

# Practical Instructions for Buddhist Funerals

A Rigpa Spiritual Care Project



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Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc.

A RIGPA SPIRITUAL CARE PROJECT

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*Practical  
Instructions  
for  
Buddhist  
Funerals  
in NSW  
Australia*



# *Contents*

## **PART 1**

INTRODUCTION .....	6
PREPARATION AND RESPONSIBILITIES .....	6
LEGAL REQUIREMENTS CONCERNING A DEATH .....	8
WHEN DEATH HAPPENS AT HOME .....	9
WHEN DEATH HAPPENS IN HOSPITAL .....	12
THE CORONER'S INVOLVEMENT FOLLOWING A DEATH .....	12
CONTACTING A FUNERAL DIRECTOR .....	14
Questions to consider: .....	14
CREMATION .....	15
BURIAL IN A CEMETERY .....	15
BURIAL ON YOUR OWN LAND .....	16
ORGANISING THE FUNERAL .....	16
Issues to consider and discuss .....	17
Order of arrangements .....	17
Other Tasks to Consider .....	18
THE FUNERAL SERVICE .....	19
Suggestions for the service .....	20
An Example and Order of a Funeral Service .....	20

<i>Appendix I Documents Required for Burial or Cremation</i> .....	22
DOCUMENTS FOR A BURIAL .....	22
DOCUMENTS FOR A CREMATION .....	23
COST OF DOCUMENTS (NSW 2002) .....	24
Burial .....	24
Cremation .....	24
<i>Appendix II Who to Notify when Someone Dies</i> .....	25
A check list .....	25
<i>Appendix III Preparation for a Funeral</i> .....	26
A checklist for yourself .....	26
Other preparations/tasks .....	27
A checklist for someone else: .....	27
Other preparations/tasks: .....	27
<i>Appendix IV Making a Coffin</i> .....	28
<i>Appendix V Reference Material</i> .....	29

## PART 2

HOW TO HELP SOMEONE WHO IS DYING OR AFTER THEY HAVE DIED .....	30
Introduction .....	30
Finding a Spiritual Practice .....	31

PRAYER .....	32
MEDITATION .....	32
PRACTICE .....	32
The Essential Phowa .....	32
COMPASSION PRACTICES .....	33
Tonglen .....	33
Heart Practice — for Helping After Death .....	34
Requesting Prayers From a Tibetan Master .....	34

## APPENDIX A — PRAYERS

A Reading From The Tibetan Book Of The Dead .....	35
A Prayer Of Shantideva .....	36
Aspiration Prayer (Hebrew) .....	36
The Root Verses From the “Bardo Thodrol Chenm” .....	37

## APPENDIX B — PRACTICES

The Essential Phowa Practice .....	39
Guided Phowa For Others .....	41
The Heart Practice .....	43
1. <i>Invocation</i> .....	44
2. <i>Calling Out</i> .....	44
3. <i>Filling The Heart with Bliss</i> .....	44
4. <i>Helping the Dead</i> .....	45

# *Part 1*

## **Introduction**

We know that death is certain but that the time of death is uncertain, so it is a good idea to have a plan for your death and the prayers and rituals you would like after your death. It may be useful to discuss this with family and close friends and also to encourage them to plan their own funerals. To consider making a will, allocating their possessions, setting aside money for offerings for prayers or rituals, deciding whether they wish to be buried or cremated. Dealing with these issues before death can avoid difficult situations and problems between family members after death.

This booklet has been compiled as a guide to help you with the **practical aspects** of funerals and there is also a section on prayers and practices for death. Whilst it is possible to make all the arrangement yourself without using the services of a funeral director, most people find it easier to have someone who is experienced carry out the basic requirements. Costs will vary, depending on the amount of work done and the types of services you request.

The information provided here is only a guideline, so you need to check the details of your particular needs and situation, especially if you live outside NSW, Australia.

## **Preparation and Responsibilities**

Whether or not a person dies at home, while under no legal obligation to accept responsibility for burial or cremation, the

next of kin is required to provide the personal details of the deceased within one month of the death, so that the death can be registered. If no next of kin is available anyone who knows the facts can be asked to provide this information.

When an executor of a will has been appointed, it is the executor's responsibility to organise the funeral. The executor has a right to the possession and custody of the body until it is buried or cremated. However the executor is not empowered to make decisions about organ donation and post-mortem examinations; this right falls to the senior available next of kin.

It is helpful to become familiar with and understand your rights regarding hospitals, local councils and health department regulations concerning death, so that if death happens suddenly or unexpectedly you will be able to make the right decisions in what may be a time of great crisis.

Check the local funeral parlours and funeral procedures and obtain the required forms. It is worthwhile asking several funeral directors about any particular procedure you may wish to follow that is outside their normal service. These days they are more prepared to accommodate different customs and practices. Ask them what services they will still be able to provide for you after you have decided how much personal involvement you want in the funeral service. Remember that the funeral industry is a service industry, they are there to serve you. Charges will vary, depending on the amount of work you wish them to do and the type of services that you select.

In Australia today 80% of funeral parlours are owned by just two American corporations. You may wish to use a locally owned firm instead.

You can also make inquiries about your local cemetery and crematorium, as some crematoriums are owned by local councils and others are owned privately, usually by funeral directors. Charges may vary from place to place.

Make inquiries about coffins at a funeral parlour. Cardboard coffins are available but are not necessarily cheaper than the simple timber-based coffins that can be obtained from funeral directors and which cost around \$500. Or you could start to think about making the coffin yourself and decorating it with prayers, personal photographs etc. But be sure to check with your local crematorium that they will accept the type of coffin you choose. *For further information on making a coffin see Appendix 4.*

Allocate a specific place, drawer or box in which copies of birth and marriage certificates, your will, and instructions regarding your funeral are kept. Inform a family member or close friend where this is, or leave a copy with a chosen institution, such as The Public Trustee.

## **Legal Requirements Concerning a Death**

A doctor needs to examine the deceased person within 24 hours of death to issue a **Death Certificate** (*form PR315*).

If cremation has been requested, a **Practitioners Cremation Certificate** (*form CL49*) will also need to be signed.

If the deceased has left written instructions not to be cremated, a cremation permit will not be issued.

*(Note: See Appendix II for further information regarding the legal documentation required at the time of death and concerning funeral arrangements)*

To place a Death/Funeral Notice in a newspaper you will need to show a copy of the Death Certificate or have your death/funeral notice witnessed by a Justice of the Peace. A funeral director is also able to do this.

If the death is unexpected an autopsy may be required. If you wish to apply for an exemption from this on religious or other grounds, you can seek further information from the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

([HTTP://HREOC.GOV.AU](http://hreoc.gov.au))

It is legally possible for the dead person to remain at home if you can maintain an air temperature of 1–5 degrees centigrade. (The same effect as cold storage)

In NSW a body can be transported by private vehicle. This may be different in other states or territories. If collecting the body from the hospital or mortuary, ring first and explain to someone in charge what your intentions are and ask what they will require from you. The body will be in a plastic bag which can be removed before the funeral.

If you wish to be buried on your own land be sure to contact your local council as the laws differ from place to place. Usually you need to have at least five hectares, and if the property is communally owned you will need to have consent of all the owners.

## **When Death Happens at Home**

Slow down, remember this is an important time of transition and an opportunity to help by saying prayers, doing Phowa practice, keeping your own mind stable and free from panic,

sadness, or anything that may disturb the consciousness of the person who has died. (*See section on “Prayers and Practices for the Dying and after Death”.*)

If appropriate you can request a Lama or practitioner to pray or practice for the deceased person. One way to do this is by sending the relevant details and an offering (whatever you can afford) to the Rigpa Prayer Request program. The name, details and offerings are then sent to monasteries in India where the monks will practice for the person who has died. Their name is also sent to the monastic and practising sanghas at Lerab Ling for inclusion in their practice.

To do this you must enter the full name of the person who has died, date of death, cause of death, and your name (as sponsor) in the prayer request book at a Rigpa Centre, or e-mail these details to the Australian National Prayer Request Co-ordinator.

[[JWELLS@STAFF.KAMBALA.NSW.EDU.AU](mailto:JWELLS@STAFF.KAMBALA.NSW.EDU.AU)]

You can make your offering by placing it in the appropriate box at a Rigpa Centre, or by depositing directly into the Prayer Sponsorship bank account.

[National Australia Bank 082 053 557 468 1101]

A doctor will need to be called to pronounce the person dead and to issue a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death. Until this happens the funeral director cannot remove the body, and only the police can authorize that the body be moved and taken to the local hospital until a doctor is able to verify that death has occurred. A funeral director may then remove the body. Once a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death has been issued, you can contact the funeral director if

you wish and they are legally bound to respond within eight hours of being notified. It is a legal requirement that the body be disposed of by burial or cremation within five days. If a longer period is required permission from the Health Department must be sought.

Remember if you need to touch the body, gently tap the top of the head first or gently pull the hair at the fontanelle. It is said that this will assist the consciousness to leave the body at this point on the head and this is considered most significant for one's next rebirth. Also try to avoid touching the body unnecessarily during this time of transition. You can check if the person's consciousness has left the body by gently feeling the area around the heart: if it is no longer warm, then the consciousness has moved on. When the body starts to decompose, this also indicates that the consciousness has left. You can wash the body with saffron or perfumed water before transporting to the mortuary.

If you intend to keep the deceased person at home for any length of time, you are required by law to keep the body at a temperature of 1–5 degrees centigrade. So you may need to have an air-conditioner or to pack frozen plastic water bottles around the body. Alternatively blocks of ice with a fan blowing over it may suffice. Rigor mortis will start to set in slowly within four hours after death, but the body will start to soften again within three days and look quite peaceful. Illness and humidity can cause rapid deterioration, odour, and discharge from the body. This must be considered contaminated waste and placed in a sturdy plastic bag for disposal. So you will need to have available plastic bottles to freeze water in, air-

conditioner, thermometer to check room temperature, large pads to soak up body fluids, and strong plastic bags.

## **When Death Happens in Hospital**

Stay with the deceased person for as long as you need to as this time is very important. Ask the staff to leave you alone for as long as possible, even though due to circumstances, you may not be able to spend as much time as you would like. Remember that it is said that the consciousness of the person who has just died is nine times more clairvoyant than normal. This means that whatever is in our mind at this time is conveyed to the deceased. If we can learn to calm and stabilise our own mind now, even when we are under stress, we will be better able to convey a sense of stability and clarity to a loved one who has just died.

The body will be washed and prepared for the mortuary. You can ask if you can be present or if you can assist.

Most hospitals have a room which is usually attached to the mortuary, where relatives and friends can spend time with the deceased. The body can usually stay in the hospital until the funeral arrangements are made.

## **The Coroner's Involvement Following a Death**

In cases where a doctor is unable to determine the cause of death, it is necessary for the coroner to be notified. The police will do this and prepare a report for the coroner who then seeks to determine the cause of death by contacting the

attending doctor or requesting a pathologist to inspect the body and carry out an autopsy.

**There are many reasons for a Coroner to be called in.**

- With a sudden death where the cause is unknown.
- When a Medical Certificate stating cause of death has not been issued by a doctor
- Where the deceased has not attended a doctor within the last three months prior to death.
- Where death has occurred while under an anaesthetic or within 24 hours of the administration of an anaesthetic.
- Where the deceased has met a violent or unnatural death or has died under suspicious or unusual circumstances.
- While the deceased is a patient in, or temporarily absent from, a mental hospital, child welfare institution, prison or detention centre, lockup, or while in the lawful custody of any member of the police force.
- Where the deceased has not been identified.

A government Medical Officer carries out the post-mortem/autopsy. You may wish to apply for exemption from this on religious grounds. The next of kin has a legal right to apply to the Supreme Court for an order which prevents the post-mortem from occurring. If you are considering seeking such

an order, you should immediately advise the Coroner to whom the death has been reported. The post mortem can then be delayed while you get legal advice, consider the matter further or make the application to the Supreme Court. It is advisable to get legal advice on how to make an application, the cost involved and the chances of success of an application. If you wish to research this further you can do so through the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

([HTTP://HREOC.GOV.AU](http://hreoc.gov.au))

If you are using the services of a funeral director, be clear about which tasks you want them to perform for you and the cost. Convey to them how you would like to be involved and which tasks you wish to carry out

## **Contacting a Funeral Director**

When you contact the funeral director let them know what you want and discuss what legal forms are required. Remember that you can contact different funeral directors to get what you want. Ask someone who is clear and firm to do this for you if you feel it is too difficult at the time.

### **Questions to consider:**

Is the funeral to be a burial or a cremation

Will you be providing your own coffin.

Do you wish to transport the coffin in your own car.

Would you like the deceased brought home for a short while. (Check viability/cost)

Do you want the service to be held inside the chapel or church or outside (if possible)

Who would you like to conduct the service — friend, relative, religious person.

Are chairs or cushions needed for the service.

Will music be provided or can you provide your own.

## **Cremation**

Do you wish to go behind the scenes and see the coffin go into the cremator, or would you prefer to have everybody leave before the coffin leaves the chapel?

The time allotted for each service varies from place to place. If you think you need a long service at the crematorium, book two time slots or book the last one of the day.

Remember that you can have another special prayer service in a more private place.

A cremation takes about one and a half hours to complete. The few pieces of the larger bones that remain afterwards are crushed to a fine powder. It usually takes at least 24 hours before you can collect these ashes. The crematorium will provide a container for the ashes, or you can bring your own. If you intend to scatter the ashes request that the container is not heat sealed as it will be difficult to open.

## **Burial in a Cemetery**

Much of the expense of a burial is associated with the burial plot. A single grave can cost \$1,000 to \$3,500. In country areas where cemetery land is not so scarce, a plot may cost as little as \$250. There are also labour costs involved with

opening and closing the grave. Where a double grave is used, costs will be limited to a re-opening fee.

Different funeral directors offer different facilities and again it is worth contacting more than one director to find out the cost of the services you want.

## **Burial on Your Own Land**

First contact your local council and apply to have a designated burial site on your land, this will change the zoning on your land, and could be a problem in selling it. The land owner has to provide access to the grave for mourners.

Then organise with your local council for a hole to be dug.

Arrange for six people to be coffin bearers, being mindful of their different heights.

Provide gloves for coffin bearers and ropes and planks to lower the coffin.

Have someone with screws and screwdriver to fix the lid on the coffin.

Organise a team with shovels to fill in the grave.

Have trees available for planting etc.

## **Organising the Funeral**

If you intend to organise the funeral yourself you will need a team of people with one person coordinating. This person should be aware of not taking over, but encouraging the family to make some decisions and discussing the options with them. Grief can make people forgetful so all instruc-

tions should be in writing, with letters from the next of kin authorising people to do official tasks.

Whoever orders the funeral is initially responsible for the costs involved, however these costs are able to be recovered from the deceased estate.

### **Issues to consider and discuss**

- Is the funeral to be a burial or a cremation (with or without a body)?
- Is it to take place inside or outside?
- Is it to be a public or private ceremony?
- Are the ashes to be scattered, where, and by whom?
- Who will take charge of this?
- Who will conduct the ceremony?
- Who needs to be contacted to say prayers or perform other rituals?
- Which rituals and prayers are appropriate or have already been requested?

### **Order of arrangements**

- Discussion with the bereaved.
- Book a time slot at the Crematorium or Cemetery (very important as all other arrangements hinge on this).

- Create a time frame, travel, etc.
- Organise coffin: (build or buy).
- Organise Death Notices.
- Collect special items and materials to be placed in the coffin.

### **Other Tasks to Consider**

- Dealing with the necessary legal paper work.
- Attending to obituary notices.
- Notifying people about the death, and where and when the service is being held.
- Arranging for someone to take phone calls.
- Encouraging friends to bring photos, prayers, offerings for a Tsok, etc.
- Having ready any clothes that have been specially chosen for/by the deceased person.
- Organising transport.
- Check with friends or family for someone to write a story of the person's life highlighting important events. This can be read out at the service and perhaps later placed in the local paper.

## The Funeral Service

- Decide where you will hold the service — in your own home or garden, at the crematorium, in a church, at the funeral directors, or at the cemetery.
- Use of a public place will require permission from the local council.
- Some clergy will not allow an open coffin in a church.
- Organise to have printed, or draw up yourself, a “Service Programme”.
- In planning the programme you will need to invite someone to lead the service. This can be a friend, a family member, or a celebrant: there are no legal requirements. This person does not have to say a great deal, but to just keep the service flowing, be flexible, and allow time for the unexpected.
- Organise the order of those who may wish to speak at the service.
- Arrange for someone to take charge of the prayers and/or music. This can include tapes, CD’s, live music, a choir etc.
- Arrange for someone to take care of food, drinks and offerings.
- Consider how to end the service well.

## **Suggestions for the service**

- A photograph of the deceased on the cover of the service program.
- Photocopies of prayers & poems, etc. to be read out during the service.
- A table for flowers, light offerings, incense, personal items belonging to the deceased.
- A memorial book or people to write in.
- Small cards and pens for people to write messages to place in the coffin or grave.
- A corkboard and pins for photos.
- Someone to take photos or video.
- Flower petals.
- Table or trestle to place coffin on.

## **An Example and Order of a Funeral Service**

- Organise to have mantras, prayers or music playing as people are arriving.
- Give a program and a flower to each person.
- Have the person leading the service introduce themselves and explain what will be happening during the ceremony.

- Then have a selection of music — a favourite CD, a choir, mantra practice, etc.
- Invite the first speaker to begin — they may need some support as this could be a difficult time.
- Play a second selection of music.
- Invite the second speaker to begin.
- Then invite people who may spontaneously want to say something, to do so.
- After the last speaker, have music or mantras playing softly while informing people of the small cards they can write on to place in the coffin or the grave. Invite people to come forward and encourage them to say their final good-byes.
- If the coffin is open, people can place their flower and/or message in the coffin. If the coffin is closed, place the message and flower on the top.
- When everyone has finished saying goodbye, have a silent time of reflection, followed by a guided meditation to conclude the service.
- Remind people to write in the Memorial Book.



*Appendix I*  
*Documents Required for Burial or Cremation*

**Documents for a burial**

Application for Reservation form in order to buy a plot in a cemetery.

Application for Burial Permit for burial in the cemetery.

**OR**

Application for Private Burial if a home burial is to take place.

- These all available from your local council.

**PR315 Medical Certificate of Cause of Death**

- To be completed by a doctor who will supply this document.

**PR 13 Form of Information of Death**

- To be completed by the funeral director and lodged with the Registrar of Births Death and Marriages within seven days of the death.
- The next of kin normally provides the information for the funeral director.
- Remember to include a signed copy of the Application for Private Burial form if a home burial has occurred.
- Available from Local Court House.

## **PR189 Death Certificate Application Form (NSW)**

- May be needed for banking, business arrangements etc.
- Available from Local Court House (Cost around \$50)

## **Documents for a cremation**

**PR315 Medical Certificate of Cause of Death**  
(see above as for burial)

**PR13 Form of Information of Death**  
(see above as for burial)

**CL47 Application for Permission for Cremation plus  
Statutory Declaration**

- Completed by the next of kin or executor and Signed by a JP.
- Can be supplied by Funeral Director, or available from NSW Dept. of Health.

**Form CL49.1 The Attending Practitioners Cremation  
Certificate**

- Supplied, completed and signed by the attending practitioner.
- Also available from NSW Department of Health

**OR**

## **Form CL49.2 Medical Certificate of Cause of Death**

- Completed by the pathologist performing the post-mortem examination when cause of death is unknown.

## **Form CL50 Medical Referee's Cremation Permit**

- Completed and signed by a medical health officer or the medical superintendent of a Second or Third Schedule Public Hospital.

## **Form CL51 Cremation Permit**

- Completed and signed by a coroner in coronial cases.

## **Cost of Documents (NSW 2002)**

All costs mentioned in this manual will vary depending on place and time.

### **Burial**

Application for Burial (cemetery fee)

Registration of Death (no cost)

Application for Death Certificate (\$29)

Conform to Policy on Private Ground (check cost)

### **Cremation**

Attending Practitioners Cremation Certificate (\$55)

Medical Referee's Certificate (\$55)

**OR**

Coroner's Certificate (autopsy) (no cost)  
Application for permission to cremate (JP) (no cost)  
Registration of Death (no cost)  
Application for Death Certificate (\$29)

## *Appendix II Who to Notify when Someone Dies*

### **A check list**

Dept. of Social Security.  
Dept. of Veteran's Affairs.  
Australian Tax Office.  
Roads Traffic Authority (car registration)  
Electoral Office.  
Post office for mail delivery.  
Local government for rates, fire levy, etc.  
Telephone service.  
Electricity company.

Superannuation Company.  
Solicitor and/or public trustee.  
Accountant.  
Banks/Building societies/Credit Union.  
Financial Institutions/Loan companies.  
Credit card providers.  
Companies, directorships etc.  
Chamber of Commerce.  
Home appliance rental.

Doctor/specialist/hospital.  
Dentist.  
Chemist.  
Medicare.  
Health Benefits Fund.  
Home nursing service.  
Ambulance service.  
Blood Bank.  
Home medical aids rental company.

Employer/Former employer.  
Trade Unions or Professional Associations.  
Clubs, organisations and associations.  
Church and religious organisations.  
Service organizations,  
e.g. Rotary, Lions, Apex, Zonta, Red Cross.  
School or college.

Home delivery services, e.g. newspapers, milk.  
Household help, gardening services, Meals on Wheels.

### *Appendix III Preparation for a Funeral*

#### **A checklist for yourself**

Will made and executor appointed.  
Location of will & instructions for funeral given to family  
/friends.  
Burial plot organised.

Instructions for dying process in place.  
Instructions for funeral (burial/cremation) completed.  
Instructions for funeral ceremony organised.  
Discussion with funeral director.  
Coffin designated.  
Contact list for death notice provided.  
Autopsy exemption applicable.

### **Other preparations/tasks**

#### **A checklist for someone else:**

Death certificate obtained.  
Autopsy exemption applicable.  
Other necessary certificates dealt with.  
Death registration completed.  
Time slot booked at crematorium/cemetery.  
Coffin organized (build/buy).  
Death notices posted.  
Funeral ceremony organised.

### **Other preparations/tasks:**

## *Appendix IV Making a Coffin*

These are approximate guidelines only, so please check with your local crematorium.

Coffins must:

- be of a size that is generally commensurate with the size of the body.
- be constructed of an easily combustible material of timber origin with sufficient strength to allow unsupported movement.
- be lined with a 4 cm-thick absorbent, waterproof liner, i.e. PVA film or cotton wadding.
- have a smooth base with no projections.
- have multiple handholds, i.e. wooden or rope.
- include a fixed but readily removable name plate, placed at the head of the coffin. (this will be retained by the crematorium for identification of the remains)
- can be painted or decorated.
- can have plastic in the bottom which is then covered with woodchips, shredded paper, or fresh herbs.
- can contain bedding and pillow for the body to be laid on

**Note:** Only combustible items may be placed in the coffin if it is to be cremated.

## *Appendix V Reference Material*

### *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*

by Sogyal Rinpoche

Rest Assured: A legal guide to wills, estates and funerals

Redfern Legal Centre Publishing

122 George St.

Redfern NSW 2016

Ph: (02) 9698 3066 Fax: (02) 9698 3077

Cost: \$21.95 + \$6 for P & H (Total: \$27.95); 128 pgs

### *The Do-It-Yourself Funeral Book by Leah Munro*

Cost: \$6.95; 35 pgs

Ph. (02) 6657 2648 (Dorrigo)

Ph. (02) 6655 1189 (Bellingen)

### *Australian Eco-Coffins*

11 Easter Cres.

Gaven QLD 4211

Mobile: 0412 292 827

Ph: (07) 5529 7158

Fax: (07) 5529 8617

e-mail: [ECOCOFFINS@AUSTARNET.COM.AU](mailto:ECOCOFFINS@AUSTARNET.COM.AU)

## *Part 2*

### **How to help someone who is dying or after they have died**

These prayers and practices have been extracted from much longer descriptions in Sogyal Rinpoche's book *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* Chapters 12, 13, 14 and 19. If you have this book or can borrow it, you may find reading the passages again a support.

*“So my heartfelt advice to those in the depths of grief and despair after losing someone they dearly loved is to pray for help and strength and grace. Pray you will survive and discover the richest possible meaning to the new life you now find yourself in. Be vulnerable and receptive, be courageous and be patient. Above all, look into your life to find ways of sharing your love more deeply with others now”.*

(Sogyal Rinpoche TBLD)

### **Introduction**

It is said in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition that the most powerful time to do spiritual practice for someone is during the 49 days after they have died, with special emphasis on the first 21 days and very strong emphasis immediately after they have stopped breathing, and the 3 days which follow. Each week for seven weeks, on the same day and at the same time as the person died, is also a powerful time to pray for them.

It is helpful to be aware and remember to pray for them at this time each week for the seven weeks.

So you can pray for someone to benefit their consciousness after their death. Any prayers you do for them now or in the future will benefit them. It is never too late to help someone who has died.

## **Finding a Spiritual Practice**

If the dying person is at all open to the idea of spiritual practice, help that person find a simple suitable practice, do it with him or her as often as possible, and keep gently reminding the person of it as death nears.

The whole atmosphere of dying can be transformed if people find a practice they can do whole-heartedly before and as they die. There are many aspects of spiritual practice so try to find the one they might be most connected with. It could be forgiveness, purification, dedication or feeling the presence of light and love.

Family members and friends, even those who may not be so familiar with Buddhist practices, can still do a great deal to help a friend or loved one before, during, and after their death. Firstly through prayer and meditation, and then through simple but powerful practices such as the Essential Phowa practice, Tonglen, and the Heart Practice.

*(Tibetan Book of Living And Dying, chapters 12, 13 & 19)*

**More experienced practitioners can do Guru Yoga, purification practices such as Vajrasattva, or the confession practices of Yeshe Ku Shok and Narak Kong Shak.**

## Prayer

In all religious traditions it is held that to die in a state of prayer is enormously powerful. Rinpoche writes:

*“Don’t for one moment imagine that it would be less effective for you to invoke the truth to help your dead friend than if a “holy man” prays for them. Because you are close to the person who has died, the intensity of your love and the depth of your connection will give your invocation an added power. The masters have assured us: Call out to them and the Buddhas will answer you.”*

(See Appendix A. Prayers )

## Meditation

*“If your dying friend or relative is familiar with some kind of meditation practice, encourage him or her to rest in meditation as much as possible, and meditate with the person as death approaches.”*

## Practice

### The Essential Phowa

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, Phowa is considered the most valuable and effective practice for death. The word Phowa means the transference or ejection of consciousness into the state of truth. There are many types of Phowa; the more traditional form is an elaborate, inner yogic practice that is only transmitted from a spiritual master to his or her student after years of committed practice.

Sogyal Rinpoche has taught an Essential Phowa practice,

which, unlike the traditional Phowa, is not just for the moment of death. This practice also helps to purify our regrets and negative karma, and it can be used to assist in emotional or physical healing. Essential Phowa is a practice for our whole life as well as for the time of dying, and it is the principal practice for offering spiritual support to others at the moment of death, and afterward.

*“No matter what your religious tradition you may find the practice of phowa combines very well with your own prayers. Many people who have no particular religious belief have also found this practice helpful. The point is that your love will benefit the person who has died directly. The more positive you can be the better for them.”*

*“I want to emphasise that this is a practice that anyone at all can do. It is simple, but it is also the most essential practice we can do to prepare for our own death, and it is the main practice I teach my students for helping their dying friends and relatives, and their loved ones who have already died.”*

(See Appendix B for The Essential Phowa practice)

## **Compassion Practices**

### **Tonglen**

(Chapter 12 TBLD)

*“Tonglen is a Buddhist practice, but I strongly believe that anyone — anyone at all can do it. Even if you have no religious faith, I urge you simply to try it. I have found Tonglen to be the greatest possible help”: (See “Tonglen for a Dying Person” TBLD p. 210)*

## Heart Practice — for Helping After Death

(Page 317 Chapter 19 TBLD)

*“The most important thing to do is to hold the name and good memory of a person in our hearts when they die. No matter how they died or how our feelings about them are when they died, we can most definitely benefit them through facing the death with an open heart.”*

(See Appendix B for the Heart Practice)

### Requesting Prayers From a Tibetan Master

Other than your own prayers and practices, in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition you can make a request for prayers or practices to be done by a master in order to liberate the consciousness of someone who has died. If you personally know a master you can directly request them and traditionally one makes an offering for this.

Written and Compiled by Susie White

### *Appendix A — Prayers*

These are some prayers can be said on behalf of someone who is dying or who has died.

## A Reading From The Tibetan Book Of The Dead

When the journey of my life has reached its end,  
and since no relatives go with me from this world  
I wander in the bardo state alone,  
may the peaceful and wrathful Buddhas  
send out the power of their compassion  
and clear away the dense darkness of ignorance.

When parted from beloved friends, wandering alone,  
my own projections' empty forms appear,  
may the Buddhas send out the power of their compassion  
so that the bardos' terrors do not come.

When the five luminous lights of Wisdom shine,  
fearlessly may I recognize myself:  
when the forms of the peaceful and wrathful ones appear,  
fearless and confident may I recognize the bardo.

May I be the doctor and the medicine  
And may I be the nurse  
For all sick beings in the world  
Until everyone is healed.

Just like space  
And the great elements such as earth,  
May I always support the life  
Of all the boundless creatures.

*“How transformed the world and our experience of it would be if each of us, while we live and as we die, could say this prayer, along with Shantideva and all the masters of compassion.”*

(Sogyal Rinpoche TBLD)

## **A Prayer Of Shantideva**

May I be a protector to those without protection,  
A leader for those who journey,  
And a boat, a bridge, a passage  
For those desiring the further shore.

May the pain of every living creature  
Be completely cleared away.

And until they pass away from pain  
May I also be the source of life  
For all the realms of varied beings  
That reach unto the ends of space.

## **Aspiration Prayer (Hebrew)**

May I be a guard for those who are without protection  
A guide for those who journey on the road.  
For those who wish to go across the water,  
May I be a boat, a raft, a bridge.

May I be an isle for those who yearn for landfall,  
A lamp for those who long for light;  
For those who need a resting place, a bed:  
For those who need a servant, may I be their slave.  
May I be the wishing jewel, the vase of plenty,  
A word of power and the supreme healing:

May I be the tree of miracles,  
and for every being a source of abundance.  
Thus for every thing that lives,  
As far as are the limits of the sky,  
May I provide their livelihood and nourishment  
Until they pass beyond the bonds of suffering.

## The Root Verses From the “Bardo Thodrol Chenm”

(The Tibetan Book of the Dead)

These prayers are said to help guide those who are dying as well as those who have already died, and are the root verses of Padmasambhava’s Heart Advice for the Dying and Dead.

Now when the *bardo of life* is dawning upon me  
I will abandon laziness for which life has no time,  
Enter, undistracted, the path of listening and hearing,  
reflection and contemplation, and meditation,  
Making perceptions and mind the path,  
And realize the “three kayas”: the enlightened mind.  
Now that I have once attained a human body,  
There is no time on the path for the mind to wander.  
(TBLD p. 119)

Now when the *bardo of dying* dawns upon me,  
I will abandon all grasping and yearning and attachment,  
Enter undistracted into clear awareness of the teaching,  
And eject my consciousness into the space of unborn Rigpa;  
As I leave this compound body of flesh and blood I will

know it to be a transitory illusion.

(TBLD p. 235)

Now when the *bardo of dharmata* dawns upon me,  
I will abandon all thoughts of fear and terror,  
I will recognize whatever appears as the display of my own  
Rigpa

And know it to be the natural appearance of this bardo;  
Now that I have reached this crucial point,  
I will not fear the peaceful and wrathful deities  
that arise from the nature of my very own mind.

(TBLD p. 283)

Now when the *bardo of becoming* dawns upon me,  
I will concentrate my mind one-pointedly,  
And strive to prolong the results of good karma,  
Close the entrance to rebirth and try to keep from being reborn;  
This is the time when perseverance and pure perception are  
needed,

Abandon negative emotions, and meditate on the master.

(TBLD p. 302)

With my mind far off, not thinking of death's coming,  
Performing these meaningless activities,  
Returning empty-handed now would be complete confusion;  
The need is recognition, the spiritual teachings,  
So why not practice the path of wisdom at this very moment?  
From the mouths of saints come these words:  
If you do not keep your master's teaching in your heart  
Will you not become your own deceiver?

(TBLD p. 137)

## *Appendix B — Practices*

### **The Essential Phowa Practice**

(TBLD p. 219)

First make sure you are comfortable, and assume the meditative posture. If you are doing this practice as you are coming close to death, just sit as comfortably as you are able, or practice lying down. Then bring your mind home, release and relax completely.

1. In the sky in front of you, invoke the embodiment of whatever truth you believe in, in the form of radiant light.

Choose whichever divine being or saint you feel close to. If you are a Buddhist, invoke a Buddha with whom you feel an intimate connection. If you are a practicing Christian, feel with all your heart the vivid, immediate presence of God, the Holy Spirit, Jesus, or the Virgin Mary. If you don't feel linked with any particular spiritual figure, simply imagine a form of pure golden light in the sky before you.

The important point is that you consider the being you are visualising, or whose presence you feel, is the embodiment of the truth, wisdom, and compassion of all the Buddhas, saints, masters, and enlightened beings. Don't worry if you cannot visualize them very clearly, just fill your heart with their presence and trust that they are there.

2. Then focus your mind, heart and soul on the presence you have invoked, and pray:

*Through your blessing, grace, and guidance, through the power of  
the light that streams from you:*

*May all my negative karma, destructive emotions, obscurations,  
and blockages be purified and removed,*

*May I know myself forgiven for all the harm I may have  
thought and done,*

*May I accomplish this profound practice of Phowa, and die a  
good and peaceful death,*

*And through the triumph of my death,*

*May I be able to benefit all other beings, living or dead.*

3. Now imagine that the presence of light you have invoked responds with a loving smile and sends out love and compassion in a stream of rays of light from his or her heart. As these touch and penetrate you, they cleanse and purify all your negative karma, destructive emotions, and obscurations, which are the causes of suffering. You see and feel that you are totally immersed in light.
4. You are now completely purified and completely healed by the light streaming from the presence. Consider that your very body, itself created by karma, now dissolves completely into light.
5. The body of light you are now soars up into the sky and merges, inseparably, with the blissful presence of light.
6. Remain in that state of oneness with the presence for as long as possible.

*“I have formulated this essential phowa specially from the traditional Tibetan practice for dying, and it incorporates all the most important principles. So it is not only a practice for dying, but it can also be used both to purify and to heal; it is important for the living, and for the sick as well. If a person is going to be healed, it will assist that healing; if a person is dying, it will help them and heal their spirit in death; and if the person has died, it will continue to purify them.”*

Sogyal Rinpoche (TBLD)

To use this practice to help someone who is dying the principle and the sequence are exactly the same; the only difference is that you visualize the Buddha or spiritual presence above the head of the dying person. Imagine that the rays of light pour down onto the dying person, purifying his or her whole being, and then he or she dissolves into light and merges into the spiritual presence

## **Guided Phowa For Others**

1. First just sit quietly and settle, gathering together all the scattered energies of body and mind

As far as possible, relax into the deep presence and spacious awareness of your being — releasing any identification with your own limited and fearful self-grasping, with all its conditioning and barriers. Imagine instead, that you are viewing things from the perspective of your true nature, the aspect of your mind and heart that is clear, spacious, and naturally radiant, with unbiased compassion and love.

2. And now from this space, visualise the person or persons who have died in front of you.

With all your heart, invoke in the sky above them the radiant presence of a Buddha, or a divine being, for whom you feel a devotion. See the form of this presence, not as flesh and blood, but as radiant light. Recognize that this being's qualities of perfect wisdom, boundless compassion, and limitless power to benefit beings, are no different to the qualities of your own wisdom nature.

3. On behalf of the other person, ask this Presence to purify the traces of any negative actions, and to release them from any distress or suffering connected with their death.
4. Visualise now, that this Presence lovingly sends out tremendous rays of light towards these people, blessing and purifying them.  
(Here you can recite a mantra or prayer, which will help to effect the purification.)
5. And now consider that the purification has been completely effected, and that their whole being, body and mind, is entirely transformed into light. That their being in the form of light rises up and dissolves into the heart of this divine presence, completely mixing with it, like light mixing with light.
6. Now just remain in this peaceful state. If thoughts arise or a sense of self begins to form, simply allow them to

dissolve back into the emptiness. Letting go, just naturally remain.

Finally, in dedicating this practice, or any prayers you offer on behalf of those who have died, think not only of those people you identify with, but of all those who have died alone or in great fear, especially during traumatic circumstances.

Extend your compassion to all beings, praying:

*May they all be purified of the suffering of their life and death.*

*May they experience happiness and peace.*

*May they ultimately attain complete liberation from suffering.*

## The Heart Practice

(TBLD P. 317)

*I would like now to give you a practice that can truly help you when you are suffering from deep sorrow and grief. It is a practice my master Jamyang Khyentse always used to give to people who were going through emotional torment or mental anguish and breakdown, and I know from my own experience it can bring enormous relief and solace.*

*The only conditions to the effectiveness of this practice are that you need to do it with all your might, and that you need to ask, really to ask, for help.*

Sogyal Rinpoche TBLD

## 1. Invocation

Invoke in the sky in front of you the presence of whichever enlightened being inspires you the most, and consider that this being is the embodiment of all the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and masters. Even if you cannot imagine in your mind's eye any one form, just feel the presence strongly and invoke his or her infinite power, compassion, and blessing.

## 2. Calling Out

Open your heart and invoke him or her with all the pain and suffering you feel. If you feel like crying, don't hold back: let your tears flow and really ask for help. Know that there is someone who is absolutely there for you, who listens to you, who understands you with love and compassion, without ever judging you: an ultimate friend.

Call to him or her from the depths of your pain, using the mantra:

*Om Ah Hum Vajra Guru Padma Siddhi Hum*

the mantra that has been used for centuries by hundreds of thousands of beings as a healing spring of purification and protection.

## 3. Filling The Heart with Bliss

Imagine and know now that the Buddha you are crying out to responds, with all his or her love, compassion wisdom, and

power. Tremendous rays of light stream toward you from him or her, Imagine that light as nectar, filling your heart up completely, and transforming all your suffering into bliss.

Think of him or her as infinitely warm and loving, a sun of bliss, comfort, peace, and healing. Open your heart , let out all your suffering; cry out for help. And say the mantra:

*Om Ah Hum Vajra Guru Padma Siddhi Hum*

Imagine now thousands of rays of light streaming out of his or her body, or from the heart: Imagine that the nectar overflows with joy and pours down over you in a continuous stream of soothing, golden liquid light. It flows into your heart, filling it and transforming your suffering into bliss.

#### **4. Helping the Dead**

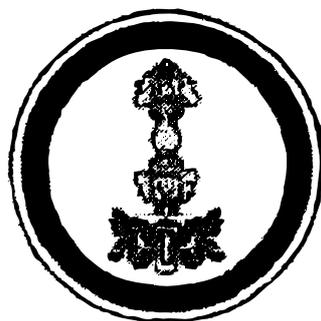
As you do this practice again and again, saying the mantra and filling your heart with bliss, slowly your suffering will dissolve in the confident peace of the nature of your mind. You will realise, with joy and delight, that the Buddhas are not outside of you but always with you, inseparable from the nature of your mind. And what they have done through their blessing is to empower and nourish you with the confidence of the Buddha within you.

Now with all the power and confidence this practice has given you, imagine you are sending this blessing, the light of

healing compassion of the enlightened beings, to your loved one who has died.

This is especially vital in the case of someone who has suffered a traumatic death, as it transforms their suffering and brings them peace and bliss. In the past, you may have felt helpless in your grief and impotent to help your dear friend, but now through this practice you can feel consoled, encouraged, and empowered to help the dead person.

*“Don’t expect immediate results, or a miracle. It may only be after a while, or even much later, when you least expect it that your suffering will shift. Do not have any expectation that it is going to “work”, and end your grief once and for all. Be open to your grief as open as you are to the enlightened beings and Buddhas in the practice.”*



**RIGPA**

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