makes for an increase in pure energy, wisdom-wind. With this accumulation of wisdom-wind, it's much easier to liberate in the Bardo of Dying than it had been in this life.
- Know that actual experiences may not be in the order described, but it will all happen. If I'm not concentrating undistractedly on my practice, it will all pass by quickly. Only with stable awareness will there be time to recognize the nature of mind and attain liberation.
- Be happy and grateful that I have had a teacher and access to teachings that familiarizes me with what is to come in the bardos and how to practice for them! Through our connection, I have confidence that I will feel Tsoknyi Rinpoche's presence and support.
- Although I intend to persevere in stabilizing my mind and rehearse going through the bardos without distraction, if I die suddenly the the most effective thing to do is chant [Om Mani Padme Hum](#). I trust this will help me overcome the inevitable shock

and confusion. I'll need to recognize I'm dead, call upon Tsoknyi Rinpoche's support and stabilize my mind in its empty nature.

Throughout the Training Guide, this color code is used:

*Points in **Turquoise** are outer signs; red are **Inner** signs; **Purple** are secret signs.*

***Green** denotes practices that are appropriate at this time.*

***Blue** denotes instructions for my Dharma friend.*

The journey begins with experiencing the dissolution of the coarse body, its consciousnesses and the sense bases.

This is called:

The Four Instances:

earth into water, water into fire, fire into wind, wind into consciousness

Maintaining rigpa, the basic space of phenomena, without distraction is essential.

Remember: **All dissolution experiences in the bardos are simply projections of my mind.**

Earth element (*flesh & bones*) dissolves into water element

- I feel physical and mental heaviness, as if I am being crushed
- Eye base, its consciousness and sight are vanishing
- Intense cracking resounds, as if a mountain is crumbling
- All that appears is like a mirage
- I can envision Rinpoche at my heart center and with devotion offer supplications
- Whispering in my ear, my Dharma friend can help me express "I'm experiencing the process of death."

Water element (*blood, saliva, urine, etc.*) dissolves into fire element

- I have leakage of fluids followed by intense thirst; the body is drying out
- Mind buzzes and is agitated; increasing irritability and loss of mental clarity
- Ear base, its consciousness and hearing are vanishing
- All that appears is smoke-like
- Sounds of great waves crashing resound
- I can envision Rinpoche at my navel center and with devotion offer supplications
- Whispering in my ear, my Dharma friend can help me recognize these signs

Fire element (*warmth*) dissolves into wind element

- My body rapidly goes from being hot to cold
- I can no longer speak
- My mental clarity vacillates; it's hard to recognize people and I may have hallucinations
- Nose base and its consciousness are disappearing
- All that appears is like fireflies or sparks
- Sounds of an immense fire storm resound
- I can envision Rinpoche at my forehead and with devotion offer supplications
- Whispering in my ear, my Dharma friend can help me recognize these signs

Wind element (*breath*) dissolves into consciousness

- My breath shortens, rattles and soon disappears
- My taste and tactile bases and their consciousnesses are vanishing
- All that appears is a brightly shining torch or butter lamp
- Sound like a dragon's roar resounds
- Breath stops = clinical death
- Whispering in my ear, my Dharma friend needs to tell me this has happened and it's time to concentrate on the final dissolution that is now about to happen.

For the next three to 3 1/2 days my body should not be moved until death is completed with the inner dissolution of consciousness.

- The Kuntuzangpo prayer should be read at the conclusion of the three (+) days and its amulet is placed on my heart. If I have a "Bardo garb", it should be burned on my body, along with all of my Dharma journals and notebooks when it is time for my cremation.
- If possible, Tsoknyi Rinpoche, or other lamas should be contacted to say prayers.
- Anis can be contacted through the Pundarika website to do weekly pujas from this point on through the 49 days. If a local lama or monk has been in attendance at my death ask him to continue as well.
- During this time the inner dissolution continues taking place as the white element from my father moves down to the heart and the red element from my mother moves up to the heart where they rest in union, squeezing out consciousness.

This is called:

Appearance, Increase, Attainment, and Full Attainment

This phase of the Bardo of Dying marks the subtle dissolution and disappearance of the consciousness of my conceptual, afflictive mind. With **Full Attainment**, I intend to experience the emergence of brilliant, unfabricated, non-conceptual dharmakaya. This is the natural, empty basic space of the self-cognizant nature of mind.

- * The afflictive consciousnesses (6, 7, 8) of my mistaken thoughts and disturbing emotions now dissolve. The total dissolution of these consciousnesses, which comprise my dualistic mind (the ability to perceive, conceptualize, grasp onto objects, give rise to kleshas, and to project a self to others) and in particular the alaya-vijñāna (8th consciousness – the storehouse that carries my karmic seeds) are ceasing for this lifetime, just as the external breath in my physical body ceased previously.
- * There are 4 stages: **Appearance, Increase, Attainment, and Full Attainment**
Each of these phases progressively dissolves the afflictions I have developed over lifetimes. The functions of my relative, conceptual mind are ceasing; my consciousness is ceasing to apprehend objects and engage conceptually with them. Finally, the samsaric appearances of this lifetime evaporate with the cessation of my dualistic consciousness.
- * What then bursts into appearance is limitless, pure, non-dual, non-conceptual, vivid dharmakaya. It will appear brighter than 1000 or even 100,000 suns.

Appearance dissolves into the Mind of Increase: the Whiteness

- Vast and perfectly clear sky lit by a halo of light, also described as a luminous white light, like a moonlit cloudless night
- All thoughts related to aggression cease
- Secret sign: nature of mind's uncommon clarity free of concepts
- It's helpful if my Dharma friend whispers in my ear: "No matter what appearances arise, don't attach to them. Maintain strong alertness and cut through appearances."

Increase dissolves into Mind of Attainment: the Redness

- Luminous red light in a cloudless sky, like a beautiful sunrise
- All thoughts of passion and desire cease
- Secret signs: wisdom of increase, a natural ceasing of ignorance.
- Do not get drawn into this appearance...it is easy to get attached to its beauty!
- It's helpful if my Dharma friend whispers in my ear: "No matter what appearances arise, don't attach to them. Maintain strong alertness and cut through appearances."

Attainment dissolves into space: the Blackness

- Luminous dark sky without any sunlight, moonlight or starlight
- Thoughts related to ignorance cease and all conceptuality ceases
- Secret sign: wisdom of attainment, heightened experience of thought-free indivisible bliss and clarity
- Again, it's helpful if my Dharma friend whispers in my ear: "No matter what appearances arise, don't attach to them. Maintain strong mindfulness and cut through appearances."
- Inner respiration ceases, which is the actual point of my death and the end of this life.
- In this blackness it's easy to fall unconsciousness and completely miss full attainment, waking up in the Bardo of Dharmata instead.
- **I must remain mindful, stable and alert, for Full Attainment, my best chance for attaining enlightenment, is about to arise!**

Full Attainment: space dissolves into Ground Luminosity

- This is the nature of Dharmakaya, free of limitations, dimensions or characteristics
- Vast and open like a clear, luminous sky in autumn, brighter than thousands of suns
- This is known as Ground of Dharmakaya and Mother Luminosity meeting the Child Luminosity I have experienced in rigpa practice. It is my empty essence, fully unveiled.

"Yogins who realize their very essence attain buddhahood once freed from the confines of the physical body." *Longchenpa, pg. 397*

- This is when I can enter “five days” of non-distracted meditative concentration or tukdam. Its duration is measured by each “day” lasting as long as my meditation abides in non-conceptual wisdom times five (five minutes = 25 min). Without recognition of dharmakaya’s empty nature, each day is over in a second, with no opportunity to liberate.
- During tukdam my mind is still in the body, so I will appear asleep. There is warmth at the heart and there is no rigor mortis or smell during the time when my body is left in place.
- My Dharma friend needs to be aware of these signs indicating that my mind has not yet left the body and not disturb me or let anyone else disturb me.
- At the end of this phase, either intentionally or through the reactivation of the winds of karma, consciousness leaves the body through one of nine portals. “The red bindu continues its ascent and can sometimes be seen as blood coming out of the nose or mouth. The white bindu continues its descent and can sometimes be seen as a white discharge coming from the urethra. This separation of the red and white bindus releases the indestructible bindu at the heart, where consciousness is held.” *Holecek, pg. 83*

However, if I’m overwhelmed by the brightness of dharmakaya’s light, I will instantly fall unconscious and not have the opportunity to be liberated. Instead, I will wake up in the Bardo of Dharmata.

The Bardo of Luminous Dharmata

*“Now when the bardo of dharmata dawns upon me,
I will abandon all thoughts of fear and terror,
I will recognize whatever appears as my projection
and know it to be a vision of the bardo; now that I have reached this critical point,
I will not fear the peaceful and wrathful ones, my own projections.”*
The Tibetan Book of the Dead

- If I recognized my true nature in the Full Attainment experience of the Ground Luminosity, then I have attained enlightenment in the great original state of primordial purity and will not go into this next bardo.
- If I became unconscious & didn’t recognize the nature of my mind upon seeing the brilliant light of Ground Luminosity, I’ll wake up in the Bardo of Sambogakaya/ Suchness, the Bardo of Dharmata.

- The Ground Luminosity of Dharmakaya that appeared at the time of death during Full Attainment was completely pure in nature and had no appearance. Arising out of it is this next bardo, the Bardo of Dharmata, also called Bardo of Luminosity and Suchness. It has been likened to the Big Bang in that it's full of densely packed dynamic energy. This is inherent buddha-nature expressed in sounds and lights and will rapidly emerge as form. It is "spontaneous presence," out of which all phenomena of samsara and nirvana will arise, and into which they will eventually be reabsorbed.
- Expressions of wisdom-mind appear in this bardo because I'm now free of the ordinary eight consciousnesses and their reliance upon sense objects. It is the pure knowing of the suchness of everything, knowing the luminosity and empty nature even though there's form.
- Sambogakaya luminosity, the unconditioned nature, is the essence of all the experiences in the Bardo of Dharmata including the frightening images. It will take meditative effort to realize these are from my own mind because they appear to be outside of me and as such will feel like the relative reality I've left behind.
- I must remember that all appearances are the nature of my mind and as such, are the basic space of phenomena that I have trained in during rigpa practice during this lifetime. In light of this, Rinpoche recommends watching scary movies to train in recognizing the illusory nature of fearsome images and experiences.
- At this point there still are opportunities to recognize the nature of my mind. However from here on, through the Karmic Bardo of Becoming, it will be increasingly more difficult for me to recognize the nature of mind. I need to remain alert, especially now as I encounter the experiences of spontaneous presence in their intrinsic dynamic forms and not in the forms I am used to.

The following are experiences I will encounter as they appear to Nyingma, Kagyu, Vajrayana and Dzogchen practitioner. Different images may be projected by practitioners of other lineages and non-Buddhists. These, like all else, are only projections of my mind; recognition of their empty nature will bring liberation.

- The hundred peaceful and wrathful (heruka) deities, which are manifestations of the wakefulness of spontaneous presence. These deities are unconditioned and composed of rainbow light, no matter how real or solid they appear.
- The five Buddha families: **Vajra**, **Ratna**, **Padma**, **Karma**, **Buddha**.

- The four wisdom lights of blue, yellow, red and white (the fifth, green, will not manifest here).
- Finally, wisdom, which is originally present within the ground of primordial purity, will dissolve into spontaneous presence.

If I depart the Bardo of Dharmata without attaining liberation, the last remaining possibility is:

The Karmic Bardo of Becoming

“Do not be distracted. This is the dividing line where Buddhas and sentient beings are separated. It is said of this moment: In an instant, they are separated, in an instant, complete enlightenment.”

The Tibetan Book of the Dead

This is the time to not be distracted by all that will be going on. Use as much effort as it takes to stay focused and still. Although it is difficult, non-distraction can bring liberation, even in this final bardo.

- In about 4 ½ days my consciousness begins to wake up.
- Having no physical body, just a mental body with lifetimes of collected karmic patterns, I will be automatically tossed about by every subtle thought and emotion that arises. I will arrive instantly at any place my mind touches upon. This mental body is easily distracted and easily forgets what is going on and what has to be done to bring about liberation or a good rebirth.
 - This can be a very disturbing and frightening experience if I lose mental stability and do not recognize my own mind’s nature. I must use any meditative strength I have to stay mentally clear and alert.
 - My karma, based on my life and previous lives, will lead me to be reborn in one of the six realms: god, demi-god, human, animal, hungry ghost or one of the hells. None of these are eternal “places”, but are qualities of mind and samsaric states projected by minds. They are determined by my karma and at this point, by whatever ability I have to practice at this time.
 - It is said that chanting **Om Mani Padme Hum** can close the door to the six realms.

- If I've made an aspiration for rebirth in a pure land, focus on it now and visualize it and its yidam. This is a very good choice - but I must practice for it to occur.

May I have a safe journey and a beneficial rebirthOm Mani Padme Hum!

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**Tsoknyi Rinpoche**

**What is the best thing a student can do before death?**

**Refresh the teachings. Whatever you have received, go through your database of teachings and refresh it. There are a lot of teachings, but try to capture the essential points of what you have received. The main points are to be detached and to refresh your recognition of the nature of mind.**

**What is the best meditation to do before death?**

For older students, find the nature of mind, which is mind beyond death and dying. This mind doesn't die. Find that mind and rest there. For newer students, they can rest in meditation. Mostly it depends on each person, according to their own belief to create some hope. It's ok to connect to your own belief to find some peace.

**What is the best thing to do when someone is actually dying?**

There are several options here. One option is if you have a yidam, you can grab onto that. By doing that, the yidam binds your mind. Again, whatever is happening, whatever is dissolving, the best thing is to maintain the unborn mind, the recognition of mind. Don't be afraid of the dissolution. Things may be dissolving but you are resting in the nature of mind which is beyond dissolution and death.

**What is the best thing for the sangha to do to help the dying person?**

If you know the person's yidam, that is very good. Invoke the mind of the yidam, and mix your mind, the mind of the dying person, and the mind of the yidam together - then rest in the nature of mind. That is a very big support for the one who is dying.

**Should the sangha do the yidam practice along with dying person?**

Yes. If the helping person is familiar [with] and understands the yidam practice, then they can remind the dying person of the qualities of the yidam. It is also helpful to recite the mantra of the yidam. The dying person can recite it and the sangha at the side of the dying person can rest in it with them....It is also good to read vajra songs and doha [songs] of fearlessness. Beginner practitioners can also do this. Read

teachings on mahamudra, dzogchen, and other inspiring readings, along with the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

The helping person has to have some kind of intuition and be able to adjust according to the person who is dying. If they are Christian, say something to connect them with God. If they are Buddhist, say something to help them connect to the underlying mind. If they are a free thinker, then help them connect with the peace in their mind in order to let go of fear. You have to see and understand the person in order to know how to best say: “Relax, let it go”.

Provide what gives them hope beyond life - whether it's God, the pure lands, or the underlying, unchanging mind. Most importantly, the helping person needs to use their intuition and wisdom to properly convey what they understand, and to match the belief of the dying person.

**What's the best thing to do when someone wakes up in the bardo after death?**

The first thing to do is to recognize that you are dead. Secondly, you should know that all the phenomena that you are experiencing now are bardo phenomena. Know that everything is the expression of your own mind. Think to yourself “I'm not going to go crazy with the expressions of my mind. I'm going to try to find the nature of my own mind, which is beyond the delusion.” Everything that is happening is the expression of your mind. It is better to not get caught up in that expression but to capture the seat of the nature of mind.

**What is the best thing that sangha can do to support someone after they have died?**

In a general way, every week you can do practices for them, because every week they have a chance to change their life, to change the course of their bardo experience. The most important thing for changing in the bardo is to know that they have lived their life properly and can therefore let go of that life with confidence. On that day you can do more puja or prayers, or you can go through the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, day by day. If you can read it in the house where they live, where they spent the most time, that is best, because they usually come back to familiar places. They probably will not recognize that they are dead, and then they may click onto some good things, like remembering the teachings and what they should do.

**Any final comments, Rinpoche, if you were at the side of someone who was dying?**

Two things. First, if they are willing to hear your advice, then give them hope. Tell them that the relative is dying, the ultimate is not dying. Give them hope that **they can**



recognize the ultimate, the nature of their mind, the mind that is unchanging and undying. You have to give a little promotion on the deathless side. Secondly, then the phenomena of this life that they are leaving, that they used properly - just let it go. Holecek, pgs. 303 - 306

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From Joan Halifax, who has worked with the dying for over 30 years:

The concept of a good death can put unbearable pressure on dying people and caregivers, and can take us away from death's mystery and the richness of not knowing. Our expectation of how someone should die can give rise to subtle or direct coerciveness. No one wants to be judged for how well she dies! "Death with dignity" is another concept that can become another obstacle to what is really happening. Dying can be very undignified. Often, it's not dignified at all, with spoiled bedclothes and sheets, bodily fluids and flailing, nudity and strange sexuality, confusion and rough language...good death, death with dignity - can be unfortunate fabrications that we use to protect ourselves against the sometimes raw and wondrous truth of dying. ^

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Kuntuzangpo's Prayer: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSbldGbH3Ok](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSbldGbH3Ok)

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