JOURNEY OF THE MIND

Preparing for the Bardo in Life, Dreams, Meditation, while Dying, and Rebirth



Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche
Geshe Lharampa

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Preparing for the Bardo in Life, Sleep, Meditation, while Dying, and Rebirth

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Geshe Larampa



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NOTE

Tibetan words are given as they are pronounced, not as they are spelled. The actual spellings are given in the Glossary of Tibetan Terms. We also capitalize Buddhist practices so they can be distinguished from ordinary states of mind. This way tranquility is a state of mind and Tranquility is Shamatha meditation and insight is something we occasionally have, and Insight is Vipashyana meditation.We use BCE for B.C. (before current era) and CE (current era) for A.D. All dates without a designation are of our current era (CE).

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

The real history of man is the history of religion.

— Max Muller

It is safe to say that all Buddhist practice — developing kindness, selflessness, compassion, bodhichitta, Shamatha, Vipashyana, and deity practice — are all preparations for when we die. The Jataka Tales tells us about the Buddha's many lifetimes. They describe how, through learning valuable lessons each lifetime and gradually developing more and more realization, he finally reached complete enlightenment. In his final lifetime 2,500 years ago, he spent over fifty years teaching others how they too could become realized. He gave these teachings in their native tongues to persons of all social classes, walks of life, and different levels of education.

Thrangu Rinpoche spent more than seventy years of his life teaching others across the world how they also can reach realization. In this book, *Journey of the Mind: Preparing for the Bardo During Life, Sleep, in Meditation, While Dying, and in Rebirth*, he explains how we can reach awakening or enlightenment. "Bardo" in Tibetan simply

means an interval between two events such a the bardo of dreaming is the interval between when we fall asleep and begin to dream and when we wake up.

The bardo, however, is usually thought of as being the interval when we take our next breath and the time when we enter a new fetus. This bardo of dying is often a very frightening experience. Rinpoche also explains that if we, whether Buddhist or not, actually understand the stages of the dissolution of our body while we are dying and we also learn how we should hold our mind, we will have a positive outcome in the dying process. However, we cannot wait until we actually die to help us, so Thrangu Rinpoche throughout this book emphasizes many practical ways we can prepare for this turbulent and frightening time that comes to us all.

The Western Approach to Death

The subject of death has been largely ignored by mainstream scientists and academics. The academics in philosophy departments rarely touch on death since it is rarely mentioned by Aristotle, Hegel, Kant, Wittgenstein, and Russell and so on. Scientists, for the most part, see death as something that cannot be measured and therefore is a "one-time event" so there is very little they can do to study it. This is quite extraordinary when we think of it, because the question of what happens after we die is of universal concern to billions and billions of people.

One reason scientists avoid discussions on death is that the various religions around the world differ among themselves in what happens after death. Consequently, philosophers and scientists shrug off this topic with "what happens at death and afterward is the purview of religion and not a proper inquiry for philosophy or science.

The three major religions in the West — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — have their origins in the Near East. They, too, actually have very little to say about death and the afterlife in their holy books. For example, in the Christian Bible, Mathew 25:32-33 says: "All the nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. He will set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on his left." Most descriptions of what happens after death, like going to heaven and hell as described in Dante's *Inferno*, are based on Indo-European beliefs originating many centuries earlier.

The Development of Beliefs About Death

The history of what happens to human beings after they die is fascinating yet difficult to establish because we have few written records of the beliefs of early man. The earliest evidence that we have of human beings' understanding of death is found in the caves across the Near East and Europe.[1] Between 30,000 and 100,00 years

1. This discussion of a comparison of religious beliefs is vast so we have limited this discussion to a few examples.

ago, some humans began burying their dead: at times placing a stone under their heads as a pillow.[2] Also, many different tribes all over the world buried their dead with the sacred mineral ochre or with their prized possessions or pointing their heads in a specific direction. Obviously, these facts and many more show that humans held the belief that there was a "soul" which goes on after death.

Since we do not have actual observations of ancient religious beliefs concerning death, we must rely upon on the archeological remains, the study of languages, and the study of ancient stories. Most people in the West are familiar with Greek "myths" such as Hades, the god of the underworld, coming up and snatching Persephone and taking her into the underworld for six months a year. While this is usually called a "myth" indicating that it was a story made up to explain physical events in the calendar, in modern times we would not call crossing oneself and touching the holy water, or prostrating to a statue a myth, but rather a religious ritual.

Mallory, in an exhaustive collection on the origin of words from about 21 major Indo-European languages[3] and their stories, shows that from around 4,000 to 2,000 BCE, Indo-European religions generally believed that at death the spirit of the dead person traveled to an underworld which was below the ground. This underworld was originally just a place with no rewards or punishments. The land of

2. See the article by Australian Museum.

3. All together there are hundreds more languages that are based on Indo-European and these are spoken by almost half the world's population.

the dead was gray and fairly gloomy much like Hades in the Greek myths. Later this belief evolved into many of the Indo-European cultures having the belief that the dead person made a long journey over a large meadow or by climbing a hill and came to a large river that was often guarded by dogs. Then, they crossed over the river that separated the dead from the living either in a boat or over a bridge and encountered the Lord of Death. This lord of death would then judge them and send good persons to a light pleasant place and bad persons to a dark place to be tormented by demons. One of the Indo-European words for "death" means "passed beyond" or "passed away." Surprisingly, even today in English we use this expression a person has "passed away" as a polite way to say they have died. Common to many Indo-European stories is the idea that the judgement was done on a scale in which the person's good deeds were placed on one side and their evil deeds on the other.

Many cultures in the Middle East had a story of a famous person who went to the land of the dead and then came back to describe the Lord of Death judging the dead. There were the Greek Orpheus, Mesopotamian Gilgamesh, the Indian Yama, the Tibetan Gesar of Ling, all of whom visited the underworld and came back to tell about it. As told in the Rig Veda — one of the oldest religious stories known — Yama actually discovered the "path of the fathers" and followed this path to the afterworld where he became the Lord of Death. His original responsibility was merely to preside over the happy reunions of the spirits of the dead. But in versions of this

story which came much later, Yama would also choose who would live and who would die. In these stories, Yama would also capture their "souls" and judge whether the soul deserved happiness or to be tortured in hell (Mallory, page 612).

We may think that these beliefs occurred only among Indo-European language speakers. But this was not so. The Egyptians, who were definitely not an Indo-European culture, also held many of these beliefs. For example, on the walls of Egyptian tombs, there are beautiful depictions of the Anubis (a jackal-headed god) with the heart of the pharaoh on one side of the scale and black deeds on the other side. Some pharaohs had a large boat hidden outside the pyramid to carry him or her across the Nile River which symbolically separates the living from the dead. Afterward, the pharaohs went into the sky (possibly along the milky way) where they, too, would be judged.

The Tibetan *Bardo Thodol* has often been mistranslated as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and the proper translation is more like *The Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State*. This book describes 58 wrathful deities appearing in the bardo with 36 of them having animal heads. As Lauf (1989) points out: "We shall just mention Anubis with the jackal's head, Chepera with the head of a beetle, Thoth with the head of an ibis... Sekhmet with the lion's head, Chnum with the head of a ram, Horus with the falcon's head, and Selkis the protective goddess of the dead with the head

of a scorpion." Like the animal-headed deities of the *Bardo Thodol*, the Egyptian deities encountered at death are also given certain attributes which can be discerned if one knows the corresponding animal head and its color.

There are also 42 peaceful deities in the *Bardo Thodol*. Lauf sees a correspondence that Osiris, the god of the underworld, has 42 judges with "It is of critical importance [to the Egyptians] that the dead person in the underworld knows all the names of the demons present there so that he or she can render them harmless by means of the appropriate formulas" (Lauf, 1989). Four thousand years later in some monasteries in Tibet and Nepal, some monks every day recite the names of the 100 peaceful and wrathful deities that they will encounter in the bardo (but for a different reason than the Egyptians).

I have briefly gone through this history to show that many of these ideas of death — the long journey across a plain, coming to a river, going over the river in a boat or on a bridge, the meeting of the Lord of Death, and being judged. These beliefs of the ordinary Tibetans are not what Thrangu Rinpoche describes in this book. For example, Cuevas (2008) relates a story of a *delog* (one who has returned from death) who was a Tibetan housewife and animal herder with two children. After a week of lying motionless in bed, her family began preparing for her funeral when suddenly she became alive again. She described being lost in darkness, then walking on a great plain,

meeting the river, crossing a bridge, meeting *Shingje* (the Tibetan Lord of Death), and having her white and black beads counted out. After being told she had to go back, she forced herself back to her original body which she then saw as a rotting pig.

It is amazing that this "myth" or we should say "religious belief" about what happens at death is a story told in many different cultures that have completely different histories and languages and that this belief has been present for thousands of years. There are dozens and dozens of stories like this that show that this belief about death is still alive and well. In fact, the *Bardo Thodol* mentions the Lord of Death and the weighing of a person's good and bad deeds using a scale. But this is more of a symbolic representation of karma and no lama would say that one's karma is determined by an outside god or deity but is due entirely to one's positive and negative actions.

So far, we have been speaking about religions in the Middle East without a discussion of the three major theistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Basically, these religions took many gods of the earlier religions and replaced them with just one omniscient God who created not only the whole material world, but who also created a Heaven and a Hell. This god also had the responsibility of judging all the persons who died. These religions held the belief that their God would judge not only those of their own religion, but also everyone else who had ever lived. They also held the belief that heaven and hell were concrete places, and these places were

only for human beings, angels, and demons. These religions have many stories about the beautiful, sunny, tranquil heavens and the dark, gruesome tortures in hell which have been carried on in great detail in our modern media in ghost and horror stories. When the world had a smaller population and most people lived in towns and villages, it seemed reasonable that a deity could judge everyone. However, in our modern world, it seems almost beyond belief that the 150,000 people who die each day on our planet are individually judged by a single god.

The Asian Approach to Death

We now come to India and the Rig Veda, one of the oldest religious texts in the world. It was written down in Sanskrit, the language which is actually the most complex of all Indo-European languages. Since much of the information in the *Bardo Thodol* is said to have come from India, we will now discuss the development of its religious beliefs in India. We must begin with India which holds the belief in reincarnation shared by most non-Islamic east and central Asian countries but it is not a common belief in most of the countries we have already discussed. In India, for example, the Abhedand says, "Search for the inner light, and do not give up until this goal is achieved. When you have reached that light, you have crossed the boundaries of death." This mirrors the teachings of the bardo.

The Scientific Approach to Death

In the Western world there was the pioneering work of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross who performed careful research on individuals with near-death experiences in the hospital where she worked before most people really knew about this phenomenon. She found that there were dozens of individuals who did not know each other who described the same events occurring in their near-death experiences regardless of their age, sex, race, religion, or beliefs. Scientists have tried to refute this by saying that near death experiences (such as the person floating over their body and watching the first responders or being drawn towards a bright light often described as a tunnel full of love) are simply hallucinations caused by near-death neurological events in their brain.

However, over 50 years ago, Kubler-Ross (1969) reported stories of blind persons who had near-death experiences and were able to describe the paramedics working on their body including the color of their clothes, or of a congenitally deaf person who reported whole conversations of the doctors and nurses who had been working over their flatlined body. In her research, Kubler-Ross always talked to the youngest family member first after a fatal accident, before others had talked to the child. She reports that these children described entering "the tunnel" and meeting some family members and not others. She found that, without ever being told, these children always correctly reported seeing only the persons who had died in the accident and

not those who survived (Worth, 2005). Since then, thousands of similar reports from all over the world from individuals of many different religions and cultures have been documented. Tsultrim Lodro (2021) has taken some of these descriptions of near-death experiences reported by the American physician Moody (2001) and placed text next to each of these describing the same phenomena from *The Bardo Thodol* which was written by Padmasambhava in the eighth century in Tibet and rediscovered later. What these near-death experiences indicate is that the mind can actually leave the physical body in certain instances.

So why don't scientists set up research teams to evaluate the evidence to see whether consciousness is entirely a neurological event or whether the mind can actually exist outside the body? The main reason, I believe, is that since Newton developed the mathematics for his three laws of motion and Einstein revolutionized physics with his 100 pages of complex mathematical formulas (containing no text) in his *Theory of Relativity*, scientists have wrathfully held onto the belief that reality can only be described by the mathematical descriptions they developed for the universe. Quantum physics, string theory, particle physics, and the multi-billion-dollar Hadron collider searching for the "god particle" are all based on mathematical theory. Since no mathematician has developed a set of equations to explain the existence of consciousness, mainstream scientists have simply implied that consciousness does not exist.

Yet, the irony is that every scientist on the planet has personally experienced consciousness.

The Tibetan View of Death

The Tibetan view of death and dying is much different from the Western view because Tibet has had a long history of realized practitioners who have accomplished things that persons of other religions have never accomplished. Here I will give background to adjunct practices and events related to death which Thrangu Rinpoche did not have time to discuss. These practices are well-known in Tibet but not very well-known outside Tibet.

First is the practice of *Tukdam* which occurs when a lama or practitioner tells their students that they are ready to die. First, they are seated in the meditation position. Then, when the lama stops breathing, they will remain in this meditation position without their body slumping down to the ground as normally happens to human bodies that have stopped breathing. They can remain in this position for days even though their heart has stopped, and they are not breathing so that their body is not receiving any oxygen. Their whole body becomes cold except for the area around their heart which feels to be warm. This can last from a few days up to about three weeks. During this time, instead of turning pale, having rigor mortis set in and beginning to slowly decay and smell at room temperature, the flesh of the person remains soft and often puts

off a pleasant odor. This event is well-known among Tibetans and common enough that many Tibetans know of a relative or a lama that has done *Tukdam*. When His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa passed away in a cancer hospital in Illinois in the US, the hospital staff and physicians were able to observe this process and feel his warm heart and were astounded because they had never seen this before in anyone.

There is a second Tibetan practice involving death which is only performed by certain highly realized lamas and is unique to Tibetan Buddhists. This is the practice of *jalu* which is translated as the "Rainbow Body" practice. Traditionally, this practice was done with the lama telling their students that they were going to die and to seal them up in a closed space and not to disturb them for ten days. While the practitioner doing Rainbow Body practice would then sit in meditation posture, his students would actually sew the tent shut and surround the tent night and day doing meditation practices that they were instructed to do. When the tent is cut open ten days later, all that is left inside the tent is the lama's robe and sometimes fingernails and some hair. Namkhai Norbu has written an extensive account of the life of Togden Ugyen Tendzin who was born in the last century and who attained rainbow body (Norbu, 2012). This practice of Rainbow Body is still done today. In one case, an ordinary monk, Khenpo Achö, who oversaw a small nunnery in Tibet asked his students to leave him alone in his house for

seven days. When they entered the house, all that was left were his possessions and hair and nails. (Tiso, 2016).

The Rainbow Body practice can also be done another way so that when a person dies, their body begins to shrink in perfect proportion. When Dudjom Rinpoche, who was the previous head of the Nyingma lineage, came close to death, his students asked him not to do the Rainbow Body practice because he would not leave any relics. When he died in France in 1987, his students notified the authorities on that day, as required by law. By the time the authorities arrived his body had already begun to shrink down to the size of "a five-year-old child." His body shrunk in perfect proportion — bones, flesh, head, and limbs. His shrunken body (called a *kundung*) was kept in pure salt for a year in France while a stupa for his body was being built in Boudhanath, Nepal (Dongyal, 2008). In 1989, while I was attending Thrangu Rinpoche's seminar in Boudhanath, Rinpoche suggested that we go visit Dudjom Rinpoche's stupa that held his body. A group of students, with Peter Roberts translating, met a monk at the stupa where his body was covered in a gold mask and could be seen through a small window. The monk told us that he was present when Dudjom Rinpoche's body was brought from the airport through the streets of Kathmandu with thousands along the route watching and that he had actually helped put Dudjom Rinpoche's body into the stupa. He said that Dudjom Rinpoche's body was so small then that if you put out your hand, the head

could rest in the palm of the hand and the feet would stretch back to the elbow.[4]

A third Tibetan phenomena connected to death exists called *ringsels*. *Ringsels* are very small, spherical, pearl-like rocks about the size of a grain of rice that are extremely hard and come in several colors (Zivkovic, 2014). They do not exist in nature and are closely connected to meditation. I and almost every Tibetan have a few of these *ringsels* on my shrine. The lamas ask that they be placed in a container because they are easily lost and also because they multiply in the presence of Dharma. I personally experienced this. When friends came to visit my wife and me, we were talking about *ringsels*, and they wanted to see some. So, we went and got the sealed glass container that had two *ringsels* in it and found one of the *ringsels* had made a small baby *ringsel* so now we had three!

When the Chinese conquered Tibet during the cultural revolution, they took out all the carefully preserved bodies of the previous fifteen Karmapas and burned them. Then, wherever the smoke of the burning bodies touched the earth, *ringsels* appeared in large quantities. The reason I bring this up is that, even today, when high lamas such as Thrangu Rinpoche are cremated, *ringsels* are often found in their ashes among the pieces of bones that did not burn.

4. Since this introduction was written, Thrangu Rinpoche, unfortunately, passed into parinirvana. He remained in Tukdam for three days and in the next three months until his cremation his kundung body shrunk to less than a yard (meter) high. After his cremation some bones and *ringsels* were found in his ashes.

Finally, to understand how to prepare for death we have to understand reincarnation. All Buddhist sects believe in reincarnation — that after we die, our mind eventually leaves the dead body and goes into the fetus of another sentient being. This is a basic Buddhist belief. The sutras tell us that the Buddha personally went through hundreds of lifetimes, each time learning many new, until he reached complete realization or enlightenment 2,500 years ago. This was recorded in India as the *Jataka Tales*. Buddhist teachers tell us that all sentient beings are continually reincarnated. A sentient being is any being who has a mind. This includes all animals as well as invisible beings such as hungry ghosts, demons, spirits, and earth gods. Some persons and lamas who are clairvoyant and can see these invisible beings say they exist in numbers many more times the number of humans on this earth.

How do we know there is reincarnation beyond what has been discussed? This leads us to the fourth phenomenon — the Tibetan *tulku*. When a rinpoche dies in any of the Tibetan lineages except the Sakya lineage, the members of their lineage usually go to a high Tibetan master and ask them to identify that rinpoche's reincarnation. This method for choosing the reincarnation of a tulku began over a thousand years ago with the first Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa. A few years after a rinpoche has died, the members of the monastery go to a high lama and ask them for a letter telling them where to look for the reincarnation of their rinpoche. The letter typically gives part or all the parents' names as well as the

child's name, and the direction the door of their house is facing and a vague geographical description. The monastery then sends out monks who are disguised since many mothers in Tibet would love to have their son become a rinpoche.

For example, in 1930 after the eighth Thrangu Tulku passed away, his monastery sent a delegation to the Sixteenth Karmapa and asked him to write a letter explaining where the present Thrangu Tulku had reincarnated. When they got to Tsurphu after a long journey, the Karmapa wrote a letter giving the names of the tulku's parents and a vague description of where to find him. The Karmapa was quite young and playful, so the group decided to get a second opinion. They journeyed far away to Tai Situ's monastery. Without showing Tai Situ Rinpoche the Karmapa's letter, they asked him to write a letter predicting where Thrangu Tulku had reincarnated. It turned out that the two letters were exactly the same except one letter called his father by his nickname. Anyway, they found the right town and the right boy who then passed the traditional test of picking out the possessions of his previous incarnation from an array of similar objects. Then when Thrangu Rinpoche was a five-year-old boy, he was put on a horse with his mother and father walking along side and taken to Thrangu Monastery which they had never visited before.

When they got to Thrangu monastery, the five-year-old boy got off the horse, ran straight across the courtyard into the monastery, climbed

up to the second floor and went into the room where the previous Thrangu Tulku had lived. He then leapt right into the arms of the monk who had been the previous Thrangu Rinpoche's attendant.[5]

The reincarnations of important lamas are called "tulkus" and Thrangu Rinpoche has taught over a dozen of these "tulkus" at Rumtek. He said that it was amazing to him that in their teens these tulkus could read a complex philosophical Buddhist text one time and master it. They then were able to win debates with learned khenpos who had studied the text for years. This showed that the tulkus can have access to this knowledge from their previous lives.

Fifth, there is the bardo phenomena of delogs which is not unique to Tibet but has been described by both Homer and the Buddha. The delog phenomenon is very pronounced in Tibet. A delog is a person who has visited the realms of the dead or netherworlds and returned. There are two kinds of delogs. The first type are persons who tell the people of their village that they are going to visit the dead and they should be left alone until they return. They then lie down and go into a state where they are no longer moving or breathing and remain this way for several days. They then come back and have messages for the families of persons who have recently died. These families may be members of the delog's village, or they may be families living in nearby villages that the delog had never

5. This story was told by Thrangu Rinpoche's secretary who worked for him for over twenty years. See the bibliography for the *Biography of Thrangu Rinpoche*.

visited. The delog may then go to the neighboring villages and find the family who had lost a loved one and give them the deceased person's message. Many times, the message contains instructions on certain prayers or offerings the family should make to enhance the dead person's passage through the bardo to the next lifetime. Sometimes delogs may have personal information for the family such as where the deceased hid some valuables or money. In Tibet and Nepal there are no banks, so money and valuables in these villages are hidden in or around the house without telling anyone. Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche has published an account of the experiences of his mother who, as a delog, had visited the bardo when she was only sixteen. He reports, "for five full days she lay cold, breathless, and devoid of any vital signs." As she was a great practitioner, her account of what happened included meeting many deities at heavenly palaces in the bardo while she was there (Drolma, 2001).

The second type of delog, already described, are Tibetans who die for several days and then suddenly come alive again often with a long story to tell about what they saw and experienced while they were dead. This has been compared to Near-Death Experiences (NDEs)[6] where a person is in an accident and taken to the hospital and revived. These NDEs are of people who have been dead usually for only a few minutes to a few hours. Many delogs in Tibet do not breathe for days or even as long as a week. The delogs all tell

6. A good book for exploring all aspects of Near-Death Experiences is by Long (2010). See Bibliography.

different stories, but most confirm they had the experience of the dissolution of the elements described in the bardo texts. Almost all describe not realizing they are dead and feeling angry because the relatives at the funeral ignored them and wouldn't talk to them. Most delogs describe the ability to think of a place and suddenly they are there or sometimes going through solid objects. Some also describe going to a river with a bridge over it with the Lord of Death passing judgement upon them and telling them that they have to go back. Tulku Thondup (2005) has given detailed accounts of eleven delogs from various backgrounds showing that their descriptions of the dissolution of the elements fit the bardo teachings very well. But he notes that very few saw many of the hundred peaceful and wrathful deities described in the *Bardo Thodol* and, if they did see them, they were not very clear. The bardo teachings all agree that what is seen and experienced in the bardo comes from the person's own mind and karma. A person's experiences and karma, of course, are different from person to person so one would expect variations in these delog descriptions. Why these abilities appear in the bardo is explained in this book and the bardo texts.

The Evolution of the Bardo Teachings

The traditional story of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (the *Bardo Thodol*) is that this teaching was written down and hidden in Tibet by Padmasambhava in the eighth century. The teachings were then rediscovered centuries later by the terton Karma Lingpa. This raises

the question: where did Padmasambhava get the bardo teachings from?

The Sutra of Questions Regarding Death and Reincarnation tells that in the fifth century BCE, the Buddha attended a funeral for a young Sakya man. It was there the Buddha basically refuted the current Indian Vedic beliefs by the use of seven analogies. During the Buddha Shakyamuni's time, there was a belief in nihilism held by some philosophical schools that nothing happens after death. Other schools believed that one would be automatically reincarnated as a human being into the same caste and same economic and social station each lifetime. However, the Buddha taught in this Foundation Level sutra that one does not cease to exist after death. The mind lives on. Secondly, he taught that a person can be reincarnated into another human being or into another kind of sentient being such as an animal, hungry ghost, or hell being. The Buddha then refuted the prevalent Indian belief that one would automatically reincarnate into the same caste and material conditions as the previous lifetime by stating that where and how one would be reincarnated is based solely on one's own karma. He also said that making offerings to the dead person would not automatically cause the person to have a pleasant rebirth in the next lifetime. This teaching also contradicted the belief common in Asian countries today that one should make special offerings to the dead to keep the family or lineage going.

For the next nine centuries, Buddhism basically taught reincarnation, but nothing was said about the interval or bardo between the two lifetimes (Cuevas, 2002). This belief that there is no bardo is still maintained by the Buddhist Foundation schools to this day. In the fourth century CE, the scholar Vasubhandhu wrote the famous *Treasury of the Abhidharma* which held that there was an intermediate state between death and rebirth in which the person's mind became a "disembodied soul" that leaves the body at death. At this point this self regains all its sensory abilities and is able to move instantly through space, go through material objects, and is invisible to ordinary living humans. He also said that at these times when a person had no bodies, they would sometimes have special extrasensory abilities such as being able to read the minds of the persons around them. He also reported that this bardo being, like the gandharvas, was now able to be nourished by odors.

During the third and fourth centuries, the bardo was mentioned in a number of sutras. *The Devaduta Sutta* (a Foundation level sutra) featured the Indian Lord of Death Yama interrogating a man. When all his negative deeds were revealed, Yama handed the man over to his demon assistants to take the man to hell. There were also several Mahayana sutras in which the Lord of Death metes out rewards and punishments based on a person's karma (Cuevas, 2008). Cuevas also mentions that *The Medicine Buddha Sutra*, which came to Tibet in the late eighth century, adds to these accounts a judgement scene in the bardo with a "personal guardian god" (Tib. *lhenchik kyyepé*

la) who follows each human being around and records all their virtuous and unvirtuous activities. This list is then given to the Lord of Death when the person dies. Later on, in the *Bardo Thodol*, this guardian spirit was expanded into two personal guardian spirits with the other one being a demonic spirit (Tib. *lhenchik kyepé dre*).[7]

The bardo teachings that came into Tibet did not come only from Padmasambhava, but also from three other main sources. First, there were teachings on the bardo that which came from the Bon religion, the state religion of the Tibetan kings before the time of Padmasambhava. The Bonpos trace their teachings not from Buddha Shakyamuni but back to Tonpa Sherab Miwoche from the land of Zhang Zhung whose people spoke a different language from Tibetan. Orofino (1990) has translated two bardo teachings of the Bon religion. These two teachings are actually ancient Nyingma teachings called *Tantra of the Great Secret Union of the Sun and the Moon* and *The Doctrine of the Six Lights* which are said to come from Garab Dorje who is believed to have lived a few hundred years after the Buddha Shakyamuni. This makes these two texts much older than the *Bardo Thodol* of Padmasambhava. Another Nyingma text is the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* (see Bibliography). This tantra is important because it is the first known description of the 42 peaceful and 58 wrathful deities which are described at length in bardo texts.

7. This is not just related to the bardo texts. In a completely different context, I was told by Thrangu Rinpoche that everyone is born with these two guardian spirits, and they accompanied us until our death.

Padmasambhava actually wrote a commentary on this tantra and most likely used it for his writing of the *Bardo Thodol*.

In addition to the Nyingma lineage, the Kagyu lineage had independently obtained bardo teachings from India. Tilopa, who lived in India in the tenth century, transmitted to Naropa the Six Dharmas of Naropa. Tilopa's sister Niguma in her Six Dharmas of Niguma also included teachings on the practice of the bardo as well as teachings on the practice of Phowa (ejection of consciousness from the body). These were described in Milarepa's famous *100,000 Songs of Realization* and also by Rechungpa.

In summary, there were many teachings and forces coming together to explain what happens when we die. These beliefs began historically with many cultures saying that all persons who die were destined to go to a fairly bleak netherworld. Later, many cultures came up with the netherworld being divided into two kinds — a pleasant and an unpleasant one. After this, there developed a belief that there was a Lord of Death who calculated the dead person's good and evil deeds and then sent them either to a pleasant place or to be tortured in a hell. These beliefs were fairly prevalent in Asia at the time of the Buddha who then expanded this by saying that heaven and hell with its pleasures and tortures were actually just states of mind and it was karma which determined a person's rebirth.

There were also many different ideas and beliefs concerning the bardo in Buddhism. Yangonpa (Cuevas, 2003) reported there were

eight different bardo lineages that existed in Tibet before the Bardo Thodol teachings were discovered in 1326 by Karma Lingpa.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead

There is little doubt that the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (*The Bardo Thodol*) is the most complete teaching on the dying process, the visions in the bardo, and how to obtain a good rebirth. These teachings on the intermediate states or "bardo" is the *Bardo Thodol Chenmo* which literally means *The Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo* was named the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* by Evans-Wentz who first published this text in English in 1927 and this latter title has been often used.

The *Bardo Thodol* is said to be written in Tibet by Padmasambhava in the eighth century CE. Padmasambhava thought that these teachings were too advanced at the time for the Tibetan practitioners who were just then being introduced to Buddhism. Therefore, Padmasambhava and the great yogini Yeshe Tsogyal concealed these teachings in Gampo Dar Mountain as a treasure (Tib. *terma*) for a person in a later generation to discover. Padmasambhava wrote this teaching in dakini script (Tib. *dayik*) on a yellow scroll (Tib. *shokser*) before concealing it at Gampo Dar Mountain (Skek-wing, 2011). About 600 years later, the great treasure finder (Tib. *terton*) Karma Lingpa found this text on the bardo. After several years Karma Lingpa and his students widely disseminated these teachings in Tibet. These

teachings were then extensively practiced by Tibetan practitioners and even today the monks of some Tibetan monasteries recite a brief daily teaching summarizing the bardo.

Some Western scholars have said that termas were just a way to get new information on a Buddhist topic and that these termas were actually being written by the terma finder (Tib. *terton*) who then attributed the text to a famous Buddhist practitioner. But, in my opinion (and also Thrangu Rinpoche's teachings), this is not the case and that the bardo terma was an authentic text by Padmasambhava. For example, Namkhai Norbu personally witnessed a terton who had seen a cave in a vision that he had. When he and his Tibetan attendants arrived at the cave, and after much searching, the terton threw a pickax at the top of the cave entrance. When an attendant climbed up a ladder to get the pickax, a glowing jewel was found there. Namkhai Norbu also reported an interesting case of an almost illiterate terton who dictated an advanced philosophical Dzogchen work to him while continually being interrupted during his medical treatment of his patients over several days. When Norbu Rinpoche brought all these scattered sentences together, he was amazed to find that it was a coherent profound work, and not a single word was missing from what he had written down over the several days of constant interruption (Guarisco, 2014).

The *Bardo Thodol* remained a popular religious text in Tibet. Then in 1927, Evans-Wentz published the first English translation of

seven chapters of *The Bardo Thodol* under the provocative title *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. This text was actually translated by Lama Kazi Dawa Samdup. Evans-Wentz provided many notes to the text with some explanations based on Theosophy and not standard Buddhist teachings and the introduction to this book was written by Carl Jung.

The *Bardo Thodol* in whole or in part has now been retranslated into English seven different times including several translations of the complete *Bardo Thodol* text. We have included a list of these seven English translations of the *Bardo Thodol* in the Bibliography. The text is massive. For example, the entire *Bardo Thodol* has recently been translated by Gyurme Dorje into a book comprising 370 pages. This book includes: chapters on a daily preliminary practice; the meditation to prepare for the bardo; a daily practice for reciting the 100 peaceful and wrathful deities of the bardo and their characteristics (called the *Zhitro*); a practice of the confession of negative deeds to purify oneself for the bardo; several chapters on the signs of death; and an explanation of Phowa practice. In addition, it includes the actual text of *The Great Liberation Through Hearing*, which is read out loud to dying persons, instructing them on how to navigate the dying process and the experiences they will encounter in the bardo itself.

Finally, this book is dedicated to Thrangu Rinpoche who demonstrated how a realized being who had mastered the deepest level of meditation should die.

In June of 2023 Thrangu Rinpoche was in the hospital in Kathmandu and asked his monks to take him back to his monastery at Namo Buddha. There he placed himself in meditation posture and soon afterward his heart and breathing stopped. He remained in the upright postmeditation posture with no support for 3 days. This is the Tibetan Buddhist practice of Tukdam. Any doctor or coroner will tell you that when the muscles of the body do not receive oxygen, the body collapses because there is no circulation of the blood.

Furthermore, Rinpoche's body was kept for several months before his cremation in Nepal during the summer and during this time his body did not decay, and his skin remained pliable and then gradually his body began to shrink in perfect proportion to less than half his normal size. This is a part of Tukdam practice. There is no scientific explanation of how a person's body can shrink in perfect proportion to half its size while the person is alive, must less when they are dead.

Thrangu Rinpoche's Teachings on the Bardo

The *Bardo Thodol* teachings are vast, but Thrangu Rinpoche felt it was an important topic and so he gave short teachings on the bardo

on a number of occasions with a longer seven-day set of teachings in Crestone, Colorado. Needless to say, even for the Colorado teachings to cover the vast literature on the *Bardo Thodol* was impossible and so on. Thrangu Rinpoche chose for his commentary the text by Natsok Rangdrol called the *Mirror of Mindfulness* for his commentary. Since Thrangu Rinpoche has given two other shorter teachings on the bardo, we have added all the pertinent sections from these teachings to the teachings in Colorado. These teachings were:

— In 1994, Rinpoche gave a brief teaching on the first twelve days in the bardo at Oxford with Peter Roberts translating.

— In 1997, Rinpoche gave a much more detailed teaching entitled *The Journey of the Mind* in Vancouver with Lama Yeshe Gyamtso translating. This was published in *Shenpen Ösel* magazine and edited by Lama Tashi Namgyal.

— In 2004, Thrangu Rinpoche gave a ten-day teaching called *The Intermediate States of Mind* in Colorado with Yeshe Gyamtso translating. The complete set of videos of these teachings with Thrangu Rinpoche teaching in Tibetan, Yeshe Gyamtso translating, and the students asking questions is on YouTube: youtube.com/NamoBuddhaPublications.

— In 2008, Thrangu Rinpoche gave teachings on the four bardos called *The Bardo Teachings* in New Zealand with David Karma Choephel translating. These were published in *Thar Lam* magazine.

THE SIX AND FOUR BARDOS

1. The bardo of living (Tib. *kyene kyi bardo*)

This interval begins at conception and lasts until the last breath is taken. The mind then begins to withdraw from the body. The bardo of living is very important because it is the time during which we can actually prepare for the subsequent bardos.

2. The bardo of dreaming (Tib. *milam bardo*)

This bardo occurs during the bardo of living. This interval starts when we begin to dream and ends upon waking from the dream. There are the Dream Yoga that involves lucid dreaming (the ability to be aware that we are dreaming) and transforming dreaming that is being able to control the dream. This practice prepares us for a similar situation in the bardo where we often don't know we are dead. At this time, we cannot control what is happening to us just like when we can't control a dream if we don't know we are dreaming.

3. The bardo of meditation (Tib. *samten bardo*)

This bardo occurs during the bardo of living. This bardo is only experienced by meditators and begins when meditation starts and ends at the end of meditating. All meditation practices in this life can be considered preparation for the bardos.

4. The bardo at the time of death (Tib. *chikhai bardo*)

This bardo begins when the outer and inner signs of the onset of death are near and continues through the dissolution of the elements until external and internal breathing has completely ended.

5. The bardo of dharmata (Tib. *chönyi bardo*)

This bardo, also called "luminosity of the true nature," commences after the final inner breath is taken. In this bardo the mind has left the body has the opportunity to recognize the dharmata (ultimate reality or clear light) without it being experienced through the sense organs. If this does not happen, then blinding visions and sounds louder than thunder occur. These experiences appear to be outside us but actually

are created by our mind. Then the 100 peaceful and wrathful deities are experienced.

Sentient beings who have not practiced meditation nor recognized the clear light at the moment of death are usually frightened, confused, and desperate to get out of this situation. Sentient beings who have meditated and studied the bardo have the unique opportunity to reach enlightenment in this phase of the bardo.

6. The bardo of becoming (Tib. *sidpa bardo*)

This bardo begins when we begin to search for a body in which to reincarnate and ends when the inner breath enters a fetus. The mind must be calm and careful because in this bardo one can enter a being in a lower realm or have a human rebirth in a situation where there is no Dharma.

The Four Bardos are:

(1) bardo of living (includes bardo of dreaming and bardo of meditation), (2) bardo at the time of death, (3) bardo of dharmata, (4) bardo of becoming.

THE BARDO OF LIVING



• 1 •

BETWEEN BIRTH AND DEATH

1. When the bardo of birth is dawning upon me,
I will abandon laziness for which life has no time,
Enter the undistracted path of study, reflection, and meditation,
Making projections and mind as the path realize the three kayas.[8]
Now that I have once attained a human body,
There is no time on the path for the mind to wander.

— The first Primary Root Verse of the Bardo[9]

Why Study the Bardo

The teachings on the bardo often refer to the four bardos and sometimes also to six bardos. Here, we will use the six bardo system. The word "bardo" is a Tibetan word meaning "interval."

8. The three kayas are the dharmakaya, sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya. See Glossary for a fuller explanation.

9. These are the main verses of the bardo that are often recited daily by practitioners in Tibet. This translation was from Tai Situ Rinpoche's *Primordial Essence Manifests*.

Usually, it refers to the interval between death and rebirth in a new body.

Some people may think that while we are still alive, learning about what happens to us after we die is a waste of time. Actually, it is extremely important to know what is going to happen when we die. While we are alive, if we study what is going to happen to us when we die, we will be prepared to deal with the confusion, fear, and appearances (visions and sounds) that arise in the bardo.

Other people may think: "Whatever is going to happen is going to happen. Not much we can do about it. Let's talk about something else." The problem with this attitude is that the bardo is going to happen to all of us. So, we should not ignore it but find out about it. There are still others who think: "Well, the bardo is going to happen to me but it's not so bad after all. There's nothing we can do about it so there's no point in learning about it." This also is simply not true. What is true is that the bardo can be a terrifying experience. But if we are properly prepared for it, there are opportunities for us to reach liberation in the bardo.

The Buddha and great Buddhist practitioners who lived after him have given us instructions on how to deal with dying and the bardo. They have described the sounds and images that we will experience after death and how to relate to what we should do when they arise. Having these instructions means that when the time comes, we can follow them, and by recognizing what is happening to us, we can

ensure that we will have a good rebirth and avoid a bad one. If we don't have this knowledge and don't put it into practice, we may become confused by the frightening visions and loud sounds we experience in the bardo and fall into a lower realm where we will experience a great deal of suffering. This is why it is so very important to listen to, reflect on, and meditate on these bardo teachings.

Death is not a hopeless situation. In fact, it is full of opportunity to improve our situation. Since all of us have acquired a precious human birth with its eight freedoms and ten resources,[10] we are all very fortunate. In fact, Buddhists are even more fortunate because they have entered into the gate of the Dharma. Since we have these ten freedoms and eight resources; we can prepare ourselves for the future. As human beings, we have the intelligence and resources to be able to think about our future intelligently. We may ask ourselves, "When in our life are we going to experience our greatest difficulty?" The answer is, "The greatest difficulty will be when we go from one lifetime to the next lifetime." There is a great deal that we can do to help this transition using these teachings on the bardo.

Individuals have many different attitudes about whether the bardo exists or not and if we have had past lifetimes or not. There are also people who feel strongly that the bardo exists and that after death we enter a new lifetime. A person who believes strongly in the bardo and in past and future lives is naturally going to be

10. See The eight freedoms and ten resources.

concerned with insuring that they have a good rebirth. By a good birth, we mean a birth that will make us happy and also a rebirth that will be beneficial to others.

Then there are those who trust in the existence of the bardo or do not believe in the existence of past and future lives. Their attitude is fundamentally one of doubt rather than one of belief. However, those who doubt the existence of past and future lives are not really one hundred percent sure that these things don't exist. They may feel that *probably* these things don't exist, but no one is actually one hundred percent sure these things don't exist. As with any other situation where we are uncertain if something is going to happen to us or not, we must think that if there is even the slightest possibility that when we die the bardo will occur when we die, we will want to be prepared for it. If we are completely sure that nothing is going to happen, then we do not need to prepare for it. But if we think there is a sliver of a chance there is a bardo, then we should prepare ourselves for it — just in case it happens to be true.

The Six Bardos

The Tibetan word *bardo* means "interval" or "between" and usually refers to the time between the death of one lifetime and being reborn in the next lifetime. The first bardo is called the "natural bardo of life" and is the time when we are alive. The natural bardo is the bardo we are experiencing right now in this body, in this

lifetime. This bardo lasts from the time of our conception in our mother's womb until the time of our death. The value of recognizing that this "bardo of life" of ours is just a relatively short interval, it should motivate us to make better use of the time we are living. Individuals who have excellent meditation such as having a clear appearance of their meditational deity (Tib. *yidam*) in the creation stage of practice or having an extraordinary meditative absorption (Skt. *samadhi*) in the completion stage of meditation will not need to be particularly worried about dying. But most of us ordinary persons experience life with strong worldly attachments, desires, and disappointments and will need to realize that a lot of what we do in our ordinary lives is pointless. We spend much of our life trying to change situations and difficulties with other people or trying to help only our family and friends. This is called, subduing enemies and helping friends which includes everything we do to compete with others and also everything we do to promote our own interests and those interests of our friends and family. To do this makes us fill our lives with many ambitious plans of all kinds. We fill our minds with the hope that these activities will be successful, and we have the fear that they will not ever be achieved. Our life then becomes an alternation between the feeling of elation when we think we are succeeding and disappointment when we think that we are failing. From the Dharmic point of view, none of these ups and downs are ultimately very meaningful. Rather, we

should use our time on this planet to practice the Dharma so we can achieve true happiness.

The First Bardo of Living

The Mirror of Mindfulness by Natsok Rangdrol says that to make proper use of the bardo of living, we must practice with ferocious diligence and completely abandon all our mundane activities and concerns. This sounds rather extreme. But this text was written to inspire us to practice Dharma whenever possible and as intensively as we can. We should not, however, think that the intensity of this presentation is somehow a disqualification of our own efforts. Obviously, if we can practice Dharma with ferocious diligence and complete renunciation, this is wonderful. But even if we can't do that, there is still great value in learning about and beginning to understand the different bardos and practicing Dharma as much as we can.

This first interval, the bardo of living, is between our birth and our death. It is a time of preparation, especially for making ourselves ready for the experiences we will all eventually experience in the six bardos. It is through our preparation and our practice in the bardo of living that we can ensure that we will not come under the influence of negative karma and disturbing emotions.[11] It is through our practice in the bardo of living that we can learn

11. Disturbing emotions (Skt. *kleshas*) often translated as "afflictions," are emotions

how not to be overpowered by intense fear after we die. Free of fear, we will be able to seek out a good rebirth in our next lifetime. This long-term goal is crucially important and the time to prepare us for that future is right now.

What is the principal practice to prepare ourselves for death? The most obvious difference between the bardo of living and bardos occurring after death is in the force of the appearances that arise in our mind. Presently, no matter how unstable our mind may be, all the sensory sensations that which we experience while alive are grounded in our physical bodies. For example, when we think of some place other than where we are, our mind will still stay where we actually are because our body grounds our mind in this spot. The thoughts and sensory appearances while we are alive have a stability produced by this physical grounding.

However, when our body and mind have separated after death in the bardo of becoming, the mind is no longer grounded by the body, and this makes our thoughts very unstable. If we are in the bardo of becoming and think of a place, we immediately find ourselves there and then again, thinking of some other place, we find ourselves at that other place. Even if we wish our mind to be just in one place without flitting around, we cannot stay in that one place. However, if we practice meditation and learn to control our mind while we

which disturb the mind. The three main ones are anger, desire or attachment, and the ignorance of believing the world is solid and real.

are alive, it will help us greatly in the future when we enter the bardo of becoming. The main benefit of practicing meditation is that we will gain control over our mind when we are in the bardo.

The consciousness of someone who has had no experience in meditation will aimlessly wander around in the bardo and have no control over what happens to them there nor the ability to control what kind of rebirth they will have. On the other hand, a person with experience in meditation will have a certain degree of stability of mind in the bardo. Remembering to practice meditation in the bardo is of vital importance and the dying person must not become distracted and allow their mind to wander. By virtue of the momentum of their previous meditation practice and by remembering that they must be mindful, they will be able to avoid suffering and negative rebirths. For all these reasons, it is critical practice Shamatha practice as much as possible.

The Role of the Completion Stage in the Bardo

Vajrayana practice can be divided into the creation and the completion stage. The completion stage is roughly equivalent to what the sutra tradition calls Vipashyana.[12] In the sutras this meditation is based upon emptiness (Skt. *shunyata*, Tib. *tongpa nyi*); in the tantras

12. In the creation stage at the beginning of a Vajrayana practice, we visualize empty space and then the meditational deity (Tib. *yidam*) that usually comes from a seed syllable. During the completion stage at the end of the practice, we dissolve everything that we have visualized in empty space.

it is taught as being the nature of mind. The oral instructions of the masters in Tibet say that the main objective of Vipashyana meditation is understanding the nature of the mind. After we have cultivated a good foundation practice of Shamatha meditation, we should then go on and receive instructions on cultivating Vipashyana meditation.

What we learn in Vipashyana meditation is that the nature of our mind is without birth or origination; it is without any substantial existence of any kind. This recognition frees us from the fear caused by the disturbing appearances in the bardo. Having recognized this nature of our mind, we see that the only thing to fear in the bardo with all its panic, fear, and suffering, is not recognizing that these experiences are simply created by our own mind. We begin to realize that this fear and panic in the bardo occurs simply because we lack control over our mind and have not seen its nature. If we realize this and resolve to gain control of our mind by practicing Vipashyana meditation, we can free ourselves from anything that arises in the bardo since these phenomena are, after all, our own projections.

It is always worthwhile to receive instruction in Mahamudra or Dzogchen meditation[13] and then to practice them. The best result for these meditations is to gain a definitive realization. But even if we cannot do this doing these two practices will always be worth-

13. Mahamudra is the primary practice of the Kagyu lineage and is similar to Dzogchen, the primary practice of the Nyingma lineage. Thrangu Rinpoche describes these two practices in detail in his book *Luminous Clarity: The Union of Mahamudra and Dzogchen*.

while since any degree of realization is always helpful. It is beneficial to receive even a small amount of instruction in Mahamudra or Dzogchen.

Practicing for the Bardo in Post-Meditation

It is not enough just to listen and reflect on the teachings; we also need to put them into practice. As the great practitioners of the past have taught, we need to abandon all the misdeeds of our body, speech, and mind and stop any negativity that will create problems for us. We also need to engage in doing positive physical, verbal, and mental deeds. By refraining from misdeeds and doing good deeds, we will be preparing for the bardo. Not only will we have developed knowledge from listening and contemplating, but we will also know how these instructions work practically. Ordinary people like us need to engage in conduct as described in Shantideva's *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*.

We can also follow the instructions of Atisha's *The Seven Points of Mind Training*, which also contains very helpful instructions for preparation for the bardo. For example, this text says, "Of the two witnesses, hold the principal one" meaning that there are two "witnesses" to our Dharma practice — ourselves and other people. But if we really want to know whether we have stopped doing activities which harm us and others and whether we have started doing good deeds, we have to rely on our own insight. Other people cannot

see what is going on in our mind. They also can't really tell what our motives really are or — whether we are actually abandoning negative emotions or not. On the other hand, we can examine our own mind and see what is going on. Are we getting lost in our negative emotions? Are we doing good deeds? Are we meditating? Are we doing the practices that we need to? Or are we practicing the Dharma so that someone else will think we are a good practitioner instead of bringing happiness to others? So, we have to rely on ourselves as a witness; we have to check up on ourselves and observe what is happening in our own mind.

If we incorporate these instructions and do these practices, it will lead to our happiness in several different ways. For example, if we are able to do these practices all the time, we will experience great joy in our life. Even if we cannot meditate all the time, we will still feel good about trying our hardest. We can feel good that we are practicing mindfulness, being attentive, and being careful. On the other hand, we may also find ourselves entirely caught up in the events and experiences of this lifetime. We may wake up many mornings focused on our immediate needs and ignore the Dharma. We may lose ourselves in our confused experiences and negative emotions. But at some point, we may also think: "I need to integrate myself with the Dharma. I need to think about what I am doing and develop purer intentions and true loving kindness." Even having these thoughts occasionally should make us feel really happy.

Not only is mindfulness and alertness[14] important and beneficial, it is also very easy to practice. We don't need special implements or Dharma texts. All we need to do is to work, eat, talk, and so on, all the while being mindful. We might regard these worldly activities as interfering with our practice of meditation. But if we understand post-meditation as also being a meditation practice, we can easily bring meditation into our daily activities. When we integrate the practice of mindfulness into our numerous activities, far from interfering with our practice, it will enhance our practice, and this will help us in the bardo.

All the practices we have been speaking of are fundamentally mental practices. Although we may engage in the mental practice of meditation, if we carelessly engage in physical and verbal wrongdoing off the cushion, then our actions will interfere with our meditation and our meditation will not progress or improve. Therefore, mindfulness and alertness must extend beyond our mind and include the conduct of our body and speech.

This is especially important in connection with the bardo. While it is true that once we are in the bardo, we do not actually have a physical body or physical speech, our mind creates a mental body

14. Mindfulness is that you can always remember that you need to be working towards the goal of virtue. Maintaining vigilance or attentiveness is just knowing what you are doing: "Now I am doing good," or knowing, "Oh, now I am being carried away by negative emotions," or, "Now I am being carried away by thoughts." So, vigilance is the quality of knowing called "mental alertness" because it tells you when you have gone astray.

and the faculty of talking and listening in the bardo because of our longstanding habits. Furthermore, in the bardo the sounds and images that arise are produced from the habits that have developed while we were alive. Therefore, if we had the habit of having good conduct of body and speech while alive, the appearance of our body and speech that arises in the bardo will be positive. If we had a habit of careless or negative conduct of body and speech, the sights and sounds that will arise in the bardo will be negative.

In our daily life, there are many things that we do with our body that are pointless and aimless and can be avoided. The same is especially true of our speech. There are significant things that need to be said but we don't need to blather on endlessly and unnecessarily. By gaining control of our body, speech, and especially our mind by always applying the faculties of mindfulness and alertness during the day (and even at night if we are practicing dream yoga), we will be rewarded with a lack of suffering in the bardo. It is said that there are three levels of practitioners: those who have excellent realization of the Dharma; those who have very good Dharma practice; and those who have a little experience in the Dharma. The highly developed practitioners do not need any particular instructions on the bardo because they are already having great meditation and realizations especially in working with deities. Having these qualities means that they do not need particular instructions on what to do in the bardo.

But ordinary people who have not developed these qualities and lose themselves in their daily life activities are different. They are plagued by ignorance and so they become very attached to the external appearances[15] of this life. This attachment creates the disturbing emotions (Skt. *kleshas*) and many confused appearances. Ordinary people, like us, hang onto dualistic ideas about ourselves such as thinking "me" and "you" and "other." We are also influenced by things like praise, fame, loss, and being disliked. Being caught in a cycle of grasping onto these things will cause a year to pass, then two, three, and four years. Before we know it, our entire life has passed us in a cycle of confusion and grasping onto what we think is enjoyable and avoiding what we think is unpleasant.

The way to train ourselves during this bardo of life is to follow the Buddha's instructions, which he explained in the sutras and tantras. There were also great teachers and practitioners later on who added commentaries to these sutras and tantras. To train ourselves, we need to listen to the teachings and carefully contemplate them so that we will thoroughly understand their meaning. Usually this means going over again and again — studying and reflecting on the sutras, the tantras, and the oral instructions. The purpose of doing this is not to become a scholar, or be praised for our knowledge, or even to become famous. Rather, the process of listening to and

15. By "appearances" we mean any sight, sound, smell, taste, or bodily sensation that comes from our five senses and is processed by the sixth mental consciouness.

contemplating the Dharma allows our mind to gradually rest and settle into its natural state.[16]

Questions

> Rinpoche, does this first bardo begin at conception or does it begin at birth?

Generally speaking, the bardo of life begins from the moment of birth and goes all the way up to the time of death, especially for someone with a human body.

> Rinpoche, does the consciousness in the bardo actually enter the new body at conception? Also, is there a maximum period of time between death and rebirth?

The traditional texts explain that there are three factors necessary for gestation to begin: the combining of the sperm, the ovum, and the consciousness of the bardo being. If all three are not present, then a fetus will not be formed. According to the texts, if there is no consciousness present from the very beginning, the combination of a sperm and the ovum will not produce a fetus. The consciousness has to be there from the very beginning.

16. One can say that there are two different dimensions of states of mind: our ordinary mind which is full of thoughts and emotions and discursiveness; and the nature of mind which has realized the luminous emptiness of phenomena and is lucid and clear.

> Just listening to all the different practices, we are supposed to do, I feel overwhelmed with so many things to do and so little time. How do I find the right balance amongst all the different practices?

Rather than attempting to find some amount of time or some criteria, it is better if you simply practice as much as you can and then be content in knowing that you are doing as much as you can do.

> I'm trying to balance the time doing Shamatha with time doing deity practice.

You should determine this decision based on your own experience and your state of mind. If you find that your mind lacks tranquility, then you should put more time into Shamatha meditation. If you find that your mind is fairly stable, then you should put more time into the visualization or deity practice.[17]

> When do you do Vipashyana meditation?

It is good to practice Vipashyana meditation at the conclusion of every session of deity practice.

17. Deity practice is a practice such as that of Medicine Buddha or Chenrezig where one visualizes that particular deity and/or oneself as the deity. Then one usually takes refuge, generates bodhichitta, visualizes a particular deity, recites the deity's mantra, and dissolves the deity in the completion stage of practice.

> Rinpoche, could you expand on the post-meditation practice of awareness in connection with the practice of deity meditation?

The practice of deity meditation consists fundamentally of three elements: clear appearance of the deity's form, stable pride or confidence, that you are the deity, and recollection of purity by recalling the deeper meaning of the various aspects of the deity. It is difficult to cultivate clear appearance and the recollection of purity in postmeditation. Therefore, the principal post-meditation practice is to maintain the stable confidence that we are actually the deity. We try to maintain the confidence that the true nature of our body, speech, and mind is the body, speech, and mind of the deity being practiced. The commentaries on deity meditation commonly state, "In post-meditation, never part from the confidence of believing you are the deity."

THE EIGHT CONSCIOUSNESSES

Our mind consists of the eight consciousnesses. While these consciousnesses each have a different function, they are actually just luminous clarity that is empty of inherent existence. So, these consciousnesses are said to be a unity of luminous clarity and emptiness. The five sensory consciousnesses are non-conceptual, that is, they only perceive the raw image, the sound, smell, or taste, etc., without doing any processing or thinking. The sixth mental consciousness is the consciousness made up of conceptual thoughts which are abstractions and generalizations of the sensory material. The mental consciousness creates generalized abstractions based primarily on information from the five sense consciousnesses. So, the fundamental function of the sixth consciousness is conceptualization. The seventh klesha consciousness is the mind's continual fixation on the self. The eighth all-basis or alaya consciousness organizes the other seven consciousnesses and stores the karmic latencies.

Five Sensory Consciousnesses

1st — The visual consciousness perceives visual images.
2nd — The auditory consciousness perceives sounds.
3rd — The gustatory consciousness perceives tastes.
4th — The olfactory consciousness perceives smells.
5th — The tactile consciousness perceives bodily sensations.

Each of these five consciousnesses are associated with a sense organ and they are momentary (always changing) and non-conceptual which means they do not analyze the sensory input.

Sixth Mental Consciousness

This consciousness is the constant stream of discursive thoughts and feelings that go through our mind. This consciousness is momentary (constantly changing) and conceptual.

Seventh Afflicted or "Klesha" Consciousness

This consciousness is the constant feeling of ego or "I" which permeates all thought and perceptions whether we are thinking about them or not.

Eighth All-Basis or Storehouse Consciousness (Skt. *Alaya*)

This consciousness has two functions. First it organizes the other seven consciousnesses (the all-basis function) and second it stores all the karmic latencies and habitual tendencies produced by every action taken in this and previous lifetimes (the storehouse function).

• 2 •

THE BARDO OF DREAMING

2. *When the bardo of dreams is dawning upon me,*
I will abandon the corpse-like sleep of careless ignorance.
And let my thoughts enter their natural state without distraction;
Controlling and transforming dreams in luminosity,
I will not sleep like any animal,
But will unify sleep and practice completely.

— *The second Primary Root Verse of the Bardo*

The second bardo of dreaming begins when we fall asleep and begin dreaming until the time when we awaken and realize that we have been dreaming. In the four bardo system, the bardo of dreaming is counted as part of the first bardo of living.

It is very helpful to meditate while we are sleeping, especially while we are dreaming. We should try to dream about doing good deeds and also try to stop ourselves from being overwhelmed by negativities in our dreams. When we go to sleep, we should think to ourselves, "Tonight I am going to practice being virtuous in my dreams." Now, this desire may not result in having positive dreams

the first time we do it, it will probably not work. The second time we try it may not work either. But gradually by articulating this wish, we are planting positive seeds that will ripen in our dreams. Focusing on our dreams in this way will also help us to maintain mindfulness and awareness in our dreams and therefore seal us against negative emotions that may arise while dreaming. By developing positive mental states and forestalling negative states through mindfulness and awareness, we will gradually gain control over the appearances in our mind. Developing this control will also enable us to see the illusory appearances of the bardo as the illusions that they are. Training at night will also help us attain a good rebirth in our future lives.

The point of having mindfulness and alertness in different situations throughout the day and night is to ensure that our life does not lapse into an unbroken continuity of utter ignorance of the true state of reality.[18] The only way to prevent this is through the vigorous application of mindfulness and alertness. Natsok Rangdrol tells us to maintain mindfulness and to continually review in our mind what will occur to us during the bardo at the time of death, during the experience of the bardo of dharmata, and during the bardo of becoming.

18. Our normal discursive mind is "stuck" on phenomena believing them to be real and solid. When we can experience this, we will become aware of the luminous aspect of mind's nature. This recognition will help us pass through the bardo of dharmata when mind's insight can lead to liberation. Keeping the bardo in the mind helps break this ignorance of the true nature of phenomena.

Special Practices of Dream Yoga

We may wonder how sleep and the bardo are related. Sleep is primarily related to the outer dissolution of our waking processes but the experience is a much less than what is experienced in the bardo. Because we tend to become unconscious as we are falling asleep, we generally don't consciously experience the stages of this bardo. The practice of dream yoga, therefore, consists of gaining the ability to go to sleep with focused awareness: in other words, to sleep and dream without becoming unconscious. This is essentially done by cultivating a strong faculty of mindfulness and alertness just before going to sleep that will not be destroyed by the process of sleeping. The problem with this is obvious; if our mindfulness and alertness is strong enough to keep us from becoming unconscious, then will probably be strong enough to keep us from falling asleep.

The purpose of dream yoga is to develop the faculty of lucid dreaming, i.e., knowing that we are dreaming while we are dreaming and then employing mindfulness and alertness to recognize the emptiness of our dreams. When we can accomplish this, we can then meditate on the clear light (Tib. *ösel*) of sleep either while we are falling asleep or by being aware of our mind between our dreams. In other words, in this practice we can look at the mind in the states of falling asleep and in dreaming, and between dreams.

The solution recommended in the texts is to take several measures before attempting this practice. First, we should make sure that we eat nutritious food. Second, we don't sleep for a few nights before trying lucid dreaming so that we will be able to go to sleep even though we are mindful and aware. Third, we will need a friend there to remind us that we are falling asleep and to be mindful and so on. The sleep practice essentially consists of doing this over a long period until we gain the ability to do it by ourselves.[19] We can determine our ability to achieve recognition and liberation in the bardo by examining our abilities in the dream state.

As with our waking states, the more we practice the habit of recognizing our dreams and holding an outlook of purity in them, the more likely we will be able to recognize the bardo at the time of death and be able to transform the frightening appearances and hallucinations in the bardo into more helpful appearances. In dreaming, we notice that our state of mind and the resulting appearances often correspond very closely to our waking state of mind and activities during the day. Whatever we think and do throughout the day will be, to some extent, reflected in our dreams. If we spend our day in a state of sadness or anxiety or in disturbing emotions, then these will greatly color our state of mind and appearances in our dreams.

19. This practice of lucid dreaming described here by Rinpoche is part of the Six Dharmas of Naropa and is mostly practiced in the three-year retreat. See Appendix D for a description of lucid dreaming practice outside the three-year retreat.

Many mahasiddhas have said that what happens in the dream state and what happens in the bardo state depends primarily upon the momentum of our karmic latencies and our resolve to practice. For example, before we go to sleep, we can say, "I must wake up at 3 a.m." and if we really want to, then we will probably wake up at 3 a.m. This happens because the momentum of our intention is carried through the unconsciousness and the dream state. Another example is that if we strongly resolve that we want to have lucid dreams and say to ourselves before going to sleep, "Tonight I will recognize a dream as a dream while I am dreaming it," then it will probably happen. On the other hand, doing so half-heartedly will not have any effect. The preparation for the bardo of becoming is the same. To the extent that we create the earnest and strong intention to recognize and cultivate states of meditation in the bardo of becoming, to that same extent we will have the possibility of doing so.

Dreams are also an indication of our state of mind in a more general sense, such as the emergence of karmic imprints[20] as active results. For example, we will dream of something and then it will actually happen in a few days. The reason we occasionally have these glimpses of future events is that the karmic habits and imprints that are going to produce these events have actually been activated and

20. Every event that happens to a person has a karmic imprint or latency (Tib. *bakchak*) which is stored in the eighth consciousness. This imprint later enters the sixth consciousness by being stimulated by an external experience or appearing in a dream.

then we experience that activation as a dream that appears to us to be a prediction of the future.

In using dreaming to prepare for the bardo, it is important to cultivate the skill of lucid dreaming and the resultant skill of transforming our dreams. If we maintain strong mindfulness and alertness throughout the day and have the motivation to recognize the dream state, then we can know when we are dreaming. Having done this preparation while waking makes it easier to recognize the unreality of the appearances in a dream. So, the first step is to recognize that we are dreaming, and the second step is to look at the appearances in the dream and observe their illusory nature as being confused and unreal projections. Having trained in lucid dreaming and the unreal quality of the appearances in dreams, we should then train in the technique of transforming these ordinary, impure dream appearances into pure appearances such as seeing ourselves as a yidam deity and then seeing the yidam's environment of palaces and consorts and so on. In that way, we can accrue a very powerful habit of transforming and viewing ourselves as a deity.

If we have lucid dreams and we have engaged in some training to recognize their unreality while in the dream, we can then try to transform ourselves in the dream into the appearance of the deity. When we can do this, we can transform negative dreams into positive ones, dreams full of danger into pleasant experiences, and so forth.

So, the stages of preparing for the bardo using dreaming begins with cultivating lucid dreaming, then training to recognize the unreality of the appearances in dreams, and finally transforming these appearances while in the dream. By doing this we can cultivate a very strong habit that will be very beneficial to us after death because the hallucinations and visions that arise in the later part of the bardo are very much like the appearances in a dream. If we can recognize dream appearances as nothing more than our own incorrect and confused projections, and we are able to transform them, then we will have confidence that we will be able to do the same with the appearances we experience in the bardo.

There is a saying: "By judging my confusion in last night's dream, I can infer that I am going to have a difficult time in the bardo tomorrow." If we remain without any control over recognition and transformation of the dream appearances, we cannot really expect to have the abilities of recognition and transformation of the bardo appearances either. So, there is as great a benefit in training in dreaming as there is in practicing the creation stage of the yidam in waking practice.

Natsok Rangdrol advises that we also should do the Illusory Body[21] practice when we are awake and off the meditation cushion. During the actual practice session of Illusory Appearances, we meditate

21. The Illusory Body practice is usually done in the three-year retreat where one constantly reminds oneself that everything one sees or experiences in life is actually an illusion. To see the illusory nature of the self, one can also practice criticizing

mainly on the guru and the yidam, visualizing them and reciting mantras.

Questions

> Rinpoche, I was wondering if you could give us a simplified visualization practice to do every night when we go to bed.

There are particular techniques that can be used to facilitate lucidity and transformation of a dream. These techniques, however, can only be done when the person has completed the entire set of preliminary practices up to the point of doing dream yoga. However, the fundamental activity that gives us the ability to master the dream state is maintaining mindfulness and alertness throughout our waking state. Being able to maintain mindfulness and alertness as we go to sleep and making the intention to have lucid dreams and training in dream yoga helps us gain the ability to maintain mindfulness. Training in dreaming means being able to recognize the appearances in a dream as being empty: that they are merely confused projections in the dream. The transformation of dreams means recognizing the emptiness of appearances in the dream and then having the ability to change the content of dreams from bad dreams into good dreams. One can also learn to alter the size or appearance of dream objects and transform unvirtuous situations

oneself naked in front of a mirror. In a highly advanced stage, one can actually create an illusory body that can travel outside one's physical body.

in dreams into virtuous ones. To undertake the complete practice from start to finish of this particular system requires doing this under close supervision and, therefore, it is usually done in the three-year retreat.

> We're used to being awake in this lifetime and then going to sleep at night. In the bardo is there an actual experience of feeling awake and then asleep?

It seems that bardo beings don't think about going to sleep. They don't have that kind of circadian cycle that the body has. They never sleep.

"Regard all phenomena as dreams" is one of the Mind Training slogans. To engage in the two contemplations that relate to this — that outer and inner phenomena resemble a dream — we first think that everything we see in the animate and inanimate world is like the appearances arising in a dream and that our sensations of these phenomena (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and sensation) also resemble the sensations felt in a dream. We then think, "If everything out there is just a dream or an illusion, then clearly these phenomena must come from the mind."

From: The Seven Points of Mind Training *by Thrangu Rinpoche*

THE EIGHT FREEDOMS AND THE TEN ASSETS

These forms of leisure and endowments create the positive conditions needed to practice the Dharma.

The Eight Freedoms

1. Not being born into one of the hell realms
2. Not being born as a hungry ghost (Skt. *preta*)
3. Not being born as an animal
4. Not being born in the god realm
5. Not being born in a country that does not have the Buddhist Dharma
6. Not possessing wrong views (like there is no such thing as karma)
7. Not being born where a buddha has not yet appeared
8. Not being either too mentally or physically incapable to practice the Dharma

The Ten Assets or Endowments

The first group of assets due to our own circumstances:

1. Having the good karma to have been born a human
2. Having the good karma to be born where the Buddhist teachings are available
3. Having the good karma of having our mental and physical faculties intact
4. Having the good karma of not having an unvirtuous livelihood
5. Having the good karma to have faith and confidence in the Dharma

The second group of assets due to outside circumstances:

1. The good karma that a buddha exists in the world into which we are born
2. The good karma that the Buddha gave teachings
3. The good karma that these teachings haven't declined and disappeared
4. The good karma that the Dharma is still being practiced
5. The good karma of having a spiritual friend who is available.

• 3 •

THE BARDO OF MEDITATION

3. When the bardo of samadhi meditation dawns upon me,
I will abandon the crowd of distractions and confusions,
And rest in the boundless state without grasping or disturbance,
Firm in the two practices of creation and completion.
At this time of meditation, one-pointed, free from activity,
I will not fall into the power of confused emotions.

— The third Primary Root Verse of the Bardo

In the system of six bardos, the third bardo is the interval between the beginning of our meditation session and the end of our meditation session. In the four bardo system, the meditation bardo is considered part of the first bardo of living. Fundamentally, there are three stages of bardo practice which follow the three types of *prajna*: listening (or studying) about the bardo, contemplating the bardo, and then actually meditating on it. To be able to do this, we must first find and follow an authentic guru. Once we have discovered and formed a relationship with an authentic guru, we can receive these bardo instructions. Our motivation, even during

this preliminary stage of receiving instruction, is very important. We should not receive meditation instruction merely because we want to become famous or experience bliss or because this knowledge will make us well-known. Our motivation needs to be the sincere desire to help ourselves so that we will be able to help others. If we have this proper attitude when receiving the bardo instructions, we think: "I will only do this to be of genuine benefit to both myself and others. I will not only receive these instructions, but I will actually practice them."

The Role of Disturbing Emotions in the Bardo

Because our mind lacks stability in the bardo, it is easily affected by the disturbing emotions (Skt. *klesha*). Just as disturbing emotions arise in our present situation, they will continue to arise in the bardo. These disturbing emotions such as anger, attachment, and anxiety can take hold of us and become very strong after we have died because we will not have a physical body to ground our mind. To prevent this fear and confusion of the disturbing emotions from happening in the bardo, we need to practice meditation, in particular, Tranquility (Skt. *Shamatha*) meditation before we die.

As we meditate, we should focus on our disturbing emotions, especially on those emotions that affect us most strongly. People vary in temperament: for some, anger or aggression is their strongest disturbing emotion; for others, jealousy is the strongest; and still

for others, it is pride that is strongest. It is always best to begin working with the disturbing emotion that affects us the most and to focus our practice on developing mindfulness which will serve as an effective remedy for this disturbing emotion.

If we practice meditation while we are alive with the intent of weakening our disturbing emotions, then these that arise in the bardo will be much weaker and less overwhelming. The loud sounds, bright colors, and frightening images in the bardo, especially those hallucinations produced by our disturbing emotions, will be much less confusing and frightening. Therefore, we should prepare for the bardo by practicing meditation.

Some individuals who practice meditation for a relatively short time discover that their mind is effectively pacified and tamed by their practice. Other individuals who practice meditation for a much longer time may not derive much benefit from it. These two types of practitioners may even be practicing the same meditation. The difference between them lies not so much in the technique of meditation used or the time they have been practicing but, rather, the practitioner's intention in doing the meditation. For an effective practice of meditation, the individual should apply their meditation to the disturbing emotions and the actual problems which they face. On the other hand, someone who practices a similar meditation with only a very vague motivation that does not focus on the particular issues that need to be worked through will have a less

effective meditation. Indeed, the most effective Dharma practice is when we consciously apply it to eliminating particular problems and disturbing emotions and later this process will be especially beneficial when the disturbing emotions are encountered in the bardo.

If our practice is intensive, it is wonderful. But even if it is not, it is important to practice as much as we can with the correct motivation. When we receive instruction, we should recognize the true value and importance of the Dharma that we are receiving. Through a metaphor the Buddha taught four attitudes that we can use to determine our motivation. The Buddha said, "Child of a good family, regard yourself as someone suffering from an illness." If we are suffering from an illness, we will earnestly seek an appropriate cure for that illness to alleviate our suffering. In the same way, because we are all suffering from the illness of karma and disturbing emotions, we need to find a way to cure this illness. The Buddha continued, "See the Dharma as medicine." Just as we take medicine to cure our illness, we take the medicine of Dharma to become free from the illness of the disturbing emotions and negative karma. To be cured we must be given a particular medicine by a physician who has correctly diagnosed the illness and then prescribed the appropriate remedy. The Buddha continued, "See the spiritual friend as a learned physician. Regard the spiritual friend as the prescriber of the appropriate remedy for your illness." Finally, the Buddha taught, "See the diligent practice of Dharma as the process through which your illness is gradually alleviated." When we take the medicine

prescribed for our illness, we begin to feel better. In the same way, if we diligently practice the Dharma that we received from a spiritual friend, the suffering of the disturbing emotions and karma will begin to diminish, and we will start to feel better. In sum, knowing that we are suffering, we begin the path of Dharma by relying upon a qualified guru and receiving appropriate instructions and, then after that, we must practice.

According to Natsok Rangdrol in the *Mirror for Mindfulness*, this process begins with receiving the three types of vows[22] and then keeping these commitments properly.[23] A vow is a tool that we use to facilitate the practice of Dharma. Essentially, it consists of a commitment to stop doing certain negative things or a commitment to do certain positive things. For example, when we say, "I will perform 100,000 prostrations," the value of this commitment is that the vow causes momentum for us to exert ourselves. Or we may say to ourselves, "I will engage in the preliminary practices" or "I will practice Shamatha meditation for half an hour every day." Such vows or promises promote exertion. But to function properly, whatever vows, promises, or commitments we make must be

22. The three vows (Tib. *dompa sum*) are the Foundation vehicle vows of individual liberation, the Mahayana vows of becoming a bodhisattva, and the Vajrayana tantric vows.

23. In other teachings Rinpoche has said that we should only take vows which we can keep and that we can take a vow for a certain length of time. If we break any of these vows we won't "go to the hell realms," but we can do a purification process to repair the broken vows.

appropriate to our ability to do them. It is counterproductive to make vows that we will be unable to keep later on. We should begin by taking these three vows and keeping them. After taking these vows we should start listening to the Dharma to answer questions such as: "What needs to be abandoned or given up? What needs to be practiced? How should a beginner practice? How should an experienced practitioner practice? What problems are going to arise in practice and how should I deal with them?" In this way, we should begin with learning.

While we need to have a broad and exhaustive understanding to properly practice, we also should not become attached to learning for its own sake because there is no end to what we can study. We will learn one thing and then think, "Now I need to learn about that." And having learned that we will then think, "Now I need to learn about this," and so on. If this goes on and on, we will never get down to practice. While we do need to learn about the Dharma, we do not need to become too involved with Dharma words and terms. We need to ensure that all of our learning is directed toward our practice and that the information that we acquire is fundamentally practical. As Gampopa said, "Combine hearing, contemplating, and meditating." This means that although we begin by hearing the Dharma and acquiring the information about the Dharma, our aim is always to acquire the necessary resources to be able to contemplate it, and finally, to practice meditation.

Practicing in Retreat

After we have received Dharma instructions, it is best to practice in an isolated retreat. Natsok Rangdrol says that to devote our life to practice in an isolated retreat is, of course, excellent if we can do it. But if this is impractical, we can at least find opportunities in our busy life for intensive practice for short periods in a retreat because even this is of tremendous benefit. Nowadays, everyone is extraordinarily busy. But due to the kind influence of Christianity, many of us have Sundays off whether we are a Christian or not. And, as time has gone on, this one day off a week has expanded to include Saturday. So, this institution of the weekend is very beneficial to a practitioner because it gives us plenty of time to practice in isolation and solitude if we wish. But when we are in a situation free from distraction, we must ensure that our body, speech, and mind are properly focused on virtue. This is because simply being in isolation is not Dharma practice. If being in solitude was meditation, then all the birds and beasts would be natural practitioners since they all live in an environment that is not too dissimilar to a retreat. When we are in an isolated retreat, therefore, we should ask ourselves, "Is my body, speech, and mind in accordance with the Dharma?" Creating a strong Dharmic motivation will ensure that we will have a stable environment to practice in.

Engaging in Pure Conduct

Natsok Rangdrol says, "Even though you may have realized emptiness, you should never ignore or denigrate the importance of morality." This is especially important nowadays with students having access to all kinds of instructions. There are Buddhist teachers who regularly give the direct pointing out instruction of the mind's nature.[24] Since a student has received these instructions and develops some degree of understanding of this nature, they may feel that they have realized the nature of their mind, so they no longer need to worry about the results of their behavior. However, we should never ignore the results of our actions and never forget that regardless of how realized we are, every act of wrongdoing is going to create negative karma that will eventually cause us to suffer. Similarly, even the smallest virtue we do is going to promote our overall happiness, so we should never ignore even the smallest positive act. We should never think that a certain virtuous action is too insignificant to engage in or that any unvirtuous action is too insignificant to avoid. In short, along with cultivating recognition of the true nature of mind, we need to continue to practice the ten virtuous actions and avoid the ten unvirtuous ones.[25] We need to continue to practice all the six perfections (Skt. *paramitas*) — generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom —

24. The "true nature of mind" is how the mind actually was before, when it was completely free from the veil of the disturbing emotions and misconceptions.

25. See The ten virtuous and unvirtuous actions.

and we must never think that we are above doing these practices. The Buddha taught that it is essential to integrate our view with our conduct. As our realization increases, our positive behavior of body, speech, and mind must also increase.

Practicing the Vajrayana

We are particularly fortunate to have the opportunity to practice the teachings of the Vajrayana. The Buddha taught three vehicles: the Foundation, the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana.[26] Although we also practice the Buddhist teachings of the Foundation and Mahayana vehicles, the principal practice of the four major Tibetan traditions — Kagyu, Nyingma, Sakya, and Gelug — is the Vajrayana or tantric practice. The practice of the Vajrayana requires, first of all, receiving empowerments which enhance our practice and, secondly, receiving the oral instructions from the lama. Since we have the opportunity in this bardo of living to achieve full permanent liberation, we need to do our best to seize this precious opportunity. The most effective way to achieve liberation in this lifetime is practicing the Vajrayana teachings. We will first discuss the ripening empowerment.

26. In Tibet, all three vehicles are practiced. For example, Tibetan monks take the Foundation Vehicle vows of personal conduct. They also practice bodhichitta to liberate of all sentient beings, the six paramitas of the Mahayana Vehicle, and they do the practices of the Vajrayana vehicle to realize the true nature.

Empowerment

Milarepa said: "The placing of the vase on one's head is the external empowerment; the pointing out that one's body is the body of the deity is the internal empowerment; and the pointing out of one's mind as being the union of bliss and emptiness is the ultimate empowerment." What this means is that the external symbols of an empowerment ceremony (placing the blessing vase on our head and sprinkling consecrated water on us) are external aspects of the empowerment. What is happening internally is that the practitioners are visualizing themselves as the deity which is invited to come down from the pure land and blend with the mind to enter the practitioners. This promotes the realization of the true nature of mind. We know that in daily life, our mind is quite impure and confused. It is filled with suffering, many kinds of thoughts, and disturbing emotions such as attachments, jealousies, and resentments, and so on. But these tendencies and thoughts are not the true nature of mind.[27] The mind's true nature is emptiness which is the wisdom that possesses the innate capacity for all the positive qualities of the buddhas to arise. To actually realize this true nature, we must understand the ultimate meaning of the empowerment.

27. Rinpoche is making a distinction between conceptual mind (Tib. *sem*) experienced in ordinary daily life with all its disturbing emotions and incorrect thoughts and the mind's true nature (Tib. sem nyi) which is mind free from disturbing emotions and misconceptions.

When receiving an empowerment, crucial of great importance that the wisdom of the deity of the empowerment is born within us. The mere touching of the implements in the empowerment to our head is not that important by itself. For example, Tilopa slapped Naropa in the face with his sandal and thereby transmitted to him wisdom of the empowerment. Similarly, when Shri Singha handed the translator Vairochana an apple, he transmitted the ultimate lineage to him. The point is that it is the wisdom of empowerment generated by the disciple makes the empowerment ceremony successful. Nevertheless, even if we do not develop the ultimate wisdom of the empowerment during the ceremony, we should not think that receiving the empowerment was ineffective or meaningless.

Nowadays, we receive many empowerments and if there is an increase in our faith and devotion during an empowerment ceremony, this in itself is a good result because it empowers and consecrates our practice. So, in spite of the importance of the ultimate wisdom empowerment, this does not diminish the importance of an ordinary empowerment ceremony.

Whether we give rise to the ultimate wisdom in the empowerment or not, it is important that while we are receiving an empowerment that we do not allow our mind to run wild with disturbing emotions. Rather, we should receive the empowerment by taking hold of our mind as much as possible and focusing it on the empowerment ceremony.

Empowerments always begin with a renewal of the vow of refuge and the generation of bodhichitta — the desire for all beings to reach enlightenment. When we renew the vow of refuge at the beginning of an empowerment, we do so consciously with the thought, "In receiving this empowerment, I am taking refuge in the Three Jewels and the three roots."[28] When we generate bodhichitta, we should reflect upon our motivation for receiving the empowerment. We should dispense with any negative or neutral motivation that may be present and instead reflect on the fact that all beings want to be happy and do not want to suffer. We should recall that these beings are unaware of which actions cause true happiness and which actions cause unhappiness. Lacking this knowledge, they cause their own suffering and destroy their own happiness by making wrong choices. Our motivation in the empowerment is to have the thought: "In order to help all beings enjoy happiness and freedom from suffering, I will practice Dharma and particularly practice the Vajrayana. I will receive this empowerment to be able to do this task."

Having raised bodhichitta, we next visualize our body in the form of the particular deity of the empowerment. Because we visualize ourselves as deities, this brings up the issue of self-visualization. To visualize ourselves as a deity is a much different practice from most other religious traditions, because in most theistic religions the

28. The Three Jewels are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The three roots are the guru, the protectors, and the yidams.

deities are considered to be external to us. They are almost always visualized in front of the person. However, in Vajrayana Buddhism, we often visualize ourselves as deities. We might wonder: "But I am not the deity. What good is it to pretend to be a deity or something other than I am?" In fact, we are not pretending when we visualize ourselves as a deity because our mind's true nature is buddha nature[29] and the deity we are visualizing is merely an embodiment of that buddha nature. Our true nature is concealed from us as long as we are subject to ignorance.[30] So to transcend these obscurations to our buddha nature, we visualize ourselves as a deity and believe that the embodiment of that wisdom is our own fundamental nature. As much as possible, we let go of our conventional fixation upon our impure flesh, blood, bones, and so on. Since we will still have some clinging to our normal conventional perceptions, in most empowerments we also visualize three seed syllables at our head, throat, and heart. We then visualize rays of light generated from these syllables in the forehead, throat, and heart[31] of the actual

29. Buddha nature is the innate potential that all sentient beings (Buddhist and non-Buddhist) possess that, with proper practice, allows them to become fully awakened. Most people are not aware of their buddha nature because it is covered up by the disturbing emotions and false beliefs.

30. This "ignorance" (Tib. *marigpa*) is not ignorance such as not knowing rather it refers to the third disturbing emotion which is being ignorant of the true nature of our mind. It is also not knowing what to accept or reject and not knowing the insubstantiality or inherent emptiness of self.

31. These usually are a white OM from the forehead of the deity to the OM in our forehead chakra, a red AH from the throat of the deity into the AH in our throat chakra, and a blue HUNG from the deity's heart into the HUNG in our heart chakra.

deity radiating out and dissolving into our own head, throat, and heart causing us further confidence that we actually are the deity.

The main body of most empowerments is divided into several sections usually corresponding to our body, speech, and mind. There are various visualizations that convey the actual empowerment to us such as the emanation and dissolution of rays of light dissolving into us and so on. As we have said before, during this ceremony what is of greatest importance is to have trust and confidence that we are actually receiving the empowerments and blessings of these deities. If we can experience the ultimate wisdom of the empowerment, that is wonderful. But even if that is not possible, it is still useful to receive an empowerment especially if we can have the conscious intention to direct our mind to the empowerment ceremony.

The Commitments or Vows of Practice

Another issue connected with empowerments is the practice of vows or commitments (Skt. *samaya*). Many students wonder whether it is good to receive empowerments at all because each empowerment seems to come with commitments. They may wonder if these might be a source of problems if they are unable to keep the commitments. To encourage the student to practice, the lama will sometimes say: "Having received this empowerment, you are bound by such and such samaya. And should you transgress it, you will be in great peril." Presenting it this way is done to get the students to do the

right thing. But the students should not think that having received empowerments places them in great danger. On the contrary, receiving empowerments is always a source of benefit.

Now, if someone receiving an empowerment were to develop intense antipathy towards the whole process and tradition of the empowerment and consciously engage in a great deal of wrongdoing, obviously that person might be reincarnated in a lower rebirth. But we are not going to fall into a lower rebirth simply because we received an empowerment and then couldn't fulfill all the commitments of that empowerment.

To understand this, it may help to know that the word for "commitment," *samaya* in Sanskrit, was translated into Tibetan as *dam tshig* meaning "words of promise." Now, the idea of "words of promise" does not mean that if we transgress against these rules, we will fall into vajra hell after our death. Rather, the point is that having received an empowerment and instruction, we should practice it. If we don't actually practice it, simply receiving empowerment is insufficient. As we have seen, one of the things that keeps practice going is the momentum of having a commitment. If we make a commitment to practice when we receive an empowerment, the momentum of that commitment will enable us to carry through with the empowerment. In other words, the promise that we make during the empowerment is actually a source of great help to us. A samaya should be regarded more as a useful tool rather than as

a threat. The purpose of an empowerment is to give us a means to establish a diligent practice. If we ask, "Well, do I need to keep samaya?" The answer is "Yes, I do need to keep samaya" because we need to keep our promises. But a person should not keep samayas out of fear of punishment of some kind.

The Oral Instructions

Having received the empowerment, the next step is to receive the instructions for the practice. The function of an empowerment is to ripen our mind. The function of the subsequent oral instruction (Tib. *mengak*) is to provide us with the information we need to actually practice. So, the oral instructions concern how to practice, what to meditate on, and so on. The point is that we should never consider simply receiving instructions by themselves as being sufficient because the point of these instructions is to enable us to practice. Therefore, having received instruction, we should practice as much as we can. Of course, the more practice, the better. Nonetheless, the point is not how much we practice but that we follow the instructions we've received. Traditionally, it is said, "The sign of having heard the teachings is that the mind is tamed; the sign of having meditated on the oral instructions is having no more disturbing emotions."

Under the best circumstances, those who do practice the Six Dharmas of Naropa, the Mahamudra practices of the Kagyu lineage, or

the Breakthrough (Tib. *Trekchö*) and Leapover (Tib. *Tögal*) practices of the Dzogchen lineage can achieve complete liberation if they have great exertion. The traditional way to say this is that the best practitioners achieve a state of mind that is like a snake untying its own knots. This refers to the fact that if a snake is tied into a knot, it can effortlessly untie itself. In the same way, for great practitioners who achieve a state of awareness, the arising of thoughts in their meditation is not a problem. It is also said that the intermediate practitioner achieves a state of mind that is like snowflakes dissolving into the surface of the lake. This refers to the fact that as soon as the snowflakes hit the surface of the water, they melt. In the same way, for intermediate practitioners with experience and realization, their thoughts just dissolve as soon as they are recognized. And it is said that for those with the least experience and realization, meditation is like the melting of ice. Just as solid ice melts gradually with warmth into water, so the ice gradually melts with the warmth of meditation into the fluid quality of wisdom.

Those with the greatest diligence will achieve the same state of realization as the renowned practitioners of the past, such as the great siddhas Tilopa and Naropa from the Mahamudra tradition, or Garab Dorje, Shri Singha, and Tingdzin Zangpo from the Dzogchen tradition each of whom were able to achieve rainbow body.[32] But regardless of how much or how little we practice, we are still

32. Rainbow body occurs at the time of death when a highly realized practitioner asks his students to leave him or her in meditation posture, usually for several days in

fortunate to have the opportunity to reach enlightenment. If we practice with the highest exertion, we will achieve the highest realization in this very lifetime. But if we practice with less exertion, this realization will still occur, but it will take a longer period of time. It is developing the habit of practice that will ensure that our mind will gradually be transformed into an enlightened one. Even if we practice with just a little exertion, this is still important. To summarize, we should not allow ourselves to indulge in a state of constant mindless distraction and laziness. When we practice, we need to practice in an orderly and proper manner and to principally practice Mahamudra or Dzogchen.

The Common and Special Preliminaries

We start our practice with the four common preliminaries[33] because these are the means by which we can turn our mind toward the Dharma. The four common preliminaries are contemplating: (1) contemplation of the difficulty to acquire the freedoms and resources of this precious human body; (2) contemplating impermanence and our death; (3) contemplating the results of our actions (karma); and (4) contemplating the difficulties of samsara. Thinking about

a sealed room or tent. When the students return there is nothing there but some hair and nails proving their body has dissolved into emptiness.

33. The common preliminaries are also called the "four thoughts that turn the mind toward the Dharma." They are contrasted to the Special Preliminaries often called "Ngöndro" in Tibetan.

these four preliminaries will help us to begin to understand why we need to meditate in the beginning of our Dharma practice. From time to time, we will face the obstacles of increasing laziness or decreasing devotion and enthusiasm. Whenever we find ourselves in that situation, these four contemplations can help remind us of why we should practice the Dharma.

We should particularly contemplate impermanence and our eventual death. It may seem, at first glance, that there is no way this meditation could make us feel happy. We may ask, "How will thinking about death make me happy?" In many ways, it will not. Thinking about the impermanence of our body and our life ending in death is depressing. But contemplating impermanence is important because by thinking about this unhappy event, we develop a deeper understanding of how we can develop a much greater, permanent happiness.

There are three ways to meditate on impermanence that can point us towards the Dharma. If we haven't "walked through the gate of Dharma" and do not worry about the effects of our actions, then the thought of impermanence and death can put us on the Buddhist path. Just remembering that we are going to die sometimes gives us impetus to act.

But how will contemplating death help us in the end? When we experience the positive results in our meditation, we will be able to look back and see just how helpful the meditation on imper-

manence has been. Then we will understand that the unhappiness and depression we had in our initial meditation on death was only a temporary experience and that it spurred us on to develop true happiness. In some ways, meditation on the bardo is the same as regular meditation — initially unpleasant and difficult but in the end, it evokes great results.

If we use our waking time practicing for the bardo by doing good deeds, then we will be prepared when we die. If we reflect on the instructions on the bardo, we will be prepared when death and the following bardos occur. One important instruction for preparing for the bardo is to eliminate our negative emotions in our daily life. It is very important to train ourselves so that we are mindful and careful of what we are doing without engaging in lots of discursive thoughts.

Having contemplated the four common preliminaries, we can then go on to engage in the four uncommon preliminaries (Tib. *Ngöndro*).[34] The fundamental purpose of Ngöndro practices is to increase our faith and devotion through prostrations, to purify our obscurations and wrongdoings though the practice of Vajrasattva, to gather a great accumulation of merit and wisdom, through Mandla offerings and to receive the blessings of our guru through Guru

34. The four uncommon preliminaries (Tib. *Ngöndro*) were first developed by the ninth Tai Situpa and involve doing 100,000 refuge recitations and prostrations, 100,000 Vajrasattva mantras, 100,000 Mandala plate offerings, and 100,000 repetitions of the Guru Yogas.

Yoga. These four practices are very significant because they create the conditions that result in a successful practice.

Having completed these four uncommon practices, we can then work directly on our own mind. Normally, our mind is always producing a variety of thought and emotions of different intensities including all sorts of very intense and disturbing thoughts, and it is these disturbing thoughts which prevent us from practicing Dharma. We consider some thoughts to be good because they're pleasant and we consider other thoughts as bad because they are unpleasant. Even though both have to be dealt with, it is the unpleasant thoughts that cause us many more problems in the beginning because they disturb and confuse us. People usually have a stronger habit to engage in negative thinking than they do in positive thinking. Consequently, most of our negative ways of thinking have accumulated in our mind since the beginning of samsara. Obviously, from time to time, we have had some pleasant thoughts. But far more common are our thoughts of worry, anxiety, sadness, and obsessive thoughts of all kinds. Generally, these negative thoughts cause us misery of one kind or another.

Negative thoughts are not helpful and not necessary to our lives, and they essentially prevent us from being happy. The solution to eliminating them is to practice Shamatha meditation which allows us to take possession of our mind so that it becomes more pliable. We also need to cultivate the faculties of mindfulness and alertness

to give us the ability to choose our thoughts. As a result, our mind starts to relax. As it does, these negative thoughts occur less and less often, allowing natural states of wellbeing and positive thoughts to take their proper place and their proper function.

After practicing Shamatha, we begin to practice Vipashyana or Insight meditation which is the main practice of the Mahamudra and Dzogchen traditions. The essence of this practice is to constantly cultivate the faculties of mindfulness and alertness. Mindfulness differs from alertness in slightly different ways and under different circumstances. With mindfulness and alertness, we ensure that our life is not an unbroken continuity of meaningless confusion. For example, at night we can focus our mind on the practices of lucid dreaming and clear light, consciously using the faculties of mindfulness and alertness. The word "mindfulness" in Tibetan is *drenpa* which literally means "recollection" or "memory." In meditation it refers to the remembering of our intention not to allow our mind to come under the influence of endless thinking — especially negative thinking. The momentum of this intention is maintained by the second faculty, alertness. Now, alertness (Tib. *seshin*) automatically arises when mindfulness is present. Alertness refers to the mind's capacity to recognize what is going on within the mind which allows us to maintain the faculty of mindfulness. To illustrate how important these two faculties are, Shantideva says in the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

I join my palms in sincere appreciation of those who knowingly
Cultivate the dual faculty of mindfulness and alertness,
Even at the cost of their lives, in the recognition that
This is the only way to achieve stability of mind.

In short, we need to take control of our mind by not allowing body, speech, or mind to wander aimlessly and endlessly in an unbroken chain of discursive thoughts. This is called a continuity of thoughts because one thought leads to the next thought and so on. And if we don't do anything to interrupt this flow, our mind will continue indefinitely to move from one thought and feeling to another.

The Creation Stage

In addition to the practice of Shamatha, the Vajrayana includes a number of techniques belonging to the "creation stage" and the "completion stage." The creation stage refers to the visualization of various meditational deities called *yidams*. These include deities that are peaceful, wrathful, or semi-wrathful. Regardless of the nature of the deity, the technique of visualizing ourselves in the form of a deity is very effective in producing progress in our meditation and also in receiving the blessings[35] of these deities. Deity meditation is especially beneficial in training for the bardo because after

35. Blessings (Tib. *jinlap*) in Buddhism do not come from some higher power rather, blessings are making ourselves more receptive to the positive qualities in our mind which are already there.

our death, a variety of images and sounds will arise in the bardo, some being very blaring and threatening. These appearances are not external to us — they are projections of our own mind. Due to our confused and bewildered mind, we will mistake them as being outside of us, and they can produce great fear.

The important point to remember in the bardo is to recognize that these appearances are merely the projections of our mind. Therefore, when we are doing deity practice and visualizing a yidam such as Chenrezig, Amitabha, or Medicine Buddha, it is very helpful to cultivate the habit of recognizing appearances as being projections of our mind. In the case of deity practice, it is not only the deity, but we also project a world that is the realm of the deity. When we first practice these meditations, the image of the deity may be very unclear. But as we continue to practice, eventually we will be able to develop a very clear image. Sometimes, we may experience the image as clear, but it may still be unstable. If we continue to practice, it will not only become clearer, but it will also become a stable image. This all comes about simply by becoming accustomed to the practice.

When we have cultivated a clear and stable image of the deity, we will then be able to create an even clearer and more stable image of the deity in the bardo. This is because the appearances or projections of mind are much more vivid in the bardo. When these vivid and

stable images of deities appear in the bardo, they will be familiar to us and therefore these terrifying projections can be purified.

We may also use other meditations of the creation stage to prepare ourselves for the bardo. For example, we may visualize Chenrezig or the Buddha in the space in front of us. We then visualize ourselves making offerings to these deities and making aspirational prayers to become just like them. These visualizations help us to appreciate the deities and cause us to develop a strong bond with them which creates positive merit. Alternately, we may visualize ourselves as one of these deities and thereby gradually replace the habit of perceiving the impure appearances of our ordinary life with the pure appearances of the deity.

Whether we are visualizing the yidams in front of us or visualizing ourselves as the deity, the clarity of our visualization may be greatly affected by the subtle channels and subtle winds[36] inside our bodies. For some, the state of their subtle winds and channels lead them to have a very clear visualization. For others with different winds and channels, the image will not be clear, however, this is not that important. What is important is that we remember the deity and that we make a habit of keeping the deity in our mind. If the image

36. These subtle channels are not anatomical but are more like meridians in acupuncture which make up the vajra body of a person. Through these subtle channels flows energy or *prana* in Sanskrit and *qi* in Chinese medicine. This subtle energy is called *lung* in Tibetan which literally means "winds." We use the term "subtle winds" so they are not confused with outside ordinary wind. See a chart of the subtle winds.

itself is not very clear, we can build the image gradually by focusing on parts of the deity's body, thinking about its color, its ornaments, and its implements.

Questions

> Rinpoche, you mentioned the benefits of recognizing the emptiness of all phenomena, the benefits of achieving a state of mental stability, and the benefits of learning that the deities that will appear in the bardo are not actually external to us. But what are the benefits in the bardo from learning to rest the mind in awareness (Tib. *rigpa*) in Mahamudra or Dzogchen meditation?

While in the bardo of dharmata, if you can rest your mind in *rigpa*,[37] while you are in the bardo of dharmata, you will be able to recognize the ground luminosity. Depending on the completeness of the recognition, you will either attain liberation at that moment or, at the very least, attain a good rebirth. The next bardo, the bardo of becoming, only arises if you fail to recognize the ground luminosity during the bardo of dharmata. If the bardo of becoming has begun to happen, then you have already failed to rest in *rigpa*[38] and have

37. The term *rigpa* belongs to the context of Dzogchen practice and is usually translated as "pristine awareness" or "innate wakefulness." It parallels *yeshe*, translated as "primordial wisdom" in Mahamudra practice.

38. *Rigpa* is resting the mind in full awareness. When we do this, we are able to perceive phenomena as they truly are. This is called the "ground luminosity."

failed to recognize the luminosity of the ground. Therefore, in the bardo of becoming, you need to apply the methods of Shamatha meditation and the creation stage of deity meditation, and so forth.

> Could you tell us how the view of emptiness and buddha nature as applied to preparing for death in Phowa and other bardo practices?

When we meditate on emptiness, the best outcome is that we will gain a real experience of emptiness in this life. Even if we don't have a true experience of emptiness, but we do understand the view of emptiness, that will be very beneficial for us in the bardo and also in doing Phowa practice. When we die it is not like we go from one place to another place. Rather, we are in one confused illusion that arose during our lifetime and then after this illusion stops at death, it dissolves into itself becoming another confused illusion that arises in the next lifetime.

This is like watching television, and you change the channel. One channel stops and a different channel appears. Similarly, we go from one birth to another birth there is a gap in between these births. What is in this gap? It is were we experience emptiness. When we are flipping the channels on the TV, and one channel stops and before the next channel begins, there is a brief moment when there is nothing; it is empty. In the same way, when we go through the interval between a past and a future life, there is a period of emptiness. In the bardo this emptiness appears to us as the ground

luminosity. Because we are not accustomed to phenomena as they really are, we don't recognize this ground. However, by following the instructions on the bardo given here, when we die and enter the bardo we will see dharmata or the way things really are. If we have meditated on the bardo, we will recognize this bardo experience and this will be very helpful to us in navigating the bardo. It is Phowa practice prepares us for the time when our body and the mind separate from each other. Phowa, then is a practice helping us to attain a positive rebirth.

> Could you explain what happens when a great practitioner achieves a rainbow body after death?

Someone achieves a rainbow body when they have completely realized the nature of their mind — when they first directly see the nature of mind on the third "path of seeing" on the sutra path.[39] But the path of seeing is not a complete path because the fourth path of meditation needs also to be achieved. The path of seeing is the mere recognition of mind's nature, but it is not enough to cause the practitioner to achieve the rainbow body. The path of meditation is marked by the final elimination of any distinction between meditation and post-meditation, the level of Buddhahood. When we are in "even placement" meditation, the appearances of postmeditation

39. The five paths in the Mahayana Foundation Vehicle are: (1) path of accumulation, (2) path of preparation, (3) path of insight, (4) path of meditation, and (5) path of no-more-learning.

are undiminished and when we are in postmeditation, which is until the state of "even placement" is undiminished.

When we achieve that final level of realization, all appearances, while remaining distinct, are experienced as insubstantial — like a rainbow. At that point, there is no longer any difference between the experience of the nature of the person's mind and the nature of external phenomena. The removal of this border between mind and external appearances means that when we die, we have the choice of allowing or not allowing tour body to naturally dissolve into emptiness. The parts of the body that won't dissolve into emptiness are the parts of the body that are not pervaded by the nervous system — the hair and the nails.

The fact that someone does not exhibit the rainbow body at death does not necessarily mean that they can't do so. Some individuals who have achieved that level of rainbow body choose to leave physical remains or relics behind to encourage the faith in others. The best example of this was the Buddha who left his cremated body behind, and at that time the relics were distributed among many sanghas.

So those who haven't reached the level of the rainbow body cannot demonstrate a rainbow body at death; those who have reached that level have the choice of whether or not to do so.

THE BARDO OF DYING



• 4 •

THE BARDO AT THE TIME OF DEATH

4. *When the bardo of the moment before death dawns upon me*
I will abandon all grasping, yearning and attachment,
And enter undistracted into clear awareness of the teaching,
And eject my consciousness into the space of unborn mind.
As I leave this compound body of flesh and blood
I will know it to be a transitory illusion.

— *The fourth Primary Root Verse of the Bardo*

In the previous section we studied the bardo of living — the interval between birth and death — which we are experiencing right now. The main point is that we need to make sure to do spiritual practice with our precious body while we are alive.

We now turn to the bardo at the time of dying. This interval begins approximately at the time when we stop breathing and lasts until the bardo of dharmata arises in our mind. For a person unfamiliar with the bardo teachings, the process of dying is normally a time

of great fear and anxiety. But if we have done some Dharma practice, it can be an exceptional opportunity to increase our spiritual development. Padampa Sangye has summarized this with, "Death is not death. It is an awakening for the yogin." In other words, what we call death is nothing more than changing bodies — leaving one body behind and finding another body to enter. When we make this transition, the confused and false appearances we have experienced during the preceding lifetime become an influence or a seed for our experience in the next lifetime. When we are reborn, the false appearances of samsara will be perceived and the karmic latencies from the previous lifetime will persist in our next lifetime.

Death is not so much a matter of going from one place to another as it being the withdrawing from the confusing appearances of samsara that we experienced during our lifetime. This confusion is all the incorrect appearances and incorrect ideas we had about phenomena being solid and real. However, these appearances did originally arise from the true nature of reality, the *dharmadhatu* (Skt. for "the expanse of all phenomena") and from our buddha nature. At death, these confused appearances dissolve drawn back into this expanse of dharmadhatu. As long as this ground of dharmata or suchness is not recognized, these incorrect appearances will gradually rearise in our mind during the bardo. But if we recognize these appearances to be empty due to our practice of meditation and having become familiar with the clear light (Tib. *ösel*), then, in the bardo, we will see this clearlight of the basic ground and know

what it is.[40] Before we die, therefore, it is important to know how to recognize dharmata.

The Experience of Practitioners in the Bardo

The exact period of the bardo of dying is from when we contract the illness or other condition that will cause our death until the time when our mind and body separate. At the moment when death actually occurs, ground luminosity arises, and we are then in the bardo of dharmata. The bardo of the time of death really consists of the final moments of our life in which the appearances of this life gradually dissolve and their vividness dims and disappears.

There is a difference in how we experience death which depends on the amount of practice we have done. To simplify, there are three types of practitioners: those who have practiced extensively, those who have done some spiritual practice, and those who have done no meditation at all.

Those who have practiced extensively are individuals such as the famous mahasiddhas of the past. These individuals have fully recognized dharmata (suchness) in their meditation and do not even

40. We currently experience the outside world (phenomena) through our sense organs which is a very limited, experience based on our body makeup. Without our body, external phenomena are perceived as being extremely bright, piercing, and luminous which we normally can only experience through very advanced meditation. All sentient beings experience this briefly when they separate from their body at death and enter the experience of the bardo of dharmata.

leave a body behind at death. This is called a "rainbow body" (Tib. *jalu*). Attaining rainbow body indicates that a person has attained full Buddhahood. These individuals do not enter the bardo at all.[41] Other supreme practitioners with equal realization take their entire body with them and enter the Celestial pure realm. Because of their realization, they also do not go through a bardo.[42]

The second type of individuals have some degree of practice and training in recognizing dharmata but have not perfected this recognition. Therefore, their realization is not sufficient to cause their physical body to dissolve into emptiness. But their practice is strong enough that they do not have to think, "I am dying; I must leave this body and go to another." This person can die in a state of samadhi or meditative absorption. There is no bardo for them as well.[43]

The third type of individual who has no, or little training must experience wandering through the bardo. Since virtually all of us are going to experience the bardo, we definitely need some kind of instruction in this topic. It is common for those who are dying

41. There have been examples of this in the last 40 years. In one example, a fairly "ordinary" lama who was in charge of a small nunnery in Tibet went into his cabin and asked not to be disturbed for seven days. When that time was up, all that was found in his cabin were his clothes, fingernails, and hair.

42. An example of this was Milarepa and Rechungpa who simply vanished at their death leaving absolutely nothing behind.

43. These individuals exhibit *Tukdam* which is remaining in meditation posture for several days after they have taken their last breath, and the area of their heart remains warm with the rest of the body being cold because there is no circulation. In a normal death, the body totally relaxes and falls over after the last breath is taken.

to experience an intense feeling of loss because they are attached to their possessions, their relationships, and the experiences of their life. Therefore, they usually regard death as a sad event and are afraid of it. But we need to recognize that the fear of death is not helpful at the time of death nor is it appropriate because no matter how strong our clinging may be, we cannot hold onto life.

The teachings on the bardo are especially pertinent for inexperienced individuals, who can use these teachings to prepare ourselves for the painful bardo of death. We will be less afraid if we know what is going to happen to us in the bardo — the appearances we will understand what the process of dying will be like. The reason to learn the stages of dissolution is so that we will know what is happening as we die. This enables us to stay calm and keep our mind stable during that process. Having a stable mind in the bardo eliminates much of the suffering usually associated with dying.

Recognizing the Stages of Dying

At the time of death, it is helpful to have confidence, which comes from understanding the process of dying. For example, we can say to ourselves: "I am not alone. I am not the only being on this planet who is going to die. Everyone dies, and death is a normal process. There's no reason why I should be particularly depressed or frightened by it." If we understand this, we can find the strength

and stability of mind to have some freedom of thinking at the time of death.

Another thing that is helpful in preparing for death is to learn the signs indicating that the moment of death is approaching. By learning these signs, we will be able to tell ourselves that death is beginning to happen and be able to prepare ourselves properly for it. These signs are both mental and physical. There are also some external signs that can be observed by other individuals as well, but what we will be principally concerned with here are the signs that the dying person will experience.

The value of understanding and remembering the stages of dying is that we will be able to identify each stage as it occurs. The stages of death can be divided into two phases — external death and internal death. The first phase is the dissolution of the four elements and the five senses.

The Dissolution and Function of the Five Elements

While we are alive, the subtle energies or winds (Skt. *prana*, Tib. *lung*) move throughout the subtle channels (Skt. *nadi*, Tib. *tsa*) in our body. These movements correspond to our mental and physical state. As we die, there is a progressive dissolution of the five elements because these elements are maintained by the subtle winds

in specific parts of our body. As this dissolution occurs, internal experiences arise in our mind and indicate which particular stage of dissolution that is occurring. If we know about these stages, we can recognize the stage of the bardo we are in.

There are four material elements in Buddhism: earth, water, fire, and air. The fifth element is consciousness and it is often called the element of space.[44] In the bardo of dying, "space" and "consciousness" have the same fundamental meaning. Each of the five elements have different characteristics: with the earth element representing solidity, water cohesion, the fire heat, and air movement. The fifth element of space has the characteristic of consciousness.[45]

Dying is the process of being born in reverse. We are born being confused because we did not realize the emptiness of phenomena and so the external world gradually grows stronger and stronger until finally phenomena appear to us as being real and solid. This confusion is what we are now experiencing as our life. When we die, this confusion, or false belief in reality, gradually dissolves along with the elements. The dissolution means that the empty nature of phenomena and our mind becomes clearer and clearer until, finally, the luminous bardo of dharmata clearly appears to us.

44. The element of "space" actually refers to the element of "ether" which supports everything else in the universe. Western science and philosophy believed in the existence of ether until 1898 when Michelson and Morley proved that light could be transmitted through space without ether.

45. The elements in Asian cultures are much different from the elements in the West. Appendix A gives a general sense of the profundity of these elements.

When we are a fetus during the process of gestation, these four material elements along with the fifth element of consciousness grow in the unity of emptiness and luminous clarity.[46] Later, when these elements are in balance, we will experience "health" and when these elements are out of balance, we will experience "illness." Then at the end of our life, these elements dissolve into one another causing the destruction of the body as a viable biological support for the mind.

In addition to these elements, every person possesses a combination of two kinds of karmic winds or energies. The first karmic wind, the wind of wisdom, has the qualities of stability and luminous clarity. The second wind, the wind of karma, is based on our virtuous and unvirtuous actions. It is this karmic wind that propels us into our particular rebirth. When we begin to die, the karmic wind begins to shut down and all the processes that were maintained by the karmic winds also shut down. The five chakras, or energy centers of our body[47] are inhabited by the karmic and wisdom winds. When we are approaching death, these winds start to weaken and

46. We can demonstrate that the mind and thoughts are insubstantial because whenever we look for the mind, we won't be able to find it. This is called the emptiness of the mind. Yet, the mind is not empty like a vacuum because it still has a continuous awareness and an ability to know, which is called lucidity or luminous clarity (Tib. *salwa*).

47. The five chakras are the crown chakra, the throat chakra, the heart chakra, the navel chakra, and the secret chakra. These are described in Appendix B.

the elements that are seated in the various chakras start to dissolve one into another.

When we are alive, there are five principle karmic winds present within the body: the pervasive wind, the digestive wind, the life or vitality wind, the upward moving wind, and the downward moving wind.[48] When these winds cease to function, the subtle channels start to break down and this causes the elements to dissolve one into another.

To understand this process, we must realize that the karmic wind is not like a physical wind that blows leaves around. What's meant by karmic wind is movement that leads to change. So as long as there is a process of change, that change constitutes what we call the "karmic wind." For example, the transformation of a human being throughout life from a child to an adolescent to an adult is a process that we attribute to the karmic wind.

At the end of our life, the karmic life-supporting wind is used up. This is not the exhaustion of all karmic wind but the exhaustion of just one stream of karmic wind that is active in maintaining a person's continuum. The karmic wind of leaving one life to enter the bardo is also a change. Karmic winds are not a unitary force but a large number of streams of imprints of actions that are functioning at any one time. At a particular point in time, some of these winds are being used up, new ones are starting, other ones are continuing,

48. See the ten subtle winds are described in detail.

and so on. So, the cessation of some karmic winds does not mean the exhaustion of all karmic winds.

In broad terms, there are two types of karma that cause the experiences we have while we are alive. These are called propelling karma and completing karma. We could have good propelling and good completing karma. Or we could have bad propelling karma and bad completing karma, good propelling karma and bad completing karma, and so on. For example, a case of good propelling karma and bad completing karma is someone who is born as a human under good circumstances but thereafter is always sick or always afflicted by mishaps. An example of bad propelling karma and good completing karma would be being born an animal (rather than a human) and spending the whole life living in great comfort with adequate food and shelter and never getting sick. An example of good propelling karma and good completing karma is being born a human and throughout the whole life having good health, being happy, and practicing the Dharma. Of course, it's much more complicated than this because even within the completing karma there can be a change during our life. For example, we could be born as a human being and live the first part of your life with many mishaps, sickness, deprivations and then spend the second half of our life in great happiness.

This process of the dissolution of elements of the body begins with the channels and winds located at the navel chakra. As the naval

channel begins to weaken, the earth element of our body begins to dissolve into the water element. When this happens, the outer, inner, and secret signs begin to appear. The outer sign of each stage of dissolution is what can be observed by an outside observer; someone other than the dying person can look at the dying person and see these outer signs. The inner sign is the dying person's own experience of this dissolution of the elements. The secret sign is the sign caused by the appearance of the dharmata. This last sign is called secret because it is normally recognized only by those with special meditation experience and realizations.

Dissolution of the Five Subtle Winds

The elements that make up our body are influenced by the channels, winds, and chakras within our body which comprise what is often called the subtle (or vajra) body. We have five main chakras: at the crown of our head, in our throat, in our heart center, in our navel, and in our secret place (the sexual organs). These chakras or subtle energy centers are supported by the body's subtle winds that keep the chakras from dissolving. There are five major winds. The first wind to dissolve after death is the pervasive wind. It is called this because it pervades the whole body. Its dissolution is followed by the second dissolution of the life-supporting wind; the third dissolution of the downward clearing wind; the fourth dissolution

of the upward clearing wind, and finally the dissolution of the fifth fire-accompanying wind.

There are five main subtle winds or energies that maintain the functions of the body. The first is the life-supporting wind that creates the vitality of a living being. The second upward moving wind is connected with talking and with eating. As the upward moving wind starts to become weaker, the voice and the desire to eat becomes weaker until the desire stops completely. The third downward clearing wind is connected to the elimination of waste and with other similar processes. As this downward wind ceases to function, the person becomes unable to void. Therefore, when the dying person ceases to void liquids and solids, it indicates that the downward clearing wind has ceased to function. The fourth subtle pervasive wind is important for movement, such as moving the arms and legs. When this wind ceases, bodily movement becomes impossible, and a feeling of paralysis sets in. The fifth subtle fire-accompanying wind involves metabolism and keeps the body warm. When this wind dissolves the body becomes cold, which is the last external sign of life.

Dissolution of the Five Elements

The first dissolution of the subtle channels occurs at the navel chakra when the element of solidity (earth) dissolves into the element of cohesion (water). The outer sign can be observed by someone

watching the dying person because the dying person becomes pallid and loses physical strength and cannot support themselves. The inner sign of this dissolution is that the dying person will notice that his or her cognition has become far less clear, far less lucid, and the person will become depressed. The secret signs are related to one's meditation practice so these signs can only be recognized by meditators. The secret sign of the first dissolution is that there will be a vague appearance of the display of dharmata, and the person will see something like a shimmering mirage. As the dying process progresses, the appearance of the clear light of dharmata becomes clearer and clearer.

In the second dissolution, the subtle channels begin to break down in the heart chakra causing the dissolution of the water element (cohesion) into the element of fire (heat or metabolism). The outer sign is that the mouth, nose, and throat of the dying person begins to dry up. The inner sign is that the person's mind will become irritated and agitated. The secret sign is that the previous appearances of dharmata that were like a vague glistening, or mirages will intensify and coalesce and appear as something like smoke.

In the third dissolution, the channels of the throat chakra begin to break down and, as a result, the element of fire (warmth or metabolism) will dissolve into the element of air or wind (movement). The outer sign of this stage is that the dying person's breath becomes cold, and the warmth of the body begins to diminish. The inner

sign is that the mind alternates between being clear and unclear like a kind of wildness. The secret sign is that the appearances of dharmata will increase somewhat and appear like small flashes of red light that are something like fireflies dancing about in the sky in front of the dying person. This indicates that the dharmata can be perceived a little more clearly than in previous stages.

In the fourth dissolution the channels in the secret chakra at the area of our genitals dissolve. At this time the fifth element air (movement) dissolves into the sixth element, space, or consciousness. The external sign is that breathing becomes very difficult with a long interval between inhalations and each inhalation being forced and difficult. Breathing may almost stop at this point. The inner sign is that the person will begin to hallucinate as various things appear to them. People with mostly negative karma will see very frightening things, and those with fairly good karma will see things that they perceive as being quite pleasant. The secret sign at this time is that the appearance of dharmata becomes more stable, like the flame of a lamp. In spite of the stability of the appearance of dharmata at this point, a person with no previous training will not recognize it.

While the subtle winds and channels are breaking down and the elements are dissolving one into another, a gradual impairment of the senses occurs, and the dying person gradually stops being able to see, hear, smell, taste, and even feel. The eye consciousness has dissolved, so the dying person can no longer see external forms.

The olfactory consciousness has dissolved, so the dying person can no longer smell and so forth.

At the culmination the fifth stage of dissolution, the breathing stops. With the cessation of the breathing, the element of consciousness dissolves into the element of space. This final dissolution marks the point of no return. Up until this point, the process can be reversed.[49] If the illness or injury that caused the death can be treated, the dying process can be thwarted, and the person can continue to live. However, as we move into the process of the internal dissolution there is no possibility of reversal. This internal dissolution is the dissolution of the thoughts. It is after this dissolution that the person cannot be revived.

The Dissolution of the Mental Consciousness

After the dissolution of external appearances what was just described, the internal dissolution of mental consciousness[50] begins. In most Buddhist traditions consciousness is described in terms of eight consciousnesses: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and tactile sensory consciousnesses of the sense faculties; the sixth mental consciousness; the seventh afflicted consciousness; and the eighth all-basis

49. There is an extensive literature on "near death experiences" and these individuals often encounter great bliss, no concern for external phenomena, great warmth, and telepathy which are most likely the result of a transitory encounter with dharmata.

50. See the description of the eight consciousnesses.

or *alaya* consciousness. The mental events which occur in the sixth mental consciousness are classified into the 51 different types of mental events. The relationship between these consciousnesses and thoughts can be compared to the ocean and its waves. The consciousness of a person is like the ocean and their thoughts are like the waves which create turbulence on the ocean's surface.

There are 80 different kinds of thoughts of the mental consciousnesses, and they are classified into three types: thoughts connected with anger, thoughts connected with desire, and thoughts connected with ignorance. All these thoughts will gradually dissolve and the final cessation of these 80 kinds of thoughts is part of the process of internal dissolution.

The Dissolution of the Life Supporting Wind

While we are alive, the life-supporting wind resides in the central channel. As long as the life-supporting wind remains active in the central channel, we are alive. One of the functions of the life-supporting wind is to keep the fundamental constituents that we receive from our parents at conception in their proper places. As the life-supporting wind fills the central channel, it keeps the subtle white constituent (Skt. *bindu*, Tib. *tigle*) received from our father at the top of the central channel. The life-supporting wind also keeps the subtle red constituent, received from our mother, in its place at the bottom of the central channel. As long as all the channels remain

in place and are functioning, we are alive. But when we are dying, the life-supporting wind starts to weaken. As the life-supporting wind begins to dissolve, the white and red constituents are no longer held in place and the white drop descends in the central channel and the red drop ascends in the central channel until they meet at the level of the heart. This causes various things to happen.

First, with the diminishing of the life-supporting wind, the white constituent starts to descend from the top of the head through the central channel. As it does, the dying person experiences everything going white with the experience of a complete and pervasive perception of whiteness. The cognitive experience of this descent of the white constituent is the gradual cessation of the 33 thoughts connected with anger. Since angry thoughts are the most intense type of thought, they are the ones to subside first. As we experience this pervasive whiteness, all thoughts of anger stop. This results in the experience of pleasure rather than suffering at this point.

Next, as the life-supporting wind diminishes, the subtle red constituent obtained from our mother located below the navel begins to rise up the central channel towards the heart. At this time, we will experience everything turning red. Along with the red constituent or *bindu* rising, the 40 thoughts connected with attachment or desire will cease. As these thoughts cease, the previous experience of well-being will increase. So again, there is no experience of suffering or displeasure at this point in the bardo.

Because the life-supporting wind is no longer functioning, there is nothing keeping the white and red constituents apart. As a result, they meet in the center at the level of the heart. When they meet at the heart chakra, the person's consciousness is enclosed or sandwiched between these two constituents giving the dying person the experience of a pervasive blackness called a "swoon." Everything turns black and the remaining seven types of thoughts that are connected with ignorance cease. At this point, all 80 types of thinking have temporarily ceased because of the shutdown of the life-supporting wind and its related functions. The subtle constituents and the mind are gathered together in the heart chakra. When this happens, the last stage of the dissolution of the element of space dissolves into the clear light. At this moment the ground clear light appears to the dead person.

Preparing for the Stages of Dissolution

If, while we are alive, we have familiarized ourselves with the clear light through our meditation, we may be able to recognize the ground clear light in the bardo. If we have not familiarized ourselves with it while alive, we will experience this moment as being merely a state of unconsciousness. This is why it is important to practice Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation while we are alive because these practices help us during these stages of dissolution in the bardo. If we have achieved good Shamatha meditation or at

least some degree of mental stability, then, as the stages of dissolution occur, our awareness actually becomes more and more stable and lucid. This one-pointed concentration gives us the ability to recognize the stages of dissolution as they occur.

During this whole process of dissolution, it is of great benefit to think about the six recollections at this time in the bardo. They are: (1) the Buddha, (2) the Dharma, (3) the Sangha, (4) samadhi, (5) our yidam, and (6) generosity. By recollecting the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, we are able to pray to them while we are dying. By recollecting our samadhi, we are able to actually meditate during the stages of dissolution. Thinking about generosity, we recollect our accumulation of merit and make aspirations based on this merit. By recollecting our yidam, we will be able to make aspirations to the deities to help us at this critical time. By remembering all six recollections we can gain some freedom during the process of dissolution. If we have developed an authentic realization of Vipashyana meditation, we will have the special opportunity to recognize the ground clear light when it arises. Also, if we have developed our mindfulness and alertness, this will give us the ability to take control of our mind and consciously go through the whole process of dying.

The Summary of the Fourth Bardo of Dying

In this chapter we looked at the bardo at the time of death. I am well aware that from one point of view this is a very unpleasant thing to talk about. Once, a non-Buddhist said to me: "Look, the purpose of religion is to provide consolation and comfort. Buddhism doesn't do this. All Buddhists talk about is emptiness of self, emptiness, death, suffering, and impermanence." Also, in an interview that I gave in Boulder someone said to me: "Don't you think it's time that we Buddhists started to talk about things that will make people happy? All we ever talk about is impermanence and depressing things." In spite of the fact that people often come up with objections to these topics, the fact remains that death is not a Buddhist invention. It is the natural and inevitable culmination of birth. Since no one can avoid death, it would seem worthwhile to prepare ourselves for it so that this inevitable event will be a more pleasant experience.

As we have just seen there is benefit to a long-term consideration of what will happen to us at the time of death. But there is also an immediate benefit as well. Normally, we spend much of our life with an underlying anxiety, and much of this anxiety is a fear of what is going to happen to us in the end. This anxiety is really centered around dying as much as we may try not to think about it. If we understand exactly what dying is and what will happen to us at the time of our death, we can dispel much of this anxiety

because we will have the confidence of knowing that we are prepared for death. As Milarepa said: "I initially fled to the mountains out of fear of death. But as a result of this, I have now attained a state beyond death."

In the present-day, great practitioners have continued to attain high states of realization — the rainbow body, the celestial state, and so on — and there is really no reason why we cannot also achieve these same states ourselves. But even if we do not practice enough to achieve these states, practicing Dharma that is oriented towards the preparation for death will greatly benefit us. And even if we don't practice, just knowing what will happen to us when we die will be helpful because it will prepare us to some extent for this difficult time. If we are going somewhere, it seems worthwhile to find out about the place where we are going. So, even simply knowing about what happens when we die should be of great importance.

Questions

> In the context of the bardo, what is the definition of the moment of death?

First of all, the term "bardo" refers to an interval between two things, a period which follows the ending of something and precedes the beginning of something else. So, we use the term "bardo" to refer to these four or six states which are periods in between one thing and another. We have the natural bardo or interval between birth

and death, the bardo of the time of death, the bardo of dharmata, the bardo of becoming, and so on. The basic defining moment of death is the separation of body and mind because what defines us as being a "living" being is that the body and the mind of that person are combined in such a way that anything that happens to one will affect the other. For example, if your physical body becomes ill, that causes you to have a mental experience of pain and suffering, and so on. When we die, this separation of our body and mind causes our mind to become unconscious. When the mind emerges from that state of unconsciousness, not only does the mind no longer reside in the previous body, but it is unable to re-enter it. This is distinct from states of unconsciousness that we experience when we are living because when we become unconscious, such as falling asleep, we always re-arise from unconsciousness and are still in our body. But with the unconsciousness produced by the separation of body and mind, the consciousness cannot re-enter the body, and that is the definition of death.

> Rinpoche, can the period of time from death to rebirth vary?

At the longest, the dissolution takes two or three days. But normally this dissolution process will occur in one day. In the case of a sudden death, such as an accident, the whole thing can happen very, very quickly and doesn't even follow the definite sequence I have been describing.

> If you become distracted in the bardo, do you then automatically go into the next period or phase?

It's possible to regain awareness after you've become distracted during the bardo. As for the duration, it is generally measured in what are called "meditation days," and it's said that the inner dissolution generally lasts for five or six meditation days. Now a meditation day is the period in which that person can remain undistracted in their meditation times five. If someone can rest with an undistracted mind for one hour, then it would last for five or six hours. If they can rest with an undistracted mind for half an hour it would last for two and a half or three hours. And if someone has no meditation experience or training, it all happens very quickly.

> If we learn of a friend who has died, is it possible to recite prayers of instructions after their death without being in their actual presence?

Yes, this would definitely be a big help for the person because when someone has died and regained consciousness in the bardo, their consciousness has the miraculous ability of traveling automatically wherever they want to go. Usually, the person's consciousness tends to return to those persons they were most attached to. If you were someone's friend who had died, they are likely to visit you at some point. Now, if you recite, for example, *The Bardo Thodol* after their death and you have the good intention of benefiting the person with your recitation, they will be able to directly experience the quality

of your intention and therefore will feel good about it and listen to you and what you recite may help them a great deal.[51]

> If someone dies in a sudden accident, does the body still go through this process and are there still these signs?

The dissolution of the physical elements is hard to talk about in that case, but certainly the final stages — the cessation of the thoughts connected with the three main disturbing emotions and so on — would definitely occur. However, they might occur very quickly.

> If the dying person is unconscious for several days or possibly several weeks before their death, how can you best guide them through this process when they can't tell you what they are experiencing?

When someone is in a coma before death and therefore cannot communicate with you, it is believed that they may still be able to hear and understand some of what you say to them. Therefore, it is still worthwhile to attempt to communicate to them during this dissolution process. The way to help them would be to give them this guidance in a very gentle and reassuring way.

> I worked as a pediatric nurse with children dying of leukemia and cancer. I noticed that in many cases, three or

51. In the beginning of the bardo, an English speaker can understand the recordings in English. Later on, the person has clairvoyance so that they can benefit from it being read in Tibetan even if they don't understand Tibetan. See the Bibliography for Thrangu Rinpoche reading the *Bardo Thodol* in Tibetan.

> four days before their death, the children would complain about a weight pressing down on their chest making it uncomfortable for them to lie flat, and they would ask to sit up. Also, for at least a period of twenty-four hours before their death, they would not void any liquids or solids. In some cases, and in the case of one person in particular, I noticed that the voice seemed to disappear inward and to become less distinct. Is this connected with the dissolution of the elements?

Yes, it is connected with the dissolution of the elements. As described earlier, there are five root winds, or energies, that make up the vitality of a living being. The subtle wind that is connected with talking and eating is called the upward moving wind. As the upward moving wind begins to become weaker and cease, it causes the dying person's voice and the desire to eat to become weaker. Then there is a second subtle wind called the downward eliminating wind which is connected with the elimination of waste and urine. As this downward wind ceases to function, the person becomes unable to void.

> There is more and more information about near death experiences in which people have died and then been brought back to life. Is there any significance in this other than the obvious change in their lives, both for themselves and for others?

The texts on the bardo say that even after a person has gone through the four stages of the physical dissolution of the elements, it is possible for the person to be brought back to life. However, if the complete process of the internal dissolution of the subtle constituents has been experienced, then it is impossible for the person to return to life. So, when people have near death experiences, it seems that they have gone through the coarse dissolution of the physical elements and then been brought back to life.

As for the significance of this, their experience can sometimes be an inspiration to others but, realistically, the accounts of people who have gone through near death experiences often do not seem to have much of an effect on other people.

> There are many reported near death experiences, and they are all very similar stories of seeing a white light and going through a tunnel. Have these persons actually died and gone through all the stages?

It is generally said that the white appearance is the last stage we can go through and come back. That would make sense because these experiences you are describing are the beginning of the experience of the stage of whiteness.

> Why is Yamantaka called "the slayer of the lord of death," and is this practice helpful in connection with dying?

Yamantaka is a wrathful deity, and it is normal for wrathful deities to be given names that make them sound really scarry and fearsome. In Sanskrit, Yamantaka means "the slayer of the lord of death." But this does not mean that this particular yidam is more connected with preparing for death in the bardo than any other deity.

> When we are with someone who is dying, which of these bardo teachings are we able to share? Which should we not share?

It depends on the individual person. If the dying person has no antipathy towards the Dharma and if it would not in any way upset them or make them angry, then you can tell them absolutely everything. On the other hand, if the person is unreceptive to it because of a strong different belief or other reason, then you really cannot say very much.

> If someone dies under heavy pain-killing medication, how will this affect their experience of the bardo?

Well, the medication would probably prevent a recognition of the stages of dissolution in the bardo of dying. But when the mind and body have separated, even though the mind is still in some way inhabiting the body, the mind would no longer be affected by the medication.

> But don't you prevent a mind from taking rebirth?

Is it, then, unvirtuous to be a nun? For instance, a woman who could have had five children but, instead, becomes a nun before she has had any children would have prevented five beings from taking a human rebirth. Would that be an unvirtuous action?

> Is resuscitation during the process of death only possible for one dying as a result of sudden conditions, for instance, an accident? Or is it possible to revive someone whose life force is waning?

It is possible that a dying person could have the karma to be resuscitated. But in that case, the karma of the person would include the karma of resuscitation.

> Rinpoche, you said that the white constituent comes from our father, and the red constituent comes from our mother. Does this mean that we still have a karmic connection of these materials from our parents?

The white and red constituents here are not the original sperm and ovum themselves. Sperm and ovum develop into the entire body. So in that sense, we could think that our whole body, not just these two constituents, are an outgrowth of the original substances from our parents. These red and white constituents in the head and navel chakra are like the kernels of two aspects of our body. They correspond to but are not actually the original substances needed for conception.

> Rinpoche, how should we treat the body of the person who has died? In this country, at least in some states, it is customary for the body to be removed immediately after death and to be placed in a mortuary where all the blood is removed, and it is embalmed. This seems hardly helpful to the person in the bardo.

Well, there are organ donors who, because they have great compassion, are willing to give up parts of their bodies such as their eyes or kidneys or whatever immediately after death. Individuals with this intention are probably not particularly attached to their bodies once they have died. But, with the exception of people who want to donate their body, most people usually tend to be attached to their bodies. The mind of the person in the bardo will still regard this dead body as their body and identify with it. So, it is best if the body can be treated as gently as possible after death.

> Is family planning right or wrong?

I have no fixed opinion on the matter. All details of karma are perceptible only to the Buddha. Personally, I see no great fault in preventing conception. But, of course, once conception has occurred, to kill the fetus would be to destroy a sentient being — an act of killing. That would be an unvirtuous action. But I cannot see much non-virtue in the prevention of conception.



An original calligraphy of OM AH HUNG by Thrangu Rinpoche The lower figure is his signature and seal.

• 5 •

PREPARING FOR OUR OWN DEATH

In the previous chapter, we looked at the process and the experience of the mind during death. How do we prepare for the bardo of dying? What are some specific things we can do to prepare ourselves for these experiences and where do we place our attention during these experiences?

Contemplating Impermanence

The first preparation is to understand impermanence, becoming familiar with the idea that death is inevitable even though the time of death is uncertain. Knowing what will happen to us when we die will also be helpful, so we should study the teachings on the six bardos. Then, when we begin to die, there are other things we can do. To begin with, we can let go of everything that we are attached to. At the time of death, we should imagine ourselves offering all our worldly possessions to the Three Jewels. As we are dying, we

may also find ourselves worrying about work and activities and projects that we could not finish, but at this stage we should forget about all of our unfinished business. None of these things — not even our relatives and our friends — can help us very much at this stage. We must leave them as we go beyond this life because being attached to them will only cause us more suffering.

Right now, we can consciously try to reduce the amount of attachment we have towards everything of this life and be aware of the unhappiness that goes along with our attachment to these things. Someone who has never encountered the Dharma and, therefore, has never thought of an alternative to this attachment will naturally be very attached to the things and appearances of this life because that is all that they know. As long as they are attached to friends, possessions, and so forth, at death they will experience a forced separation from these objects and will be unwilling to give them up. The solution is to meditate lifetime on all these attachments throughout our whole lifetime. So, this contemplation on impermanence of everything will be of great benefit to us.

Confessing Our Negative Deeds

The state of our mind and thoughts during the dying process is of great importance. As we approach death, it is important to recall any unvirtuous actions and especially any violations of our vows or samayas and confess them in the presence of a visualized pres-

ence of our gurus and the Three Jewels. We can also confess all the things that we probably have done but don't remember.

Having confessed either in the actual presence of our guru or in the visualized presence of the guru, we can do Guru Yoga practice[52] by visualizing either our root or a lineage guru we are particularly devoted to and placing their image above our head. Jamgon Kongtrul has said that it is acceptable to consider, for example, Marpa, Milarepa, or Gampopa as our root guru even though we have not met them. Just by visualizing them above our head and supplicating them, we will receive their blessings. We also receive their empowerments and gain the confidence of having actually received their blessings. If we can do this while we are dying, it will be of tremendous benefit to us.

Choosing the Right Circumstances at Death

While we are dying, we should also pay attention to our environment and ensure that those persons who are surrounding us are agreeable and supportive of our intention to die harmoniously. These attendants should have an attitude of accepting and encouraging the Dharma and should encourage us to die consciously. They should not be persons that we are excessively attached to or people whom we dislike.

52. Guru Yoga is the fourth special Preliminary practice. We usually visualize our guru and say either 100,000 verses or do one million mantras of the guru.

Choosing our companions carefully at the time of death is of great importance. We should avoid being surrounded by individuals who will wail and weep while we are dying because this will just upset us. On the other hand, we also don't want people who don't care about us, because their lack of caring will also upset us. Particularly, we don't want people at our death who are simply waiting for us to die so that they can get their hands on our material things. So, it is important to carefully choose our companions when we are dying.

In preparation for our own death, we should learn as much as we can about the stages of the elements dissolving into each other and the external, internal, and secret signs of each dissolution. We should especially be familiar with the stages of internal dissolution — the whiteness, redness, and blackness — and actually plan how we are going to deal with each stage as it arises. It is best that those who are going to surround us at the time of death know these stages as well, so that they will be able to tell from the external signs of death how far we have gone in the dying process and then be able to provide us with proper support.

Lessening the Disturbing Emotions

During this whole process, a dying person may become quite fearful or very sad and anxious about what is going to occur. They may be tormented by a feeling of trying to cling to this life and wanting to be with those who others surround them. None of this,

of course, is going to help them very much. So, a dying person needs to remind themselves that they can't allow themselves to be overcome by panic. At the time of death, the best situation is to be with people who have the greatest faith and also to let go of what will be left behind. Further, the dying person should be as mindful and attentive as possible to the present moment so they make the right choices and can find the right path to take.

If a caregiver is present, he or she can greatly help in the dying process by providing the right environment, support, and conditions for the dying person. The caregiver should strongly encourage the dying person to dispel their fear and anxiety by reminding them to be attentive and telling them that this is a time of great opportunity for them. The caregiver should also allow the dying person to relax as much as possible so that they will be free from all their disturbing emotions.

The caregiver should specially make sure to avoid situations like the following. Once in Sikkim, I was with someone who was passing away. While he was dying, his sons were fighting over the land that they were to inherit. They actually involved their father in the dispute and were trying to force him to decide for them by yelling at him as he was dying by saying who was going to get how much of the land. Another situation that we don't want to experience is to have relatives or other loved ones who are so attached that they grieve uncontrollably in our dying process and start exclaiming

things like: "You are dying! I can't stand it. Don't leave me behind!" At the time of death, we want to avoid these situations of conflict or attachment. The caregiver should provide an environment in which the person can concentrate on the dying process and be as undisturbed as possible.

As the dissolution process indicates, the obstacles to be overcome at the time of death are the disturbing emotions, particularly attachment and anger. To prepare for dealing with the bardo, it is good to work as much as we can on weakening any disturbing emotions. For example, we may have a great amount of attachment to the experiences and material things of our lifetime. We can be attached to our friends, our family members, our possessions, food, wealth, various circumstances, and even places. When we die, we will suffer tremendously from fear of losing them, so we should lessen our attachment while we are alive. We should reflect upon the total uselessness of being attached to material things and people. Our practice of meditation can also help here.

In our life we sometimes experience anger and aggression. We often have a tremendous anger for those whom we perceive as enemies:[53] such as persons threatening us or our status. We can also be attached to our jealousy and pride. All kinds of aggression become a tremendous problem for us in the bardo, and we should realize that

53. The term "enemies" includes persons we don't like, people who hinder or obstruct our plans, and people who try to belittle or shame us.

these emotions do not do us any good while we are alive as well. So, while we have the chance, the fundamental approach is to recognize that the cultivation of disturbing emotions is unnecessary and ill-advised and that we should try to eliminate them. There are three approaches to how we can weaken our disturbing emotions.

The first remedy to weaken the disturbing emotions is "distancing," which was taught by the Buddha in the sutras. This means that we should distance ourselves from any disturbing emotion. We do this by recognizing the presence of the disturbing emotion and then thinking about how much harm this disturbing emotion has done to us. For example, we might think, "I am afflicted by the disturbing emotion of attachment," or pride, aversion, and so on. First, we recognize that this is a disturbing emotion, then we think about the actual effect it has had on our life and also on the lives of others. What causes us to continue having these disturbing emotions is the misconception that somehow these disturbing emotions help us. For instance, we think that we need a particular disturbing emotion to function, or we think that this makes us more effective. If we begin to understand that the disturbing emotions are not helpful and that they can actually harm everyone who is connected to us, we will naturally wish to get rid of them. The desire to eliminate a disturbing emotion creates a distance in our mind and makes it easier to let it go.

The second approach for weakening the disturbing emotions is to attack them directly. Basically, this technique consists of making our practice a remedy for a specific disturbing emotion. This can be applied to any meditation practice. For example, an excellent practice to purify all our obscurations and wrongdoing is Vajrayana practice. In this practice we visualize the deity Vajrasattva above our head with the 100-syllable mantra in our heart and the amrita of wisdom descending from Vajrasattva's mantra in his heart, entering the top of our head and filling our entire body.

During the practice, we would, of course, include all the obscurations and wrongdoing as the objects for purification, but we would focus particularly on the disturbing emotions that are our biggest problem. We might think: "Well, I'm a jealous person" or "I'm an ignorant person" or "I'm an aggressive person." Whatever the disturbing emotion is, while we are doing this practice, the disturbing emotions are completely purified by the amrita which is flowing from the body of Vajrasattva. We could also use this technique with Chenrezig practice. In the same way, we would visualize Chenrezig above our head with the six-syllable mantra in his heart and rays of light from the mantra radiating out and purifying all of our disturbing emotions most especially the disturbing emotions, that we are focusing on at that time.[54]

54. Chenrezig's mantra is OM MA NI PE ME HUNG with: OM purifying pride, MA purifying attachment, NI ignorance, PE purifying desire, ME purifying greed, and HUNG purifying anger. See the chart.

The third approach of dealing with disturbing emotions is called "eradication" or directly expelling the disturbing emotion from our mind. This is done with the "samadhi of dharmata." We enter a state of onepointed absorption resting in a direct recognition of the nature of phenomena (Skt. *dharmata*).

In this practice we also look directly at the disturbing emotion and perceive its true nature, which is its lack of true existence, its emptiness. For example, when we become angry, we normally react forcefully and let our mind go unchecked with emotion. Instead of doing that, we can look directly at the anger and try to discover where the anger is located and whether or not it has any substantial characteristics. For example, we would say to ourselves: "Well, I am angry. Exactly what is this anger? Where is it? Is it inside or outside of my body? If this anger is mine, then surely it must be inside my body. Is it in my head or heart or my body?" and so on. We do this experientially by carefully trying to track this emotion down to find where exactly it is seated in our body. If it is located somewhere, we will not be able to find it because it is our emotion. And furthermore, if it exists, it should have some kind of substantial characteristic — some kind of shape, some kind of color, some kind of size, some kind of location, and so on. We keep looking for these characteristics until we have resolved through direct experience that the disturbing emotion of anger does not have any of these characteristics. When we experience that, not intellectually but directly, it causes the nature of the disturbing emotion to dis-

solve. This will pacify the disturbing emotion in the moment, but when we emerge from this recognition of the disturbing emotion's nature, it may come up again, in which case we repeat the process.

When we apply any of these three remedies to our disturbing emotions, they must be applied continually. One application of the remedy will not eradicate the disturbing emotion. But if we gradually cultivate the habit of applying these remedies to our disturbing emotions, they will gradually weaken. Moreover, it is very important to cultivate the habit of remediating these disturbing emotions while we are alive because, at the time of death, they can be particularly powerful and significant and take over our mind causing us harm after death.

It is very important that we stay in a positive state of mind while we are dying. If, throughout our life, we have spent most of our time worrying, being anxious or fearful, allowing the disturbing emotions to take over, then as we are dying, they will certainly come up again and determine the direction we go to in the bardo. If, on the other hand, we have devoted most of our time to being mindful and have actively remedied the disturbing emotions as they arose, then at the time of death, this habit will help us greatly.

Posture in Dying

When we are actually dying, if possible, it is best to be sitting up. If that's not possible, we should try to lie on the right side of our body

in the "lion's posture" that the Buddha took at the time of his passing away. It's not just a good posture because the Buddha did it; this posture also makes the subtle channels, winds, and drops more pliant.[55]

Meditation as We Die

What kind of meditation should we do as we are dying? We should concentrate on the practice we have the greatest confidence during our lifetime. If we mainly practiced Shamatha meditation, we would practice that; if we practiced Vipashyana meditation, we would practice that; if we practiced Vipashyana according to a specific method such as the Mahamudra or Dzogchen, we should implement the instructions of that practice; if we assiduously practiced a meditation on a particular yidam, we would do that practice while in the bardo. In brief, we apply the instructions and practice with which we have the greatest familiarity. For example, if our principal practice was Shamatha meditation, then, at the time of death, we would attempt to relax our mind as much as possible to be free of obstacles, such as regret and agitation, and use mindfulness to our mind. That will enable us to resist the tendency to be overpowered by the various frightening appearances that appear at death.

Other practices for preparing for death are the practices of relative bodhichitta. Jamgon Kongtrul wrote that if we can die doing the

55. We lie on our right side with our right hand cradling our head and legs on top of one another slightly bent. Thrangu Rinpoche normally slept in this lion's posture.

practice of Sending and Receiving (Tib. *tonglen*), that would the most profound or beneficial practice to do at the time of death. For those who have emphasized the practice of Mind Training (Tib. *lojong*) by consistently cultivating love, compassion, bodhichitta, and benevolence, this practice will also be a very powerful help during the dying process. This is because if we die in a state of love and compassion, we will naturally carry this peaceful state of mind into the bardo. Then if we begin seeking our rebirth with that benevolent state of mind, this motivation of love and compassion will naturally arise within us in the next lifetime.

If our main practice was either Mahamudra or Dzogchen, we should go through the dying process resting in the nature of our mind. While dying we would continue to relax in that recognition, regardless of whatever appearances arise from the various stages of dissolution. By staying in the recognition of our mind's nature, we will recognize the ground clear light when it arises. This recognition is called "the meeting of the mother and child."[56]

If our principal practice was the Leap Over practice of Dzogchen, which includes the yogic practices of light, darkness[57] and so forth, we would go through the stages of dissolution within the conscious

56. The "mother" is the luminous light of the dharmata. When the advanced practitioner meets this luminosity, they will recognize it as the luminous clarity from his or her previous meditation, known as the child. This is therefore called "the mother and the child."

57. These are practices such as sky gazing and dark retreat, are described in more detail in Thrangu Rinpoche's book *Luminous Clarity*.

recognition of the appearances that arise through those stages as the inseparable unity of appearances and emptiness to guard ourselves against an ignorance of the nature of phenomena.

If we principally practiced the creation stage of a yidam, we would maintain the clear appearance of that deity during the dying process. Because of the power of the mind at the time of death, we could receive the blessing of the deity and be reborn in that deity's realm without a great deal of disturbance or unpleasant hallucinations in the bardo.

If our principal practice was Subtle Heat (Tib. *tummo*), then during the dissolution stage of dying — particularly the sequential dissolution of the whiteness, redness, and blackness — we would do our Subtle Heat practice and thereby experience these stages of dying as the emergence of the wisdom of the union of bliss and emptiness.

Another beneficial preparation for going through the dying process is the practice of "taking illness and pain onto the path" from Mahamudra practice. While we are alive, whenever we experience physical pain or sickness, we can do this practice of looking directly at the nature of the sensation of the pain or illness. This practice has three major benefits. First it is very helpful for our practice of meditation in general. Second, it actually alleviates the suffering of the illness to some extent. And third, if our death is painful, it prepares us to be able to rest our mind during the dying process.

Someone who has little meditation experience but a strong devotion for their guru should practice devotion to the guru during the dying process. For example, during the first stage of dissolution when earth dissolves into water, and the outer, inner, and secret signs of this stage arise, the individual would visualize their guru in their heart and supplicate the guru one-pointedly with faith and devotion. Then at the stage when water dissolves into fire and the sign of this stage arises, they would visualize the guru in their navel and supplicate the guru. Then during the stage when fire dissolves into wind, they would visualize the guru inside their head at the level of the forehead and supplicate the guru. Finally, in the stage when the winds dissolve into consciousness, they would visualize the guru some distance above their head and try to dissolve their mind into their guru's heart. The locations mentioned are at the same locations of each of the chakras.

Questions

> Rinpoche, if someone who is well-trained should suffer a long period of dementia or impaired mental faculties before their death, would they still be able to retain the necessary information needed at the time of their death?

They would probably still appear to be in that state of dementia to an outside observer, but they might internally reclaim some of their faculties as they approach the moment of death. However, that

might not be evident to the caregiver. For example, there are a lot of reports of people who have been completely unresponsive who emerge from comas and then report they were aware of what was going around them and who visited them, and so on.

> Rinpoche, you described that with the dissolution of the life supporting energy, the white subtle drop sinks and the red subtle drop rises inside the central channel. A Tibetan medical text says that ignorance is located in the head and in the middle part of the body and it moves up from the bottom of the body to where there are 500 nerves connected to the navel. I'm wondering what the difference is between these two descriptions.

The context of these two descriptions is somewhat different. The description here is concerned with an explanation of what is experienced during the stages of dying and specifically the appearances that result from the withdrawal of the life-wind. One experiences white, red, and then black caused by the downward and upward movement of the white and red subtle drops respectively.

The explanation in the Four Medical Tantras is a description of the conditions that cause illness. In order to diagnose an illness, one must first recognize its place of origin and, therefore, the seats of the humors are identified in the medical texts.

> But is it the same channel as the black channel, the white channel, the red channel?

They are probably different channels because the channels explained in the Four Medical Tantras are those which are necessary to understand how to maintain good health. In the explanation of the bardo, the central channel is normally considered to be empty of content except for the inflating life-supporting wind which fills it so that the constituents are kept in place.

> If someone dies quickly, like in a car accident, the shutting down happens very fast. When do they actually know that they have died?

That, again, would depend upon the degree of a person's training. Someone who is well-trained in the path, and especially in the preparation for the bardo, would likely recognize that they are dead much quicker than another person.

> It has been said that one should not touch the body for three days after death. If you have to remove someone's body before the three days are up, how do you keep them from being very upset? Don't they need to be around their body for the three days and see their body disintegrating to let go of it?

Most commentaries on the bardo say that immediately after death, people are quite attached to their corpse but that, as time goes on, they become disgusted with it and want to see it destroyed.

Because of that, it shouldn't be too much of a problem if the body is disposed of before the time the three days are up.[58]

> Rinpoche, I was told by Lama Chödrak that when beings are very confused and frightened, doing Chenrezig practice helps a lot in that situation. Why is Chenrezig practice in this situation so beneficial?

Generally speaking, the three bodhisattvas called the "Lords of the Three Families," are the embodiment of three aspects of the wisdom of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. The aspect of wisdom is embodied by Manjushri; supplicating and meditating on him is especially effective in increasing our wisdom. The ability of all buddhas and bodhisattvas to spread the Dharma is embodied by Vajrapani. Therefore, supplicating and meditating on Vajrapani is especially effective for alleviating obstacles and impediments. The kindness, love, and compassion of all buddhas and bodhisattvas is embodied in Chenrezig and so, supplicating and meditating on Chenrezig is particularly effective in this situation.

> Rinpoche, I don't think my mother will live much longer. She isn't a Buddhist and I'm wondering if there is anything I can say or do that would help her in going through the experience of dying.

58. There have been several stories from delogs (those who died and came alive many days later) who report that when they saw their own dead body, they saw it as a dead pig or some other disgusting thing and wondered why it was not removed because they did not recognize their own corpse.

It is good to have positive thoughts and a peaceful state of mind just before dying. People dying can be depressed and sad, thinking, "Why is this bad thing happening to me?" But they should not think like this. Rather, they should think that dying is something that happens to everyone, in fact, to all living beings. It's like being on a large highway that everyone is on and thinking, that "I and all beings are going to die, that happens to everyone so, I should develop an acceptance of this event." To keep that in mind creates a mind that becomes stable and calm at the time of death. Helping create that state of mind is very good and very beneficial.

We should do this ourselves and we should also advise others who are dying to do this. We should say to that person, "It is time to be calm and stable, to keep a positive outlook, not to become sad and depressed, and to think that this happens to everyone. And so, you should have a positive outlook in this process." Doing that should help the person not to be sad and depressed. Also reciting prayers can be good whether you recite the prayer verbally or not. If there is a fear of death, whether a Buddhist or non-Buddhist, it is good to do a prayer, such as to take refuge in the Three Jewels as Buddhists or to praying to Jesus for those who are Christians, or however it is done in that person's religion.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MANI MANTRA

Each Syllable is a certain color and purifies a particular disturbing emotion.

ཨོཾ	མ	ཉི	པདྨེ	ཧཱུྃ
OM	MA	NI	PADME	HUNG
white	green	yellow	blue red	black
pride	jealousy	all kleshas/ stupidity	desire	anger

• 6 •

PHOWA: THE EJECTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Of the six bardos, we are still concerned with the fourth bardo of the time of death. In the previous chapter we discussed the practices needed to prepare for the bardo of dying. It is traditional that some instruction on the ejection of consciousness (Tib. *Phowa*) be given at this point.

Phowa is a particular technique based upon the relationship between the body and the mind. When we die, our perception of everything changes a great deal because our body and mind are separated. While we are alive, our body and mind are so closely linked with each other that they seem to be one thing with both physical and mental experiences occurring together at the same time. We also have the belief and feeling that the mind resides inside the body. At the time of death, however, we will want to eject the consciousness residing in our body.

Phowa is presented in this chapter because this practice is very beneficial for a person who has just died. There are three major points that need to be understood about the ejection of consciousness. First, we need to know the time which is appropriate for Phowa to be performed. Second, we need to know how to train in actually doing Phowa. And third, we need to know how to apply this skill at the time of death.

The practice of Phowa varies with the degree of our realization. Great yogins who have achieved consummate realization do not need to do Phowa because they will naturally take rebirth in a pure realm or, sometimes, even attain Buddhahood in the bardo without depending upon Phowa to achieve liberation. In spite of this, several realized mahasiddhas have performed some form of Phowa at the conclusion of their lives. Although they did not need to do so for their own benefit, it is assumed that they did so to serve as an example for others. Renowned among these were the great Indian scholar Nagarjuna who did Phowa for his students and the Tibetan translator Marpa who, at the end of his life, caused his consort Dakmema to melt into light and dissolve into him. Afterwards he then sat up straight and said to his attendants, "If you perform Phowa, do it like this." Then he blew the top of his skull off and caused a sphere of five-colored light to shoot up into the sky.

Many other siddhas have performed similar displays at the time of their deaths such as shooting white light adorned with larger and

smaller multi-colored spheres of light out of their heads and so on. But in all of these cases, while these individuals were exhibiting something that is similar to the Phowa, they did not actually depend upon it for the achievement of liberation. However, when we study and practice Phowa, we are concerned with how it is practiced by a practitioner who does not have that high a degree of realization and therefore requires the Phowa practice to ensure their liberation.

The Timing for Doing Phowa

Whether we are doing Phowa for ourselves or doing it for someone else, it is essential that it is not done at the wrong time. The wrong time usually means doing it too early in the process of dying. Timing is important because, up to a certain point in the dissolution process of a dying person, it is still possible for that the person to be resuscitated. Until the external dissolution of the elements is complete, the person could still be revived. And if the ejection of consciousness is done before that process is completed, it could hasten the person's death. Therefore, we should not perform the ejection of consciousness until the external dissolution of the elements of the dying person is completely finished.

The tantras say, "Perform the ejection of consciousness at the right time because if you do it at the wrong time, you are killing the deities within the body." This line refers to the deities that abide within

our body.[59] If we perform the ejection of consciousness before we are actually dead, we will be causing the deities' death when we abruptly remove them. Also, if we are doing Phowa for someone else and do it too early, they may become quite angry their death was being hastened. This would be a problem as they would then enter into the bardo in an angry frame of mind which would attract many negative forces.

Rather, we should do Phowa after the elements have dissolved and as soon as possible after the breathing stops. The time we want to be doing Phowa is during the stages of the internal or subtle dissolution of the white, red, and black which are the stage of appearance, increase, and attainment. We should remember that this three-fold dissolution process is the gradual cessation of the eighty types of thoughts. It is during this phase that we will want to perform the ejection of consciousness. Ideally, while dying, we will experience the stage of radiant white lightness. This time that we will want to do the visualization and prepare ourselves to do the Phowa. Then, when the white lightness turns into the red lightness — the stage of appearance changing into the stage of increase — we will want to actually perform the ejection of consciousness. Those individuals who have engaged in great wrongdoing will actually experience fear during this second stage of red increase. Those who have engaged

59. Thrangu Rinpoche discusses the fact that everyone has 100 deities dwelling within them in his book *Luminous Clarity: The Union of Mahamudra and Dzogchen*. They are also described in more detail in later chapters of this book.

in great virtue may see dakinis and dakas leading them to pure realms in this second stage of red increase. This is the point where we want to perform the actual ejection itself.

The Five Types of Phowa

There are five types of ejection of consciousness or Phowa: the dharmakaya Phowa, the sambhogakaya Phowa, the nirmanakaya Phowa, the guru Phowa, and the celestial Phowa.

The dharmakaya Phowa is not normally referred to as "Phowa" because the dharmakaya Phowa is actually part of the practice of Mahamudra or Dzogchen meditation during the dissolution and dying process. The dharmakaya Phowa, is performed by practitioners who have superior training in Mahamudra or Dzogchen. In their dying process, they remain in one-pointed meditation (Skt. *samadhi*), which causes the mother and child clear light to meet. The dharmakaya Phowa entails resting in the true samadhi of the completion stage of Mahamudra or Dzogchen practice.

The sambhogakaya Phowa refers to the creation stage of deity practice performed during the process of dying. Here, a practitioner who has fully developed the clear appearance and stable practice of the creation stage is able to merge with the pure illusory body of their meditational deity (Tib. *yidam*) and, as a result, they achieve an excellent rebirth in the pure realm of that deity. These first two types of Phowa then refer to the samadhi of the completion stage

and the samadhi of the creation stage of practice. Individuals who have perfected these achievements do not require the ejection of their mind from their body at the time of death.

The third or nirmanakaya Phowa is practiced by individuals who are not highly realized but who can achieve transference of consciousness by doing special training while they are alive. There are many types of nirmanakaya Phowa because each Tibetan school has its own characteristic sets of visualizations for the ejection of consciousness. But the essential technique and purpose of nirmanakaya Phowa is the same. To understand this technique, we need to understand the whole outlook on the ejection of consciousness.

To train for the nirmanakaya or "emanation body" Phowa, we need to understand the interaction between mind and body. The mind's nature is clear awareness while, and the nature of the body is material particles or atoms. These two things have different essences that are interdependently connected through the subtle channels, subtle winds, and chakras. The connections are why we experience the body and mind working in unison. During the dying process, as the external elements and internal thoughts dissolve, the dying person develops the feeling that the mind is trapped inside the body and the dying person wants to get out of the body.

There are nine different doors or orifices[60] through which the consciousness can leave the body. Usually, a person's consciousness is

60. The eight impure orifices leading to rebirth in samsara are the anus, urethra,

directed through one of these doors by the force of their karma. If our consciousness were to leave through a lower gate such as the anus, we would be propelled into a lower rebirth as a hell being, an animal, or a hungry ghost. If the consciousness were to leave through an upper gate, such as the eyes, nose, or mouth, we would experience a good rebirth as a god, jealous god, or human being. Even if we exit a higher gate, we would still be reborn in samsara.[61] However, we do not want to keep being reborn in samsara to free ourselves from it.

Throughout our different lives, our body and our mind are connected with one another. They are inseparable as long as the life-sustaining wind (Tib. *sok dzin rolung*) remains within the central channel. In this way, our body and our mind pervade each another. Although they are very different in nature — the mind being consciousness and the body being physical atoms — they are held together by this life-sustaining wind and our fixation on a self. As long as they are held together this way, then, throughout our life, wherever the mind is, the body is there as well. What we call death is simply the separation of these two previously inseparable things. At death our body becomes a dead corpse, and our mind becomes lucid cognition. When this separation of mind and body happens, we

navel, mouth, nose, two ears (counted as one), two eyes (counted as one) and chakra between the eyebrows (often called the third eye). The ninth orifice, which leads us out of samsara, is the aperture of brahma or the cranial aperture at top of the head.

61. Even the god and jealous god realms are still in samsara and shouldn't be confused with the pure realms of deities such as Chenrezig or the Medicine Buddha.

experience the feeling we are in a house that is caving in. If we are in a building that is collapsing, we want to escape. Likewise, our consciousness will try to escape from the body the moment before all the elements dissolve into each other.

Since death will drive us out of our body anyway, we might ask why it is important to consciously escape? If we do not intentionally eject our consciousness from our body, our consciousness will be driven out by death. The force that directs it to leave our body is our karma. As a result, we will leave from the particular orifice of our body that corresponds to our predominant karma; and we will have no choice but to take rebirth based on our karma. In other words, if we are driven out, we have no control over what happens after that.

Now, if our consciousness leaves out of one of the upper gates or orifices, we will be reborn in a higher realm and have a positive rebirth. And if our consciousness leaves through one of the lower openings, like the urethra or the anus, we are going to be reborn in a lower realm. The departure of the consciousness from a particular aperture in the body is the secondary condition, not the cause for a certain rebirth. The cause of rebirth in a particular realm is due to the karma that we have previously accumulated. In spite of the fact that the birth we take is karmically driven, it does require the secondary condition (the gate that the mind departs from) for the karma to take effect. Therefore, if we can control the exit from

which our consciousness leaves our body, to some extent we can control our rebirth.

The best opening for is the aperture of brahma at the very center of the top of our head. If our consciousness leaves the body through that gate, realization can occur and at the very least, we will have a good rebirth. This is because there is an interdependent relationship between this aperture of departure and our subsequent rebirth. For example, the consciousness of a person with a strong realization will automatically depart from the aperture at the top of the head as a result of the person's realization. In the Phowa practice, we learn to force the consciousness out of the aperture of Brahma rather than leaving this departure up to our realization.

We might ask, "Is it not the Buddhist belief that rebirth is caused by our karma? So, if we have done bad things, we'll have a bad rebirth, and if we have done good things, we'll have a good rebirth. Does not the effectiveness of the ejection of consciousness contradict this?" Actually, it does not contradict this for several reasons. First, we can only do Phowa if we are trained to do it, and the training itself accumulates powerful positive karma. Second, by achieving a good rebirth that we might not otherwise have achieved, we are deferring, not eliminating, the result of negative karma. By getting this good rebirth, we give ourselves the opportunity to gradually purify our remaining negative karma. This idea is not unique to the ejection of consciousness; it is also said to be true of the practice of

bodhichitta. For example, Shantideva's *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* says "The generation of bodhichitta enables us to escape the vicious attack of our own actions just as being accompanied by a strong and fully armed bodyguard protects us from attack." The reason for this is that bodhichitta has the strong force of virtue, and therefore it results in our negative actions having weaker karma than they would otherwise have. In the analogy above, it is like being accompanied by a strong person who can defend us from those who would otherwise be able to successfully attack us.

For example, if we develop complete, genuine bodhichitta, the karma that would have caused us to be reborn in hell may, instead, result in just a strong headache. Also, in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* it says that "like the fire at the end of time, the matchless power of bodhichitta can, in an instant, destroy even the greatest wrongdoing." This can happen due to the intense power of the virtue of bodhichitta. The same situation is true in the case of Phowa practice. It allows us to propel ourselves into a positive rebirth where we will have the opportunity to gradually purify the karma that otherwise might have caused us to be reborn in a lower state.

Training in the Nirmanakaya Phowa

Each session of Phowa practice begins with going for refuge and generating bodhichitta. This is true of any Buddhist Vajrayana practice. The first aspect of the training is to have the proper physical

posture which is described in the seven dharmas of Vairochana. The essential point of this posture is that our back is straight and upright as possible. This is important because we will use the central channel which runs along the spine as a pathway to send our consciousness out the top of our head. To do this we straighten our back.

In the second part of the training, is to do the specific visualization associated with the type of Phowa we are doing. We first visualize ourselves as the deity associated with the specific Phowa practice that we are doing. There are many Phowa practices, but there are two common ones done in the Kagyu lineage. If we are doing the Phowa as part of the Six Dharmas of Naropa, we would visualize ourselves as Vajrayogini. If we are doing the Phowa that is part of the Amitabha cycle, we would visualize ourselves as Chenrezig. In either case, we visualize ourselves clearly as the deity and also visualize the central channel within our body.

Naropa says, "Since the eight gates lead to samsara and the ninth is the skylight of Mahamudra, close the eight and open the one." To do this we visualize HRI syllables emanating from our heart and flowing throughout our body and coming to rest in the eight undesirable gates to seal them off. We begin by blocking the impure gates because if our consciousness leaves from one of these impure gates, it will cause our rebirth in samsara and not in a pure land. The eight impure gates are: the anus, the urethra, the navel, the mouth,

the nose, the two ears (counted as one), the two eyes (counted as one), and between the eyebrows. They are sealed off by visualizing a HRI syllable that are right against the outside of the orifices and thereby preventing the consciousness from leaving through any one of these gates.

We then visualize a channel of light in the center of our body starting from the heart and extending upward to the crown of our head. This channel is like a tube of light that goes straight upwards without impediment and without any twists or blockages. It is closed at the bottom, and it widens like the mouth of a trumpet at the top of the head — or we could say it flares at the top. Above the opening of the central channel, at the very center of the top of our head, we visualize Amitabha or the particular yidam depending on the specific liturgy of our Phowa practice. We also visualize that in our heart either there is a drop of light or a seed syllable or the figure of the deity. This depends upon the particular liturgy that we choose, and it doesn't make any difference which one of these three we use. The main point is that these three visualizations represent our mind, which is inseparable from the subtle wind on which it rides. This is referred to as the "visualization of the inseparability of the subtle energy (wind) and the mind." Then above our head we visualize the deity into whose heart we are going to eject our consciousness. Usually, this is Amitabha. Having established that visualization, we then train ourselves in repeatedly eject our consciousness into the heart of the deity above us.

In Phowa training we visualize the Amitabha seated above our head on a lotus in the posture of Maitreya seated in a chair with his legs and feet hanging over the lotus. In these practice sessions, we visualize his feet covering the open top of the central channel.

The third aspect of Phowa training is breathing. The key point here is that we gently hold the breath, and then, at the moment when we visualize our consciousness moving up from our heart through the central channel and out the top of our head, we exhale and let the breath out. Because we are practicing shooting our consciousness out of the top of our head, there is a slight danger that we could shorten our life by doing this. To prevent this from becoming a problem, it is customary that in between sessions of formal practice, we visualize either the letter HUNG or a golden double vajra or something similar blocking the aperture visualized at the top of our head so that our consciousness remains firmly in our body. We should create this visualization strongly at the end of every session of Phowa practice.

Earlier it was said that there were five types of Phowa. We have been discussing the third of these — the nirmanakaya Phowa. The fourth type is called the guru Phowa in which we attempt to eject our consciousness into the visualized body of our root guru who is above our head. This is a form of Phowa is based upon having the utmost faith and devotion in our guru and is not customarily done nowadays.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with a practitioner who has great devotion dissolving their consciousness into their guru, but there is a larger issue that needs to be addressed here about practice and lineage. For instructions of a specific practice being transmitted from a teacher to a student, both the teacher and the student need to be absolutely confident that the practice transmitted is authentic and reliable, in brief, that it works. This means that for a teacher in good faith to transmit a technique of practice, that teacher needs to be able to say, "I know from my own experience that this works and that if you do this, you will achieve this result." Based on the teacher's assurance, the student can receive the transmission of the technique and put it into practice with the confidence that comes from knowing that "Having received this from my teacher who has done this practice, gained a result, I know that if I practice it, I will attain the same result." If this practice which was based on actual practical experience from generation to generation without any break in the transmission, then the practice is definitely going to remain reliable and there will be no problems in the transmission because the transmitting person will have practiced it to the point of achieving the result. This is called the "lineage of practical experience" or sometimes called he "lineage of the blessing of practical experience."

However, there are some techniques of meditation which have actually stopped being practiced. While this lineage theoretically exists in the reading transmission and empowerment, the lineage

of experiential application does not. So, a master teaching the practice who had no practical experience of it, then one would have little confident that it would benefit the student. Therefore, when we practice Phowa, we should practice the nirmanakaya Phowa that has been practiced up to the present day. Because there is no experiential lineage for the Guru Phowa it might not work at all, making practicing it a waste of time.

The Celestial Phowa

The fifth Phowa is the celestial Phowa which literally means "that which dwells in space" meaning that this practice consists of training the mind to take rebirth in a pure realm. This is done by applying ourselves with great effort to this end. For example, it is taught that rebirth in the pure realm of Amitabha, (Skt. *Sukhavati*, Tib. *Dewachen*), results from four causes. The first cause is that we must keep the realm in our mind. This means to repeatedly contemplating and imagining the realm of Sukhavati and its inhabitants with all the buddhas and bodhisattvas who inhabit it.

In general, there are two ways to meditate on the yidam. Sometimes we visualize ourselves as the deity (self-generation) and sometimes we visualize the deity with their retinue in front of us (frontal generation). One way to keep the pure realm in mind is to formally meditate on it with the frontal generation. Or we can simply recollect the qualities and appearance of the realm by recollecting its purity.

If we do this repeatedly, we will establish a strong karmic connection with having a rebirth there. This process is called "training your mind in the realm."

The practice of celestial Phowa consists of contemplating the realm that we wish to take rebirth in during our formal meditation, our postmeditation, and also at night while we are dreaming. In dreaming, we need to assiduously train in the recognition and transformation of dreams. Recognition of dreams refers to lucid dreaming, which was explained earlier, as well as developing the ability to know that we are dreaming, while we are dreaming. Transformation of dreaming is when we are aware that we are dreaming and if we can do that, we can then alter the appearances in the dream. This relies primarily on having strong mindfulness and alertness. So, before we fall sleep, we reinforce this mindfulness and alertness by thinking, "I will recognize that I am dreaming and in the dream I will change it to such and such." Some people can do lucid dreaming automatically, but many people cannot so that they must exert themselves through the power of intention and mindfulness.

After gaining the ability of lucid dreaming, we can apply the transformation of our dreams by transforming the appearances in the dream into the pure appearances of the body and the surrounding realm of the deity. When we can do that, we rehearse going to that pure realm at the time of our death by actually trying to go there in

our dream. Then, with this transformation of the dream, we develop the ability to train our mind to go to a pure realm.

Applying Phowa at the Time of Death

We now come to the application of Phowa at the time of death. Whether the Phowa practice is going to be performed by us as the dying person or by somebody else, the first preparation is to relinquish, as much as possible, all clinging and craving for the things of our life. This includes all the things that we are normally attached to — our material possessions, our wealth, our family, and our friends. We must let go of all of these because to cling to them is simply of no help to us whatsoever. In fact, no matter how much we cling to these things, we cannot possibly keep them. So, this clinging does nothing except disturb our mind. Therefore, first we must let go of that clinging.

Along with not clinging to objects, it is important to not allow our mind to come under the influence of any of the three disturbing emotions: attachment, aversion, or ignorance. The most important way to do this is to watch out for our attachment and craving. We also must ensure that we do not become angry or allow other negative emotions to arise while we are dying. It may seem normal for us to have these disturbing emotions, but they are absolutely of no use to us at the time of death, when we need our mind to be

one-pointedly focused on the particular visualization or practice that we are going to do in the bardo.

Obviously, it is too late to start eliminating the disturbing emotions as we are dying. We need to start preparing ourselves to reduce these emotions now. As Jamgon Kongtrul says in *Creation and Completion*, the key is to continuously apply "recollection" or mindfulness.[62] We must repeatedly think that when such and such a thing happens, we must not do such and such. For example, at the time of dying, we must think that we cannot become angry or jealous or greedy. In preparing ourselves by being mindful while we are alive, we develop a mindset of not reacting to disturbing emotions and end up with a peaceful mind at the time of death.

To facilitate the proper ejection of consciousness from the body out of the aperture of Brahma, we need to maintain the habit of having our awareness directed to the top of our head. Normally, our awareness is not directed to the top of our head, but we can do several things to ensure that it is so. For example, when we do the Vajrasattva and Guru Yoga practices, we visualize the deity or the guru above our head. One of the reasons for putting a deity above our head is to get into the habit of directing our attention and awareness to this part of our body. If we can extend this beyond formal practice sessions by always imagining our root guru or meditational deity above our

62. The Tibetan word for mindfulness (Tib. *drenpa*) literally means "recollection" as to remember or to be mindful of where we are and what we are doing or thinking at all times.

head and supplicate them there, it will be tremendously beneficial to us. We should also learn to visualize the root guru above our head and supplicate him at any moment we are in crisis. This will create the habit of reacting to crises in this way, and, since death is a crisis, it will cause us to visualize the guru automatically at the top of our head at the time of death.

We must beware of even the slightest or briefest negative interruption when we are engaging in a practice like Phowa by our mind becoming distracted by a thought or giving rise to anger or jealousy or some other disturbing emotion. We don't want the power of the momentum at the time of death to be disturbed because it can entirely change the direction we are headed. This is also one reason why we need to be careful of those who surround us as we die. They should not be individuals who are going to carelessly do or say things that will cause us to react with disturbing emotions. In our ordinary world, if we are in a war and dying from a fatal wound, and we try to kill as many of our enemies as we can, this is considered by many to be a really noble act of valor. But from a dharmic point of view, it is the worst thing we could possibly do since we want to avoid having great anger as we are leaving the world.

When we are dying, we should focus our awareness with complete trust and without hesitation on the visualization of the particular practice we are doing. Then, having created the visualization, we eject our consciousness into the heart of the deity above us whether

it is Amitabha, our particular yidam, or our root guru. We eject our consciousness thinking that we are mixing our mind with theirs. Through this aspiration and practice, we ensure that we will have a positive rebirth.

What is presented here is essentially the theory behind the ejection of consciousness — why we do Phowa, how we practice it, how we apply it, and the benefits of this practice. For the actual technical instructions of Phowa, we need to select the particular Phowa practice that we wish to practice and then receive detailed instructions of that practice. We should then study all these details assiduously and perform the practice until the signs of the ability to eject our consciousness arise. The physical signs of the ability to eject our consciousness are not as difficult to achieve as it may sound. So, we need to practice the ejection of consciousness until these signs are achieved.[63]

If we achieve the signs of successful ejection, however, we should not become overconfident thinking, "Since I have now achieved the signs of successful Phowa, when I die that is all I need to do."

63. The traditional sign of the accomplishment of Phowa practice is that the spot at the aperture of Brahma becomes very soft and a blade of grass can be inserted into it.

Questions

> How is the HRI syllable that seals the anus read?

As viewed from the outside, except it's upside down.

> When I was much younger, I had a motorcycle accident and went to the emergency room. My consciousness was clearly separated from my body, and I was up on the ceiling watching the doctors running around attending to my body. But I was also very aware that my body was not my consciousness. What stage of this process is that? Was that a form of Phowa in the sense that my consciousness left my body?

Probably what happened was that your consciousness separated from the body because you had stopped breathing at one point. I would guess that you went at least through the process of the dissolution of the elements. I haven't experienced this myself, so I'm not one hundred percent sure. But it sounds like what happened was that because of the accident, your life-supporting wind was temporarily weakened so much that your consciousness could escape. But then, the doctors re-activated the body which caused your consciousness to return to its place.

> How does the consciousness at that point re-enter and reestablish its connection with the body?

You probably have a better idea of how your consciousness got back into your body than anybody else does. Basically, the connection between the mind and body was not severed. It was kind of stretched, but it was not broken, so it was able to return.

> If a being should die in the uterus or immediately after birth, is the dissolution process the same and are the practices for that being the same? If a child should be miscarried or aborted, is the dissolution and practice the same?

The stages of dissolution would be the same, the Phowa for the ejection of consciousness would be the same, and certainly the other practices for benefiting the being in the bardo would all be the same.

> When you practice Phowa does the actual deity, such as Amitabha or Medicine Buddha, that is visualized above the head determine the specific realm to which your consciousness transfers? And if it does, is one thereafter limited to that realm?

Whether the deity you visualize above your head will affect where you actually go after doing Phowa depends in part upon how good your Phowa is. If you have a very strong Phowa practice, then it is possible it might make a difference. By ejecting your consciousness out of the top of your head into Amitabha's heart, you might succeed in being reborn in Sukhavati. Or you may eject your consciousness out of the top of your head into the heart of the Medicine Buddha

so that you will be reborn in Medicine Buddha's realm. But it is also possible that the successful transference of your consciousness out of the top of your head might lead merely to an excellent rebirth rather than going to a pure realm. In this case it would not have made much difference which deity you visualized except that meditating on a deity that you feel strong devotion to and great confidence in may possibly make your Phowa more effective.

Regarding whether or not transference to a pure realm will limit you to that realm depends upon the realm. There are different kinds of pure realms and there are also many impure realms. There are sambhogakaya pure realms, nirmanakaya pure realms, and there are also ordinary realms that are not technically pure realms. If you are reborn in some of these, you are free to move about. For example, according to the sutras if you are reborn in Sukhavati, then you can remain there attending Amitabha, but you are also free to go to the realms of other buddhas, attend them, receive their teachings, and so on. So, whether you might be able to travel to different realms depends upon the realm.

THE BARDO OF DHARMATA



• 7 •

THE LUMINOSITY OF THE GROUND

5. *When the bardo of dharmata dawns upon me,*
I will abandon all thoughts of fear and terror,
I will recognize whatever appears as my own projection,
And know it to be a vision in the bardo;
Now that I have reached this crucial point,
I will not fear the peaceful and wrathful ones, my own projections.

— *The fifth Primary Root Verse of the Bardo*

The fifth bardo is called the "interval of the clear light of dharmata" or just "the bardo of dharmata." This bardo begins when the dissolution of the bardo of dying is complete. This includes not only the coarse external dissolution of the elements, but also the subtle internal dissolution that leads to the experience of the white appearance, the red increase, and the black attainment. The white constituent located in the top of the central channel in the form of the syllable HUNG descends while the red constituent below the

navel in the form of the syllable AH rises up the central channel, and they meet in the heart. It is then that the bardo of dharmata begins.

Developing a Stable Mind for the Bardo of Dharmata

The luminous bardo of the dharmata appears next because the process of dying has allowed the dharmata (the true nature of reality) to manifest naturally. While we were alive, the dharmata was always with us but since we were blinded by our many conceptualizations, negative emotions, and confused appearances, we did not perceive it. Instead of dharmata, what arose were the five elements of earth, water, fire, air, and space or consciousness.

However, through the process of dying, the subtle winds and channels that support these five elements were weakened and then dissolved into each other as previously explained. In this dissolution the subtle thoughts also dissolved and left us directly or "nakedly" to perceive the dharmata. Those who have meditated on the dharmata in their meditation will recognize this incredible experience of the bardo of dharmata. Most of us, however, have no direct experience of dharmata, so we do not recognize it and it will quickly pass us by in the bardo. When it does pass, the force of our old habits of confused appearances arises again. To ensure that we recognize the dharmadhatu after we die, we need to have developed a stable meditation before dying.

In preparation for the bardo, we need to develop an ability to recognize the dharmata in stages. We begin by practicing the common preliminaries of the four thoughts that turn the mind to the Dharma and the uncommon preliminaries of the Ngöndro. These practices take us through the gate of Dharma and help purify our negative emotions. After this, we move on to Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation. In these practices we develop the ability to rest in samadhi or meditative absorption. We are not able to do this straight away because we have very strong habits that act against developing a stable mind. This is because since beginningless time we have been chasing one thought after another. We are presently habituated to this chain of thoughts; therefore, we are not used to allowing our mind to rest peacefully. When we first sit down and start to meditate, we may have glimpses of the basic nature of the mind. But we do not have enough control over our mind to let it rest. Developing strong Shamatha along with Vipashyana allows us to rest our mind.

In his *Aspiration Prayer for Mahamudra*, the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, explained this process with, "the subtle and coarse thoughts dissolve like waves into the ocean." Our thoughts arise in our mind as frequently as waves that appear on the ocean. We want to develop a meditation that is like a very calm, placid, and clear lake. There are two obstacles that stop us from achieving this state. Continuing with the analogy, one obstacle to our meditation is a calm lake that is disturbed by large waves on it. The other obstacle is that

these agitated waves churn up muck from the bottom of the lake and make the lake cloudy with impurities. To counteract this, we need to gradually let our mind settle and eventually it will become naturally clear and calm. The subtle thoughts and negative emotions that cloud our mind will settle down and we will rest in the true nature of our mind. This allows us to experience the mind as it originally was before we became confused and agitated by thoughts.

Developing an Understanding of Emptiness for the Bardo of Dharmata

To understand the experience of the bardo of dharmata, we also need to return to the basic Buddhist concepts of emptiness and emptiness of self. In general, the Buddhist teachings are very much concerned with the nature of phenomena. The selfhood or substantiality of the person, which is "I" or "me," do not inherently exist. This fixation is the root cause of all the disturbing emotions. If we don't have this fixation on the self, we will not give in to the disturbing emotions of desire or attachment or give rise to hatred or aversion or pride. To sum it up, as long as we have not eliminated this fixation on the self, we will never get rid of all the disturbing emotions. The best we can manage without giving up the fixation on the self is a temporary suppression of the disturbing emotions; however, their eradication is impossible. We have to face the fact that we simply must eliminate this fixation on the self.

Can we eliminate this fixation simply by saying to ourselves with great determination: "I will not fixate on the self. I refuse to do that." No, determination or strong will not work. The only way fixation on a self can be eliminated is to directly perceive that there actually is no self. By experiencing emptiness of self, we eliminate the fixation on the self. This is accomplished in a two-step process. The first step is to logically examine this "self" and discover that it lacks a basis or the foundation. The second step is to actually meditate directly on the emptiness of self that we previously examined with concepts.

The first thing we discover when we start to examine this imputed "self" is that it keeps moving around, proving that the self is not always the same thing. The concept of "me" is most closely aligned with the concept of "mine" such as "my thoughts" or "my leg." We relate to things as possessions that are "mine" such as "my watch," "my salary," "my spouse and children." So clearly, "I" and "mine" are different. "I" refers to the self, and "mine" or "my" refers to that which belongs or pertains to the self. Sometimes we think of our body as "me," but at other times we don't regard it as "me" but as a possession by saying "my head" or "my foot." There is no part of the body that has the characteristic that we consistently identify as the self. Often, we identify the self with our thoughts or mind, yet we still say, "my mind."

In short, if we track down every possibility for the existence of the "self" and discover that none of them are consistent, we find that

we are unable to determine that there can be such a thing as a solid "self." Self is more like a verbal convention we learned; this is the understanding of emptiness of self.

When we realize the absence of a substantial personal self, we can extend our examination to discover the absence of inherent or true existence of all external phenomenon which we call "empty." When we normally think about emptiness (Skt. *shunyata*, Tib. *tongpa nyi*), we normally think of a nothingness or a voidness of something. This seems to contradict our experience because we say: "Well, my body isn't empty of existence. My body and the bodies of others do exist. These things exist because I can see and feel them." But, in fact, our body does not substantially exist. What we call "our body" is actually a group of many different things that we think of as a single unit. A body contains a head, arms, legs, skin, flesh, bones, organs — all kinds of things. None of these are the body. If these parts were the body, we would just call these parts "the body." For example, we wouldn't call the head "our body." So clearly, none of these parts are the body because "body" is merely a mental concept that we have come up with to describe all these different things taken as a whole.

You might then argue, "Well, all right, so the body is a mere concept for all these different parts, but my hand exists because I can see it." But this isn't true either because a hand is also a concept that we have come up with to describe a group of things that we wish

to consider as a single unit. Our hand is made up of parts — a thumb, a forefinger, a middle finger, a little finger, a palm, and so on. None of these are the hand. We can't say that a thumb is a hand. If it were a hand, we would call it a hand, not a thumb.

You might then argue, "Well, all right, a hand doesn't exist, but the fingers do exist because I can see them." But a finger has parts — the first joint, the second joint, the bones, the skin, the flesh, the muscles and so on. None of these things are the finger. If they were, we would call them "a finger" and not whatever we call them individually.

The point of all these arguments is simply that all external things are mere aggregates. The idea of aggregates was explained by the Buddha as being like a heap of something. For example, we can think of a pile of rocks as a unit, but we know perfectly well it is not. We are merely choosing to say that aggregate of rocks is a single unit for purposes of communication. In the same way, everything that we normally think of as an inherent unit, such as a mountain, really turns out to have parts, and these parts also turn out to be an aggregate or mental concept of a unit of something.

Now, we can carry this argument on as long as we want until, finally, we might decide: "Well, everything must be made up of something, so there must be some very small particle that cannot be divided further. There must be a small indivisible particle or atom that everything is made of." Well, if there were such an indivisible

particle, it would either occupy space or it wouldn't. If it occupies space, then part of it is facing east, a part of it is facing west, a part of it is facing north, and a part of it is facing south, and so on. If that's true, it has parts. If that's not true, it doesn't occupy space so then how could it be a particle?

In short, if we analyze anything that we can isolate conceptually as a unit, we will discover that it is an aggregate and that it has parts. This is why the Buddha said in the Heart Sutra, "Form is emptiness." Now this statement is not obvious to us because it is not an object of direct cognition. We do not experience things as empty and therefore we must determine it through intellectual analysis. Once we do so, the question might arise, "Well if everything I analyze turns out not to be a solid thing, then there is nothing whatsoever and this means that the nature of all things is absolute nothingness." But this conclusion is not correct either because the concept of absolute non-existence is based entirely on its opposite, the concept of the true existence of one or more things. So that idea of absolute nothingness is merely another mental concept.

Experiencing Emptiness through Meditation

We do have the innate capacity to experience things. This ability of luminous clarity is also called "buddha nature" and in Mahamudra meditation it is called "co-emergent wisdom." This wisdom of luminous clarity has always been present within us, but we have not yet

recognized it. In the Leap-over (Tib. *Tögal*) practice of Dzogchen meditation of the Nyingma tradition, this luminous clarity is called "primordially pure awareness" and the recognition of it is called "arriving on the ground" or the "arriving at the ground of radiant appearances."

This capacity of knowing has always been present in us and is not a result of meditation practice. Normally, it is concealed from us except in the bardo when the elements have dissolved one into another, the subtle dissolution process has been completed, and everything has dissolved into dharmata. This is the direct experience of emptiness, which we call the dharmata (the equivalent of buddha nature), is experienced directly by everyone who enters the bardo. However, individuals who have had prior experience with dharmata in their meditation, either in a previous life or this one, may recognize it. If they have not experienced it before, they will simply experience a mere blankness or darkness (often called "the swoon"), and later their mind will begin recreating the confused appearances of their previous lifetime.

We might think, "Well, if dharmata appears nakedly at the time of death, how could we fail to recognize it?" The answer is that the dharmata is right in front of us all the time and yet we don't see or recognize it, so we shouldn't be too surprised that we won't recognize it at the time of death. This fact about the bardo shows

us how extremely important it is to prepare ourselves by practicing meditation for this encounter with dharmata.

Vipashyana Meditation to Realize Emptiness

When we practice "Shamatha," we need to have a mind that is stable, peaceful, and relaxed. When we can do this, we can then develop Insight or "Vipashyana" meditation. The Buddha explained the need for Vipashyana in many different sutras and tantras. This was followed later on with lamas giving instructions from the oral tradition on Vipashyana. Briefly, the Buddha described the basic nature of phenomena as being empty. He also taught that this is not mere emptiness, but there is also buddha nature. The emptiness of phenomena is not just a blank voidness; it is also the inseparability of "luminous clarity" or knowing and emptiness. When we meditate, we should rest in this union.

The Prajnaparamita sutras describe this emptiness in detail. For example, the Heart Sutra says, "There is no form, no sound, no smell, no taste," and so forth referring to the empty nature of all phenomena. Emptiness is a very difficult concept for ordinary individuals to understand. The Heart Sutra does not explain the logic that leads to determining this empty nature. However, through the Buddha's inspiration and blessing, great bodhisattvas were able to understand what the Buddha said and wrote commentaries on these teachings, giving many different proofs for the empty nature

of phenomena. By studying these commentaries such as the treatises of Nagarjuna, we can understand emptiness. This is called taking inference as the path. The difficulty with taking inference as the path is that it can take a long time to develop realization of the emptiness of external phenomena.

There is, however, an exceptional method for attaining this understanding of emptiness that is taught in the Vajrayana. Great Indian mahasiddhas developed precious instructions that allow us to look directly at the nature of phenomena in our meditation. This is called taking direct perception as the path. If we used any external object for our meditation — mountains, palaces, houses, people — it would be very difficult to directly perceive the emptiness of these objects. Instead, the mahasiddhas taught the method of looking at the nature of our own mind. When we look directly at mind, we realize that the nature of our thoughts is empty or insubstantial, yet still our thoughts keep arising. From where do these thoughts and feelings come? Do they have a shape or a color? What is their texture? If they do not have any form, then how can they arise? Are these thoughts things that we can look at and say, "Yes, that actually exists"? If we investigate in this way, we will discover that thoughts are not things. We can look for them everywhere, but there are no "things" to look for and no way to find them. By looking directly at the nature of our mind, we can simply and directly see the mind's nature and perceive its emptiness.

The Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje, in his *Aspirational Prayer for Mahamudra*, said:

> *It has no existence: Even the conquerors have not seen it.*
> *It is not nonexistent: It is the basis for all samsara and nirvana.*
> *There is no contradiction: It is the path of the middle way, of union.*
> *May the true nature of the mind, free from extremes, be realized.*
>
> — *Verse 11*

Rangjung Dorje also said, "Look again and again at the unseen mind." When we meditate on the mind over and over again, we become familiar with our mind, and we realize that there is no mind to see. We directly realize what cannot be realized — the empty nature of the mind. Whether we choose to look at the last line of the verse as an oral instruction or an aspirational prayer, the verse is instructing us.

If we look again and again at the mind, we will notice changes in it. If we are practicing Shamatha meditation, we find that one time our mind is stable and peaceful and other times many thoughts are arising, and the mind seems to be moving. At this time, we should ask ourselves: "What is moving? Where is it going? How do these thoughts arise? Where do they arise from?" If we investigate these thoughts again and again, we will begin to see that the nature of thoughts is also emptiness. Whether we are discussing the bardo of

dharmata, the true nature of phenomena, or the nature of the mind in meditation, the meaning is always the same. With this training, we will recognize the dharmata when it appears to us in the bardo. But if we do not recognize the nature of the mind, the peaceful and wrathful deities will appear to us in the bardo. While we are alive, we do not see them because our body and mind reside together.

The Eight Consciousnesses and the Bardo of Dharmata

What actually causes the ground wisdom, or dharmata to appear? In the discussion of the life-winds, we said that our mind consists of eight consciousnesses with the root of all of these consciousnesses being the eighth all-basis consciousness.[64] This consciousness functions continuously whether we are walking, talking, eating, or even sleeping. The allbasis consciousness is the cognitive lucidity that holds together the other seven consciousnesses. The nature of this consciousness is luminous clarity while at the same time being empty, so it is referred to as the unity of emptiness and luminous clarity. The problem is that when the luminous clarity of the all-basis consciousness arises, it is so over-whelming or "bright" that we don't recognize all-basis consciousness as being empty. This then causes us to mistake the true nature of reality.[65]

64. See a description of the eight consciousnesses.

65. The intensity of external objects, even our dreams are so seemingly "real" and

Ignorance (Tib. *marigpa*) is not mere unconsciousness but a lucid function of mind. Although ignorance is a negative function of the mind, it comes, nevertheless, out of the luminous clarity of the mind. First, this ignorance is the lack of understanding of the emptiness of phenomena. Next, this ignorance causes us to mistake our empty, or insubstantial, self for an "I" that is a real, solid self. This second part of ignorance causes the creation of the seventh afflicted consciousness. The seventh consciousness is an underlying belief in our self that we continuously hold. Whether we are thinking about this self or not, there is always a fixed belief in the self. The eighth all-basis consciousness and the seventh afflicted mental consciousness are said to be stable (nonfluctuating) because they function without interruption.

The six consciousnesses that arise from the seventh and eighth consciousnesses, however, are fluctuating or unstable because they arise and cease in response to their contact with external objects. There are five sensory consciousnesses. The eye consciousness relies upon the eye to experience images, the ear consciousness relies upon the ear to experience sounds, the nose consciousness relies upon the nose to experience smell, the tongue consciousness relies on the tongue to experience taste, and the body consciousness relies on the body to experience tactile and inner sensations such as pain. While these five sensory consciousnesses are fluctuating,

strong and bright, that the mind does not notice the illusory or empty quality of these appearances.

they are also utterly non-conceptual; they merely perceive the raw sensory input without recognizing it or considering the input to be good or bad or neutral.

The sixth fluctuating mental consciousness does not directly perceive the objects of the senses. Rather it experiences an abstraction, a generalized image, that is produced based upon the sense impression received by the sense consciousnesses. The sixth consciousness will, for example, create a generalized image of what the eye consciousness has seen and, by comparing it to past experiences, decide it to be friendly or dangerous, good or bad, and so on.

By almost automatically processing the appearances we experience, the first six consciousnesses actually hinder the all-basis consciousness from recognizing its own emptiness. The mind does not recognize its own emptiness because it is overpowered by its own luminous clarity, present in the vivid perception of the objects that appear to it. It then incorrectly perceives itself as solid and real which is the beginning of the seventh consciousness. From all these consciousnesses arise all our perceptions of the entire phenomenal world.

What happens to these consciousnesses during death? During the dying process the first set of consciousnesses to cease functioning are the five sensory consciousnesses. As the body organs lose their functioning, the sensory consciousnesses that rely on sensory input from them stop sending information to the sixth mental consciousness. Then, during the inner dissolution phases of the white, red,

and black appearances, the other consciousnesses gradually become dormant as well. After the five sensory consciousnesses have dissolved into the eighth all-basis consciousness, the sixth mental consciousness then also dissolves into it.

What is initially experienced in the bardo of dharmata is the luminosity of the ground as it is called in the Prajnaparamita sutras. In the Middle Way (Skt. *Madhyamaka*) teachings, it is called the ultimate truth, which is a synonym for emptiness. In the Mahamudra teachings it is called the great non-conceptual wisdom. All these are labels for the true nature of reality a state of mind that is beyond false perceptions or confusions. On the sutra path, we attempt to realize the true nature of reality through logical analysis. On the tantric path, we attempt to experience it by having it directly pointed out to us by our teacher. The experience of this true nature of reality in the bardo simply arises naturally to everyone; it arises because the 80 types of thoughts connected with the disturbing emotions have ceased. However, for this true nature to be recognized, we need to be experienced in meditation. If this experience of the dharmata is not recognized, in a short period of time the confusion of the previous life will rearise.

If we do not recognize the nature, however, the peaceful and wrathful deities will appear to us. While we are alive, they do not necessarily appear to us. The body and mind reside together. The mind expresses itself with the eight different consciousnesses and the

51 different mental factors and the continual acts of speech. After we die, however, the mind expresses iteself through the different peaceful and wrathful deities. The eight different consciousnesses are the same as the 42 peaceful deities. These reside in the channels at our heart center, but because of the impure appearances, we experience them as the eight consciousnesses. The 51 mental factors are the same as the 51 wrathful deities who reside in the channels at the brain center. They appear in life in their impure aspects as the mental events, and in the bardo as the 51 wrathful deities. These mental events appear very vividly to us and since they are associated with the mind center, we feel that there is a lot of mental activity in the brain. These days, scientists sense these activities and say that the brain is the mind, but by saying this they are limiting it to the 51 mental factors.

We have seen that in the bardo of dharmata, there is the cessation of the 80 types of conceptual thoughts.[66] The bardo of dharmata has two aspects: the first aspect is called the luminosity of the dharmakaya, and the second aspect is called the luminosity of spontaneous presence. The former is the direct experience of emptiness and the latter experienced in the bardo of dharmata is called "the luminosity of spontaneous purity."

66. The 80 types of thoughts can be found in *The Mirror for Mindfulness*, page 32. See Bibliography.

The bardo of dharmata begins with the dissolution of the five elements: earth dissolving into water, water into fire, fire into air, air into space, and space into luminosity or clear light (Tib. *ösel*). After these dissolutions of the bardo of death end, we enter into the first phase of the bardo of spontaneous purity. Then this luminosity of clear light dissolves into the unity of appearance and emptiness that is the dharmata. At this point the bardo of the dharmata manifests as spheres of light (Tib. *tigle*) with brilliant, penetrating rays of multi-colored light.

During the inner dissolution of the white appearance, the seventh afflicted consciousness dissolves back into the eighth all-basis consciousness. During the end of black attainment, the all-basis consciousness (which has been in a state of ignorance during our lifetime) becomes briefly non-functional. It is not purified so there is a gap in its functioning where all the eight consciousnesses which have been involved in ignorance stop working. This allows for the appearance of the ground luminosity to arise. The ground clear light appears at this moment, which is the first moment of the bardo of dharmata, because the eight consciousnesses, while temporarily dormant, have not been eradicated. If the ground clear light is not recognized by the dying person, all the confused phenomena based on the eight consciousnesses of the past lifetime will gradually rearise.

This is the reason we need to familiarize ourselves with the ground clear light beyond a mere glimpse of it in our meditation. This recognition must be consciously developed through our own practice of Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation which also must be very stable.

The Dissolution of Space into Clear Light

We have discussed the first five stages of the dissolution of the elements — earth into water, water into fire, fire into wind, wind into consciousness, and consciousness into space. These five dissolutions were completed during the bardo of dying. We now come to the sixth dissolution which occurs on the border between the bardo of dying and the bardo of dharmata. This stage is called the dissolution of space (or consciousness) into the ground of clear light. The ground clear light can also be called the ground wisdom. A person who is familiar with the bardo and has recognized the dharmata from their meditation, can rest in a state of meditative absorption at this time. When they arise later from their samadhi, they will be able to choose a good rebirth. However, if the person does not recognize the ground clear light (*dharmata*), they will only see many confusing appearances in this sixth stage of dissolution.

The next seventh dissolution is called "the dissolution of clear light into unity." During this dissolution the wrathful deities appear to the person's mind in the midst of very loud sounds, brilliant lights, and piercing rays of multi-colored lights. As said before, these wrathful

deities appear to the person because they originally dwelled in the person's own body when they were living and, therefore, they are released at this point of the separation of mind and body at death.

The teachings of the Breakthrough and Leapover practices of Dzogchen have definite practices that allow these deities to appear to the meditator in certain kinds of meditation while they are living. One practice is to look just under the rising sun[67] or at the edge or a bright light. Another way is to meditate in a completely dark room. In dark retreat, all sorts of little spheres (Tib. *tigle*) appear in the blackness in the space in front of us. With a calm mind in meditation, we begin to make out that these spheres are made up of many different colors and different sizes and often form mandalas. Eventually, we can see that these dots are actually deities and that these deities have particular ornaments and forms. We must understand that during this practice, these deities are not external appearances but that they arise from the dharmata under these special circumstances. These appearances do not appear only to Buddhist practitioners. Actually, they appear to all sentient beings; even the tiniest of parasites and insects see these appearances because all sentient beings contain deities.

67. One should never look directly at the sun because it will damage the eyes. That is why these practices should be done under close supervision.

Questions

> If, in reality, there is no self, then what is it that reincarnates?

Basically, the self is a concept that our mind creates to account for our experience. The foundation for this belief is the continuity of experience. Our mind in going from one life to another and is unable to explain to itself what is going on, so it develops this idea that the self dies and then the self reincarnates. Our mind believes that what reincarnates into a baby is the same as that which died in the previous lifetime. This is just like we believe that the person we are today is the same person that we thought we were yesterday. But, in fact, whether we are talking about yesterday and today, or this life and the next life, it's the same thing. It's the mistaking of a continuum for a solid identity.

For example, if we stand on a river side, we could say that this is the same river today as it was yesterday. But it's not really the same river because it's not the same water. The river is continuous yesterday and today, but it's not the same. It just appears to be the same thing to us. As we saw earlier, this "self" is sometimes thought of as being our body and at other times as being our mind. If we consider the changes that we have gone through in our lifetime, we cannot say that we have always had the same body or the same mind. When we were a child, we had a small child's body, and our mind thought much differently. There are many differences between

our mind and body now and when we were a child. We obviously do not act the same way as when we were a child. Even though we know that we are constantly changing, because of the continuity of experience we still say, "I'm still the same person" as we go through life. The same thing happens with reincarnation. We are mistaking a continuity of experience for a "self" that is reincarnated.

> How can we remedy the flaw we have of viewing the peaceful and wrathful deities as being outside of ourselves. Secondly, how is taking the bardo on the path connected to the techniques of Leapover or Tögal?

It is true that the basic fabric of our confusion is this false dualistic belief in a perceiver and a perceived object that are real and solid and that we grasp onto an object. The only remedy for this confusion is to recognize the truth that both the outside object and the inside subject do not have any true existence — that these two things are empty of true existence. By realizing this, true nature of phenomena, our dualistic view of the world ceases.

To your second question, we can't actually say that taking the bardo on the path is or is not a practice of Tögal because taking the bardo on the path is actually a small part of Tögal practice. The mainstream Tögal practice is quite demanding and very dangerous. It can only be done under the constant supervision and guidance of a fully realized guru because the technique involves practices like remaining in total darkness for long periods of times or looking

almost, but not completely, directly at the sun. If we do not know what we are doing and have insufficient guidance, then we may go blind looking at the sun or go crazy sitting in total darkness for long periods of time. So, what I have presented here are gentle and easy- to-do techniques for experiencing these appearances of dharmata that involve very little risk.

• 8 •

THE PEACEFUL AND WRATHFUL DEITIES

The Great Liberation of Hearing in the Bardo says that the peaceful deities appear to us first and the wrathful deities appear afterwards. In *The Mirror of Mindfulness* Natsok Rangdrol says that the wrathful deities[68] appear first, and the peaceful deities appear afterwards. We can infer from this that the order in which the deities appear may vary but the deities do begin to appear in the bardo at this point.

The Wrathful Deities

The forms of the deities are of three basic types: wrathful, peaceful, and semi-wrathful. Let us say that the wrathful deities appear first. The wrathful deities are made up of the five buddhas and

68. Most texts have used the word "wrathful" to describe the 58 deities residing in the head. The word "wrathful" implies anger and hostility, while these deities are actually supporting and protecting the Dharma. They are visually depicted as angry and scary, so we have chosen to translate them as "wrathful" deities.

the eight male and eight female bodhisattvas who are manifesting in their wrathful forms and are called *herukas* in Sanskrit.[69] The principal wrathful deity is called Chemchok Heruka and retinue of five wrathful deities related to each of the five Buddha families making up 25 wrathful deities.

Afterwards the eight male and eight female bodhisattvas appear in their wrathful forms as two groups of eight female wrathful deities (making 16 wrathful deities). The first group comprises the eight goddesses called *matrikas* (Tib. *mamos*) or "eight mothers." The second group includes the eight *pishaci* (Tib. *tramens*) or eight goddesses having human bodies and animal heads. All of these female wrathful deities appear in a variety of clothing and are holding different kinds of implements. Some of them have three faces and some have one face while tramens have heads of different animals.

When these wrathful deities appear, we will hear a very sharp, loud, penetrating sound called the sound of dharmata. This sound is said to be like the sound of a thunderclap multiplied by a thousand times. In this phase of the appearances of spontaneous presence, we hear this extremely loud and intense sounds, and we see the wrathful forms of these deities. Shining out from their bodies will be intensely bright, multi-colored rays of light shooting towards us. A person who has had extensive meditation experience will

69. *Heruka* is the Sanskrit name for "wrathful deity." The word "wrathful" describes the deity's appearance but is misleading because these deities are important to us because they destroy negative qualities we may have.

recognize these deities as sources of refuge and not as threatening enemies. They will also recognize that they are simply the projection of their own mind and not something external to be terrified of. But those who have had no meditation experience will be terrified by the brilliance, the clearness, and the frightening forms of these various images and sounds. If they perceive these projections as being outside themselves and extremely threatening, they will faint in terror. When they wake up from that faint, these images and sounds will have vanished.

If we have cultivated the creation stage in our meditation practice and focused on the wrathful deities, we will be able to recognize these deities when they appear, and their appearance will be a much better experience. If we have not familiarized ourselves with these deities, we will be frightened by them which will result in a bad experience. Even if we have not practiced the visualization of these deities but have familiarized ourselves with the appearances of the deities by studying paintings and pictures of them, we may be able to recognize them. Even if we don't recognize them, by simply looking at pictures of these deities we may develop a familiarity with their appearance making them not so frightening.

The Appearance of the Peaceful Deities

According to Natsok Rangdrol's *Mirror of Mindfulness*, after the appearance of the wrathful deities the peaceful deities and pleasant

appearances begin to appear. The peaceful deities are surrounded by rainbows and smaller spheres of multicolored lights. They include the five male and five female Buddhas, the eight male and eight female bodhisattvas, and so forth.[70]

Many people have said that the description of these deities is either culturally or religiously specific. They may believe that these deities are culturally specific in the sense that the colors, postures, and appearances of these deities, as well as the clothing and jewelry that they wear, are based on Tibetan cultural traditions and that non-Tibetans would see them as appearing differently. They also assume that Buddhists would see deities looking like this, but that non-Buddhists would see non-Buddhist deities such as the Virgin Mary.

First of all, the appearance of these deities is definitely not a Tibetan cultural tradition; it is not even an Indian cultural tradition. Nor do they appear the way you expect them to or because you believe in them.Whether or not you believe in them, they are going to appear the way they appear in paintings because they exist within the subtle channels of your body and they emerge from these channels at death. The proof of this contention comes from the practice of Leapover in the Dzogchen tradition.

Here, either in the practice of light or darkness,[71] any person who does the practice properly will first see little spheres of light. As

70. See Appendix I for a description of the 42 peaceful deities of the bardo.

71. This refers to the practice of light in which we rest our mind in meditation

the meditation becomes more stable and clearer, they will see the peaceful and wrathful deities within these drops of light. When they see these deities, they are not imagining them. This meditation technique simply allows the person to see the deities as they actually are. They are not produced by meditation. Rather, they are already present within the body. Because they appear consistently as described in the text to practitioners of Leapover, we can infer that these deities also consistently appear this way to beings in the bardo.

As the peaceful deities arise, we will begin to perceive our entire environment as being utterly insubstantial no longer composed of solid elements such as earth and stones but as a limitless expanse of rainbow light. This rainbow light will be extremely lustrous and brilliant, extremely vast and spacious, and utterly without impediments of any kind. These appearances are extremely beautiful. If we look all around them, above and below us, we can see them to the very limits of space, which is filled with rainbows composed of five-colored light. Some of these rainbows are like arching rainbows, some are stretching straight out into space, and some are coiled in on themselves to form circles of rainbow light. Inside of these circles we will see the peaceful deities. The peaceful deities are the five buddha families of Vairochana, Akshobhya, Ratnasamb-

and either look into a cloudless sky as we see these spheres or, if we are under close supervision, we may look just below where the sun is rising. In the practice of darkness in which we stay in a totally dark place with supervision and meditate for many days, these images begin to appear in the darkness before us.

hava, Amitabha, and Amoghasiddhi together with Dhatvishvari, Lochana, Mamaki, Pandaravasini, and Samayatara (the female buddhas) making ten peaceful deities in total. Along with them are the eight male bodhisattvas (Kshitigarbha, Maitreya, Akashagarbha, Samantabhadra, Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri, Vajrapani, and Sarvanirvarana-vishkambin), and the eight female bodhisattvas in the form of the offering goddesses (Lasya, Pushpa, Mala, Dhupa, Gita, Aloka, Gandha, and Nritya) making up a total of 16 peaceful bodhisattvas. All of these deities have a peaceful appearance, but have different clothing and jewelry, display different mudras, and hold different implements. All of them are extremely majestic and pleasing in appearance but they are so majestic and bright that it is very difficult to directly look at them.

From the hearts of all of these deities come rays of multicolored light which shine right into our own heart. Also, emerging from these rays of light are tiny spheres of the same multicolored light. After we see these visions, this entire display of the deities dissolves back into our heart whence they originally came.

At the eighth dissolution, the deities that appeared outside us now dissolve into us and then, emerge from our heart as rays of brilliant light in four colors — white, yellow, blue, and red — shooting out a great distance from our heart. These rays are adorned with colored spheres and rings of light of their corresponding colors.

After all of these sights and sounds have dissolved, there comes the unity dissolving into wisdom. These are four-colored lights that shoot out of our heart and form canopies of blue, white, yellow, and red light above us. These canopies of light are adorned with many small and large spheres of light. They appear first at the blue canopy, then over that is a white canopy, then a yellow one, and then a red one with each canopy adorned by spheres of light of their own colors. These canopies are adorned with a large sphere with five smaller spheres inside which are arranged as a mandala, and inside each sphere are smaller replicas, and so on. In this way the person in the bardo sees the whole scene as like the shimmering colors of the tail of a peacock.

The four colors represent the four wisdoms — the dharmadhatu wisdom, the mirror-like wisdom, the wisdom of equality, the discriminating wisdom. The reason we perceive only four different colored rays of light coming from four canopies is that the fifth color, green, is missing. Green is the color of the wisdom of accomplishment. The wisdom of accomplishment is the source of the activity of a fully awakened buddha and so the wisdom of accomplishment is not fully achieved until complete buddhahood is attained. Since we have not yet attained buddhahood, there is no appearance of the green-colored light representing the wisdom of accomplishment.

Dissolutions into Wisdoms

The appearances of both the peaceful and wrathful deities make up the seventh stage of dissolution called the dissolution of the clear light into unity. After that, occurs the eighth dissolution called the "dissolution of wisdom into spontaneous presence." Up until this point, the wrathful deities, the peaceful deities, and then the canopies of light appeared. Now there is a further display of light above us which is like a dome or parasol made of four-colored lights. In the midst of this, we see the mandalas of both the wrathful and the peaceful deities. All of this appears to us like a cloudless sky above us. This display is called the display of the dharmakaya or the display of primordial purity.

At this eighth dissolution, the deities that have appeared outside us then dissolve into us. They emerge from our heart as rays of brilliant light of the four colors white, yellow, blue, and red that shoot out a great distance from our heart. The fifth color, green, as we have said, is not present because it is the color of the wisdom of accomplishment. But the other four do shoot out of our heart and these rays of light are adorned with spheres and rings of light of their corresponding colors.

At this time the pure mandalas of the wrathful and peaceful deities are above us. Displayed clearly below us are the worlds of the six realms of samsara like images in a mirror. Now, if we have practiced

meditation extensively, there is the opportunity to attain full liberation. But, if we have not practiced and are not familiar with the deities or with these displays of light, we will not be liberated and will instead proceed on to the next bardo of the bardo of becoming.

While it is true that the wrathful and peaceful deities appear to everyone in the bardo, for those who are not accustomed to this through practice, these appearances flash by very briefly, making it very difficult for the person to recognize them. Therefore, the primary factor in the recognition of these deities and other appearances is to be accomplished in the practice of meditation. The particular meditation that prepares us for this bardo is based upon developing the idea that these one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities are just projections of our own mind and recognizing that they are not external to us. Now, when the peaceful and wrathful deities appear in the bardo of dharmata, they appear more or less in front and outside of us. While we were alive, these deities resided inside our body where we could not see them.

The practice to prepare us for this phase of the bardo is to realize that these peaceful and wrathful deities exist naturally or are spontaneously present within our own body. The Vajrasattva buddha is the essence of these 100 deities and that is why the Vajrasattva mantra has 100 syllables. In other words, the Vajrasattva mantra is the mantra of the 100 peaceful and wrathful deities. It is for this reason that this mantra is so effective in purifying wrongdoing and

obscurations. To prepare ourselves for this phase of the bardo we visualize ourselves as Vajrasattva and then visualize the peaceful and wrathful deities, each in their own place with their specific appearance. In the center of our heart in the midst of this expanse of swirling rays of rainbow light, we visualize the 42 peaceful deities.

The ninth and last dissolution is the dissolving of wisdom into spontaneous presence or the "dissolution of wisdom into the Vidyadharas." The ninth dissolution is an experience of what are called the parasols of light. The names of these stages of dissolution describe a progressively increasing clarity or intensity of each stage and which is why the last one is called "parasols of light." During this ninth dissolution, we start to experience domes of light somewhat like parasols above us in the same four colors as the preceding rays of light. These last two stages of dissolution will be experienced by both individuals who fail to recognize clear light and individuals who succeed in recognizing the ground clear light. The difference is that the individual who fails to recognize the clear light (the person who emerges from swoon) will have a brief experience. For more advanced practitioners the ninth stage will last longer and be more vivid and more stable.

The Vidyadharas

In addition to the wrathful and peaceful deities there are the vidyadharas (Tib. *rigdzin*). Or knowledge holders. After the ninth dis-

solution of wisdom into the vidyadharas, we visualize that inside the various subtle channels in the center of our throat are the ten male and ten female vidyadharas. These vidyadharas are neither particularly wrathful nor particularly peaceful, so they are often referred to as being semi-wrathful. We visualize them in our throat in the form of Vajrasattva. These vidyadharas are also found in the midst of the expanse of rainbow light and spheres within these rainbows in this bardo. These vidyadharas are aspects of our speech which reside at our throat chakra. When we are alive, they appear in their impure aspect as our normal speech. But in the bardo they appear to us as the five vidyadharas and their consorts.

While we are alive, the peaceful deities manifest as the eight consciousnesses in the heart, the wrathful deities manifest as the 51 mental factors in the brain, and the ten vidyadharas and their consorts manifest as normal speech in our throat chakra. However, after we have died, the 42 peaceful deities are no longer confined inside our body and appear to us as if they were outside us, which is to say they appear as 42 external peaceful deities. Likewise, the 58 wrathful deities are no longer confined by impure appearances in the brain center and appear to us outwardly as the 58 wrathful deities. The nine vidyadharas that are in our throat center seem to be external to us also.

If we can recognize these deities for what they are, we can be liberated. We really need to become familiar with them. We should read

The Great Liberation of Hearing in the Bardo and look at thangkas of the bardo deities. Then in the future when they appear, we will be able to recognize them. If we do not, we will simply go to the next bardo of becoming.

Visualizing these deities inside our body as clearly as possible with their individual colors, clothing, scepters, and mudras will produce latencies so that when they actually appear before us in the bardo, we will not be terrified by them but, rather, have a familiarity of knowing that they were created by our mind and are not external to us.

The length of time for all nine dissolutions to take place is that of the length of time that the dharmata appears to us measured in "meditation days" (the amount of time that we can rest in the nature of our mind in our meditation times five). So, if we can rest in samadhi for five minutes, our "meditation day" will be twenty-five minutes long. If we can rest in this meditation for an hour, our meditation day will be five hours long, and so on. The appearance of the bardo of dharmata lasts for five meditation days. So, for most individuals who have not extensively trained in meditation, their meditation day is very short and this period of the bardo of dharmata is an extremely brief one. This is one of the reasons for us to try to recognize the nature of our mind and train in resting in this state of awareness while we are still alive.

In general, the duration of the three dissolutions in the bardo of dharmata can last anywhere from one to five meditation days. If

the person is able to rest in meditation during this time and recognizes the appearances as coming from their own mind, then during the ninth dissolution of wisdom into spontaneous presence, their awareness will emerge from the top of their head and dissolve into the lights of spontaneous presence enabling them to avoid much of the confused appearances of the later parts of the bardo. This, of course, will result in having a good rebirth. If we do not attain liberation in the bardo of dharmata, then we will go on to wander in the next bardo of becoming.



Awareness holders (*rigdzin*) all are holding curved knife and dancing.

1. Padmanarteshvara • all colors
2. Salanepa • white
3. Tsela wangpe • yellow
4. Chagya chenpo • red
5. Lhungyi drupé • green

Preparing to Recognize the Deities in the Bardo of Dharmata

There are several techniques we can use to prepare for the experience of the bardo. Of course, when we actually die and enter the bardo, we will experience something that is spontaneously present, not a visualization that we created with these techniques.

First, there is the method of taking the bardo onto the path. When we have died and no longer have a body, the appearances that arise in the bardo are unobstructed by the physical body and therefore arise freely. While we are alive, spontaneous appearances of the dharmata do not appear to us in the way they do in the bardo. Nevertheless, before we die, we can work with them using our physical body. Essentially, the technique consists of sitting in a good posture with our back straight and then closing our eyes extremely tightly so that the skin and muscles of the eyelids actually press on the eyeballs. At the same time, we clamp our teeth together very tightly.

When we do this, we will initially see nothing — just darkness. But if we keep our eyes tightly shut and keep looking directly at what arises in our visual perception, we will start to see some light appearing. It could be green or blue or yellow or red or a mixture of any of these colors. Then, if we look at this light with a relaxed mind, this light will become clearer and clearer and brighter and

brighter. As we are doing this, we are experiencing an appearance of light that has no physical source. Therefore, it is called the empty light of dharmata. Looking at this light, we can directly experience it as free of being something coming from somewhere or going somewhere. As we become more certain that it comes from nowhere, the light then begins to dissolve. This aspect of the practice is called taking light onto the path.

When we are clamping our teeth or our jaws together, we should listen very carefully to what we hear because initially we will hear nothing. But if we prolong this exercise, gradually we will start to hear a ringing hum, and this ringing hum will slowly get louder and louder and louder. This sound does not come from anywhere, and therefore it is called the empty sound of dharmata with dharmata being the true nature of the universe. Working with this sound and recognizing it as being the display of our mind is called taking sound onto the path.

These two techniques of taking light and sound onto the path are ways to prepare for the bardo of dharmata and they are called **taking the bardo onto the path**. Nevertheless, the most important method of preparing for the bardo of dharmata is to learn to rest our mind in the experience of its own nature. The nature of our mind is emptiness. This is experienced directly when we rest in the nature of our mind during meditation. If we can do that, we will automatically be able to recognize that the various sounds,

lights, and appearances that arise in the bardo are created from our own mind.

A second method deals with the fact that in the bardo of dharmata not only are there appearances of sound and light rays, but these visions are also accompanied by various emotional states such as joy, pain, and various disturbing emotions. Therefore, we should accompany taking the bardo as the path with a practice called taking pain onto the path. The basic idea of taking pain on the path is that rather than running away from the pain, we look directly at it to see its essence. By doing so, the solidity of the pain dissolves. A beginner cannot do this with real serious pain but has to begin by working with a very mild or controlled amount of pain. The technique is to pinch the skin on the back of the other hand. When we do this, it really hurts at first so that we will perceive it as unpleasant to the point of being intolerable. But if we can keep pinching ourselves and looking at the essence of the experience of the pain, though the sensation of pain does not diminish and still is there, the related suffering will begin to vanish. Being able to do this leads to the ability to do the same thing with normal situations of sickness and pain. As we train with greater and greater degrees of discomfort, we find we can deal with it. So, this is another excellent preparation for the bardo called **taking pain or sickness, onto the path.**

The third method to prepare for the bardo is called taking joy and misery onto the path. Our mind experiences a constant fluc-

tuation between degrees of being extremely happy and extremely miserable. The problem with being extremely happy and extremely miserable is that both becoming intoxicated with happiness and becoming extremely disturbed by misery is the root of samsara. Now, both of these emotional experiences can arise during any of the last three phases of the bardo, but the way to deal with them while we are alive or in the bardo is essentially the same.

The way to practice dealing with a state of extreme joy or pleasure is to look at the joy itself: What is that intoxicating pleasure exactly? Where is it located? Who it is that is experiencing it? and so on. If we pursue this search using logical analysis to determine the nature of the joy, we will probably conclude that it exists, because it will seem to exist only as long as we maintain thinking about it. But if we look at the experience directly, not conceptually, we will not find it anywhere. This is because the experience of joy has no substantial existence, no characteristics, no location whatsoever.

The same technique is applied in exactly the same way in terrible situations. When we find that we are feeling awful, we should look directly at the misery and ask: "Where is it? What is this feeling? Does it have an essence or substantial characteristics?" We will discover that the misery, like happiness, is also insubstantial and has no real essence.

The fourth method of preparing for the bardo is called taking disturbing emotions onto the path. This is an exercise that is

always helpful and appropriate in many situations. Normally, we try to relate to disturbing emotions by either trying to run away from them by denying them, or somehow doing things to get rid of them. But there is another way: taking the disturbing emotion onto the path. In this approach, we do not attempt to abandon the emotion or run away from it, but rather we stay with it and examine it. This is a helpful way to deal with emotions in our practice of meditation, and it is also particularly helpful to deal with the intense emotions that arise in the bardo.

In our present bardo of living between birth and death we experience disturbing emotions all the time and we will certainly experience them at the moment of death in the bardo of dying. The disturbing emotions do not arise very strongly in the bardo of dharmata, but they will arise strongly in next bardo of becoming. Here, disturbing emotions arise because we can see people we knew from our previous lifetime, and we will tend to react negatively to what we see. For example, when we see people to whom we were attached, we will experience the pain of losing them. When we see them going on with their lives without us, we feel rejected, thinking, "They do not love me at all." Also, when we see what they are doing with our possessions and money we may become angry. These disturbing emotions of anger, jealousy, and abandonment will all make our experience in the bardo of becoming very dangerous and extremely unpleasant. Therefore, taking disturbing emotions onto the path is extremely necessary when we are trying to find a new rebirth.

The technique of taking disturbing emotions onto the path will work with any disturbing emotion. It works when we are very attached to external things such as possessions, people, experiences of pleasure, and so on. This technique also works with anger towards those who have hindered us or who are our enemies, and even the basic feeling of aversion, or wanting to avoid anything that is unpleasant. It also works with arrogance when we feel proud or superior to others in some way. And it works with competitiveness, jealousy, and envy. It even works with that basic disturbing emotion of ignorance which is a lack of understanding of what we should accept and what we should reject. In sum, whether we are categorizing the disturbing emotions as the three poisons or five poisons or the 84,000 poisons, they all have the same fundamental quality of being a disturbance to our mind, and they can all be dealt with in the same way.

The technique of taking disturbing emotions onto the path begins as soon as we have recognized that the disturbing emotion has arisen. After recognizing that it has arisen, we "look," that is, we perceive it directly and try to determine how this disturbing emotion has arisen, exactly what it is, where it came from, and what its actual nature is. For example: "Exactly where did the anger come from? What is this anger?" Of course, we all know what it is to be angry. But exactly what is this anger and where is it seated in our mind? If we look right at the disturbing emotion, we will discover whether it has any kind of substantial existence or not. When the nature of the disturbing emotion is truly recognized, that is the

very moment that the disturbing emotion will begin to subside or dissolve. This has been explained by the great mahasiddhas who have summarized this process in words such as, "The angry mind has a clear awareness and when that clear awareness is brought to look at itself, its aspect of anger naturally dissolves into itself." This is called taking the disturbing emotions onto the path.

To summarize, the techniques presented here are specific Vajrayana techniques, which also bear the blessings of the lineage. These techniques, such as meditation on the deities, recitation of mantra, and the four ways of taking the bardo onto the path are not techniques that we would simply stumble upon or figure out for ourselves. Therefore, to receive the blessing of the lineage so that we can effectively practice these techniques, it is traditional to receive an empowerment connected with them. This is why we have the empowerment of the 42 peaceful and 58 wrathful deities (Tib. *zhitro*) that empowers us to use these various techniques designed to aid us in the bardo.

Questions

> If a pig dies and is going to be reborn as a human being, will it undergo the same experiences in the bardo as a human being?

Not only pigs, but even small insects, bugs, and slugs would experience the same appearances in the bardo because a sentient being

can be born with a great variety of physical bodies, but the nature of the mind of each and every sentient being remains the same. The nature of the mind of all sentient beings is emptiness which, at the same time, is buddha nature — the potential for attaining buddhahood. Because the basic nature of every being has the potential for full awakening or enlightenment, then when the bardo of dharmata occurs, that potential, or inherent quality, is displayed as the spontaneous appearances of deities and so on that have been described. Therefore, these appearances will arise in any being, regardless of what their previous body was and regardless of what their future body will be. The special situation of human beings is that in our present bardo between birth and death, we possess the eighteen freedoms and assets of a precious human existence. This means that we can prepare ourselves for death using these methods to bring the experience of dying onto the path. We can prepare for the bardo and actually attain liberation in the bardo, whereas animals do not possess the circumstances necessary to do this.

> Rinpoche, I was wondering if the 100 peaceful and wrathful deities are just within the human realm or if all sentient beings have the hundred peaceful and wrathful deities?

Not just humans but all sentient beings. The commentaries say this will be experienced even by a bug that lives on a blade of grass.

> When we are small children, our minds were comparatively unclear or immature. Even with the rebirth of a very

> highly realized being, some type of learning process, some reacquisition of knowledge, and some ripening of the intelligence appears to be necessary. And there also seems to be a natural process of the growing clarity of intelligence that seems to coincide with the development of physical maturity.

It is true that the continuum of the mind of each person has persisted over a long series of lifetimes and that in between lifetimes there has been a dissolution of all of the confusion of the immediate past lifetime into the basic ground during the bardo of dharmata. Therefore, all of those confused appearances or projections of any single lifetime have arisen from the basic ground in the bardo of becoming that follows the bardo of dharmata. So, there is a gap in the confusion in between each lifetime, and in that space all the knowledge of most beings tends to be lost or disappear. As the confusion and all of the projections associated with a particular lifetime are temporarily exhausted in the appearance of the luminosity of the ground, and when that person moves towards their next life, they must learn everything all over again including those things that they knew very well in their previous life. The exception to this is that most highly realized individuals might be able to bring some of this knowledge from a previous life with them into the next lifetime. But other than these rare individuals, the newly born child will need to relearn everything, regardless of how many times they

have been born previously. That is why newly born children have to be taught how to eat, how to talk, and so on.

> Humans appear to be much more intelligent than animals. What is the actual cause for the difference in intelligence between humans and the various animals on this planet?

Well, the long-term cause of the particular intelligence of being born as a member of a given species is the particular karma that the being has accumulated. If a sentient being has accumulated a great deal of karma connected with ignorance, they will be born as afflicted greatly by mental confusion. If they have accumulated a great deal of the karma of a particular type of virtue, that virtue, in this case, having a very sharp intelligence. The short-term cause is that a being who has accumulated a particular type of karma will be reborn with a particular type of body. Since they are born with a particular body, the subtle channels within that body will take a particular shape or form themselves in a certain way. Based on the formation of those channels, the subtle winds within those channels will move in certain ways which will cause the mind of that person to function in certain ways. If they have a lot of negative karma, they will be born into a body that has a disposition towards a certain kind of ignorance. Their body structures cause the winds in the subtle channels to move in a slow, depressed way which, in turn, causes their mind to be particularly torpid and unclear. On the other hand, born with positive karma, a person will have good

intelligence and a certain type of body with their subtle channels structured in a certain way, which causes their subtle winds to move in a certain way. This causes their mind to be particularly clear.

> Rinpoche, could you talk about what the ground consciousness is for an ordinary person with no realization and what that ground consciousness is for someone who has some realization.

Because the eighth ground or all-basis consciousness is the receptacle for all of a person's karmic latencies, there is a great deal of difference between the all-basis consciousness of an untrained individual and a trained individual. If someone practices assiduously over a long period of time — at least year after year, and really lifetime after lifetime — there is a gradual improvement that occurs through their practice, and this is stored in the all-basis consciousness as latencies. This improvement over long periods cannot merely be due to the sixth mental consciousness because the sixth consciousness is always changing. It certainly cannot be due to the five sense consciousnesses because they are non-conceptual. Since the karmic latencies cannot be stored in the five sensory or the sixth mental consciousness, we must conclude that the eighth all-basis consciousness is the container for the positive habits that constitute a person's progress in the Dharma. This means that someone who has been practicing Dharma for a long time is going to have an allbasis consciousness that is quite different from an untrained person.

The reason for this is that the all-basis consciousness is continuous. In its continuity, it is able to retain karmic latencies, or seeds, which allow us to retain information even when we are not thinking about it. For example, when a child goes to school and the teacher says this and that, the child receives this information in the sixth mental consciousness. Nevertheless, even when the child doesn't think about these things and goes to sleep and wakes up the next morning, the child still remembers what was taught. It is incorrect to say that memory abides within the sixth consciousness because during sleep the sixth consciousness does not function in relation to that information. The only thing that is continuously functioning to carry information on from moment to moment is the allbasis consciousness and so we must regard it as the receptacle of continuous information.

This is more obvious when we talk about the results of long-term meditation practice. If we develop a stable, deep, long-term habit of meditation, this habit will continue to accrue until we reach Buddhahood. This long-term habit abides within an individual's all-basis consciousness.

> How many days does the consciousness remain in the body after death in terms of meditation days and solar days? And are the 49 days of the bardo period, counted in meditation days or in solar days?

The period of the bardo of dharmata (the period between death and the point when the consciousness actually exits the body) is measured in meditation days and therefore this depends entirely upon the stability of mind of each particular person. But the 49-day period that is commonly used is measured in 49 solar days.

> I asked how many days there are in between dying and entering the bardo of becoming because I had understood that the period during which the peaceful and wrathful deities appear was quite extensive. But it now sounds as though it is very short.

The period of time between death and the beginning of the bardo of becoming is not a certain length in regular (solar) days because this length of time is measured in meditation days which depend entirely upon the individual's stability of mind. For example, when the 42 peaceful deities arise, it is said there is one meditation day devoted to the appearance of each of the five families. But if the person has had no experience in meditation, then each of these meditation days may last just an instant. The whole length of the five deities could flash by very quickly and the bardo of becoming might begin almost immediately. In the case of a meditator whose mind is very stable, each of these meditation days could last for a long period of time. So, the time varies tremendously.

> It is said that in the bardo, the 100 peaceful and wrathful deities appear as though they are external to us, although

> during our lives they are present within our body. Why, then, do they appear external to us in the bardo and is it possible that, while we are alive, they might appear external to us as well?

The reason that the deities appear as external to us in the bardo is that these deities are the actual natural display of how things truly are– –the dharmata. They are part of the true nature of reality itself. The deities are spontaneously present within us all the time. It is not that they actually leave us to appear in front of us in the bardo. The question is not so much why they appear then; it is a question of why we do not see them when we are awake. They appear in the bardo because they were always there, and there is nothing in the bardo of dharmata that prevents them from appearing. They do not appear to us while we are alive because their appearance is obscured by mental confusion and ignorance that prevents us from seeing them. When we die, the elements, the basis of this coarse confusion, dissolve: earth into water, water into fire, fire into air, air into space. Immediately after this dissolution of the elements during the last stage of the bardo of the time of death, all 80 types of thoughts dissolve and disappear. At this point there is nothing obscuring the direct experience of the true nature of reality and its most fundamental display. Therefore, in the bardo of dharmata, we see these peaceful and wrathful deities. We usually do not recognize these appearances, so they are again obscured by the next kind of confusion — the bardo of becoming.

For example, at daytime the sun is always in the sky, but often there are clouds obscuring it. The clouds in the sky are like the coarse appearances which we experience all the time. It is not that the sun is not there. The sun is a natural part of the sky, but we do not see it. But at a certain point, a strong wind blows all the clouds away, then the sun reappears in the sky. It is not like the sun must be newly created. This would be like the appearance of the 100 peaceful and wrathful deities in the bardo of dharmata.

Most of us are not on this level of realization so the dharmata appears to us only very briefly. The bardo of dharmata lasts for five meditation days. For most of us who have not trained in meditation extensively, our meditation days are very short, and this period is extremely brief. This is one reason we try to recognize the nature of our mind and train in resting in this state of awareness while we are still alive.

These peaceful and wrathful deities can be seen while we are alive by doing the practice of Leapover in Dzogchen which leads to the actual direct experience of these visions and appearances. But we have to receive specific instructions, we have to put them into practice, and the practice has to be pursued intensively. Initially with these practices, we will just see rainbow light. Later with this practice, we will see spheres of light, and still later we will see deities within the spheres of light. Finally, we will see the entire mandalas of the peaceful and wrathful deities.

> Is it impossible for a sentient being in one of the other realms, say the hell or god realms, to attain some degree of awakening? For example, in the Jataka stories it says that in a previous life, the Buddha was reborn in the hell realm. But by helping other hell beings, he was immediately liberated from the hell realm.

There is a basic difference between the human beings and other sentient beings of the six realms of samsara. Of course, a sentient being in any realm of samsara can be virtuous and perform virtuous acts and accumulate merit. A sentient being in any samsaric realm could, at some point, have the pure intention to help others as in the Jataka story where the Buddha is said to have generated bodhicitta for the first time in a hell realm. We see examples of this all the time. For example, in the animal realm it often happens that an animal will do something completely altruistic, such as when dolphins or other animals save the lives of humans or other animals. So, any being in any realm can accumulate positive karma and can, by the same token, accumulate negative karma. What distinguishes human beings from other sentient beings is that human beings have the opportunity to hear and understand the Dharma, to be able to contemplate it, and finally engage in the practice of meditation. It is only in the human situation with the eight freedoms and ten assets[72] that this complete process to enlightenment can transverse.

72. See the Eight Freedoms and Ten Assets.

> What is the direct introduction to clear light?

A direct introduction to the mind's true nature is something that a teacher does when pointing out the mind. While doing this, the teacher may actually tell the student what the mind is really like. When receiving such a direct introduction to the mind, most students gain some degree of experience of the mind's nature. The problem with this process is that because the student gained that experience under the power of the teacher's impressive instruction, the instruction gradually disappears as time passes and the student then has no control over it. Because students do not give rise to the experience under their own power, the experience of mind may disappear because it was not gained through meditation.

To develop an experience of the clear light or how the mind truly is, we need to develop a stable Shamatha meditation and then gradually cultivate Vipashyana meditation. Otherwise, we simply have had an impressive experience that will vanish. As is said in a spiritual song on meditation. "Experience is like mist, it vanishes. Realization is like a mountain, it stays there."

> There are many wrathful deities. Is there one that predominates that a person would relate to as an individual because of his or her own consciousness?

There is the concept that a person has a buddha family affiliation. For example, in an elaborate empowerment ceremony we cast a

stick onto a board with a simplified mandala. It is said that where the stick falls can indicate which of the five buddha families you belong to. However, this is not regarded as that reliable. So, the student is encouraged to do supplications and meditate on all five families and on the wrathful deities belonging to these same five buddha families — Vajra Heruka, Ratna Heruka, Karma Heruka and so on. From this they can develop a strong affinity towards a particular buddha family.

> When we do Vajrasattva practice as part of our Ngöndro practice, is there any particular way we could use the 100-syllable mantra to the benefit of the deities in our body?

There is certainly a connection between the hundred syllable mantra and the hundred peaceful and wrathful deities. At the same time, it is unlikely that repetition of the hundred syllable mantra is going to cause you to see them directly. The practice of Vajrasattva, including the repetition of the mantra, is designed to purify wrongdoing and obscurations. Wrongdoing refers to things we have done in this life and also in all our previous lives. Obscurations refer to the afflictive obscurations which are the disturbing emotions of attachment, aversion, ignorance, pride, and jealousy. The cognitive obscurations refer to the fixation on the self and believing phenomena are solid and real. These two obscurations are gradually purified along with the imprints of wrong-doings by the repetition of the 100-syllable

mantra in conjunction with the visualization.[73] As these negative acts are purified, the disturbing emotions and our fixation on a self begins to diminish. So, we could think of Vajrasattva practice as augmenting the power of the peaceful and wrathful deities.

> While we are in the bardo, we encounter other beings in the bardo. If we have enough stability, is it possible to help those other beings?

Yes, you can. You can do it by telling them something like, "You're in the bardo. Try not to become too frightened and allow your mind to come to rest."

> If someone does not recognize the ground luminosity in the bardo of dharmata, you said that one goes into a swoon and proceeds directly to the bardo of becoming. Does that mean that under such circumstances the person would miss out entirely on the experience of the peaceful and wrathful deities and so forth?

What probably happens is that having fainted, within that state of unconsciousness, one would have fleeting experiences of these peaceful and wrathful deities and of the lights and rays and so forth.

> Since there is one mind to one body and the world population is increasing all the time, does this mean that certain animals with good karma are taking higher rebirth

73. The visualization Rinpoche refers to in this context is the Vajrasattva practice included in Ngöndro which is different from the one described earlier in the chapter.

> and beings from other planets or world systems are taking rebirth in our plane of existence?

My opinion on the matter is that nowadays the number of desirable objects in our world has increased greatly compared with the past. But in spite of this, the general level of happiness of sentient beings seems to be declining rapidly. Since the happiness of our world is declining, it is much easier in karmic terms to be reborn in our world.

In ancient times, people had few material objects, but are said to be quite happy. So, it would seem that if people were generally happier in the world, it would be harder to gain rebirth there. There would, therefore, be fewer beings in the world due to it being harder to get into. In fact, in ancient times when beings were happier, and there were far fewer people. Now, when people are much more unhappy, there are more of them.

THE TEN VIRTUOUS AND UNVIRTUOUS ACTIONS

King Trisong Detsen, one of the early Buddhist kings of Tibet, asked the high lamas of the realm to come up with a list of easy to understand virtuous and unvirtuous deeds that he could then give to his subjects to guide them.

The Ten Virtuous Deeds

1. Not destroying life
2. Not taking what has not been given
3. Not lying
4. Not telling a falsehood
5. Not using abusive language
6. Not slandering others
7. Not indulging in irrelevant talk
8. Not being covetous of the property, position, or power of others
9. Not being malicious
10. Not holding false or destructive beliefs

The Ten Unvirtuous Deeds

1. Killing
2. Stealing
3. Sexual misconduct
4. Lying
5. Using coarse or abusive language
6. Slandering others
7. Gossiping and engaging in idle chatter
8. Coveting others' property, position, or power
9. Being malicious
10. Holding false beliefs

The Ten Special Deeds

1. Saving the lives of others
2. Giving to others what is really beneficial to them
3. Promoting healthy relationships between partners
4. Not telling the truth if it will harm the other person
5. Bringing people together and trying to remove conflicts
6. Using pleasant and gentle words to make others happy
7. Always saying what is meaningful
8. Always being content with whatever you have

9. Having malicious persons removed when they are harming other individuals
10. Analyzing and understanding the true nature of phenomena

• 9 •

THE PRACTICE FOR THE BARDO OF DHARMATA

After we experience the bardo of dying and the dissolution of all our elements, we will then experience the luminous bardo of dharmata. As the external elements dissolve, white appears to the dying person along with thoughts associated with anger. Then, red appears to the person as the thoughts associated with attachment dissolve. Finally, black appears as the thoughts associated with ignorance dissolve. When this dissolution is complete, the luminous nature — the true appearance of reality, the dharmata — appears. This dharmata nature is part of all phenomena, and it appears to all sentient beings at this point in the bardo.

Those individuals with a very strong meditation practice are able to rest here in the samadhi of the mind's true nature. While they were alive, they became intimately familiar with the mind's nature and now recognize this experience in the bardo. For them, the luminous

bardo of dharmata is like the meeting of a mother and child — an instant recognition that causes exceptional realization to arise.

Why We Experience the Dharmata

To be able to understand everything that is happening in the bardo, we must first understand the two aspects of reality often called the two truths. We are living in relative reality (Tib. *kunzop*) and ultimate reality (Tib. *dondam*). Relative or conventional reality is our perception of what we normally refer to as outer phenomena. Ultimate reality or the true nature of phenomena is called *dharmata* in Sanskrit. These two realities are actually inseparable, but we normally experience the world only in terms of relative reality. Experiencing the world through this relative reality obscures the true nature of phenomena and therefore obscures the ultimate reality of dharmata. We cling to and fixate on the characteristics of relative reality. In the bardo of dharmata, we are experiencing great changes in external appearances. We are changing from the appearances of our previous life to the appearances of the next life and there is a gap between these changes. The gap in between these two sets of appearances of relative reality occurs in the bardo of dharmata. Because the appearances of our relative reality, connected to our previous life have vanished and the appearances of relative reality connected with the next life have not yet arisen, we experience this gap as the direct experience of ultimate reality. This is experienced

by all persons. The problem is that unless we have already recognized this ultimate reality in our meditation, we will not recognize dharmata in the bardo. The merging of our previous recognition of dharmata with the direct experience of dharmata in the bardo is called the meeting of mother and child: the mother being dharmata and our previous experience of dharmata in meditation being the child. If we can fully recognize the dharmata in this bardo, we will be liberated and subsequently go into the sambhogakaya realm leaving samsara behind. Even if we have some degree of familiarization with the dharmata during our life, this familiarization will be beneficial because even a small degree of recognition during the bardo of dharmata will dispel enough of our confusion that we will have a good chance to choose an auspicious rebirth since there will be much less confusion.

Visualization of Peaceful and Wrathful Deities

The 100 peaceful and wrathful deities (Tib. *zhitro*)[74] appear in the bardo of dharmata. In our ordinary living, our mind consists of eight consciousnesses and 51 types of thoughts (mental factors). As long as our body and mind are together, we experience these thoughts and consciousnesses in an impure form. But in their pure form they

74. The word zhitro (Tib. *zhi-khro*) consists of two syllables: *zhi* which means "peaceful" and *khro* which mean "wrathful." This refers to all 100 peaceful and wrathful deities as a group. Here, Thrangu Rinpoche is giving an outline of Zhitro practice.

become the five wisdoms: the mirror-like wisdom, the wisdom of equality, the distinguishing wisdom, the all-accomplishing wisdom, and the dharmadhatu wisdom. When these five pure wisdoms are experienced as deities, they are called "the hundred peaceful and wrathful ones." While we are alive, the consciousnesses and thoughts are influenced by the hundred peaceful and wrathful deities inhabiting our body.

At death our body and mind separate and the hundred peaceful and wrathful deities leave our body and appear to us. They appear to us as though they are outside us when, in fact, they are really just appearances of our own mind. Usually, we fail to recognize them as appearances of our mind and become attracted to the peaceful deities and terrified by the wrathful deities. To learn how to deal with these, we have to familiarize ourselves with these deities while we are alive. We can also do the Zhitro practice which is briefly explained below.

When we are visualizing ourselves as deities in deity practice such as Chenrezig, we must first keep in mind that this is not just pretending to be Chenrezig. We must really believe that by acknowledging and familiarizing ourselves with the presence of these deities that we are not making anything up. Rather, we are perceiving something that is already within us. There are different ways to visualize the mandalas of the peaceful and wrathful deities and there are elaborate liturgies involving detailed descriptions of

these peaceful and wrathful deities. Here is a concise liturgy used to meditate on these deities within our own body.

Natsok Rangdrol in *The Mirror for Mindfulness* suggests that we use a sadhana found in the *Treasury of Precious Revelations*. We begin by doing the lineage supplication, then the refuge and bodhichitta liturgy, making the seven branch offerings and finally doing dedication and the liturgy of auspiciousness. A dedication and liturgy of auspiciousness written by Kalu Rinpoche is as follows:[75]

> *"OM AH HUNG! I supplicate without exception the entire succession of gurus of the thought, sign, and hearing lineages of the oral and treasure teachings and of the profound Dharma of peaceful and wrathful ones, the self-liberating thought. I pray that you grant blessings."*

As we are doing this, we may either visualize the 100 peaceful and wrathful ones present in the space before us, or we may visualize the embodiment of all these deities as Vajrasattva. In either case, we think that Vajrasattva or the 100 deities that we visualize in the space in front of us are, in essence, the root and lineage gurus who are present within us.

There are six main lineages of this Zhitro practice. The first lineage is called the thought lineage or the lineage of the intention, thought,

75. This practice by Kalu Rinpoche is available from NamoBuddhaPub.org. On the website enter "Kalu Rinpoche" in the search box.

or wisdom of the Victors. This is the lineage which passes from the dharmakaya Samantabhadra Buddha then to the sambhogakaya buddhas of the five families. Since it is passed without any verbal communication, it is called a thought lineage. What was passed down from those buddhas to the great human vidyadharas was passed down through symbols rather than through oral communication. Consequently, the second lineage is called the symbol lineage of vidyadharas.

The third lineage is called the oral lineage of individuals. This lineage is the teaching that was passed down from the great vidyadharas through a series of individuals such as Padmasambhava who received the teachings on the bardo, wrote them down, and hid them as terma to be found later and propagated by a series of tertons. This lineage consists mainly of oral teaching and instructions.

In addition to these three lineages, there are three specific types of transmission that descended from the Zhitro teachings: the oral teachings, the physical terma teachings, and the mind teachings of the tertons. The oral lineage is also called the long lineage because it has continued from one generation to the next as master passed the teachings to his or her disciples. The terma lineage is called the profound lineage because these teachings were hidden by vidyadharas and were later discovered by a treasure finder (Tib. *terton*) who was a reincarnation of the disciple who received these teachings initially. The tertons rediscovered the hidden teachings

that they received previously from Guru Rinpoche. Centuries later, the tertons propagated these teachings as an oral tradition. Finally, in the mind lineage, termas were usually received by a realized practitioner from a vision of the deity who gave them the practice and attendant instructions. All three of these lineages are part of the Zhitro tradition. With the Zhitro practice of the 42 peaceful and 58 wrathful deities, we supplicate all of the root and lineage gurus of all of these lineages and ask that they bestow their blessings upon us.

The Preliminaries

After the lineage supplication, we go for refuge thinking that we and all other beings are simultaneously going for refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha) and the Three Roots (gurus, yidams, and protectors) and, more specifically, in the peaceful and wrathful deities. When we generate bodhichitta with the intention of attaining supreme awakening, we do this by recollecting the suffering of all beings in the six realms and developing the aspiration to lead them to the state of Samantabhadra — the state of the peaceful and wrathful ones. First, we must achieve that state ourselves. Then, we must implement bodhichitta by thinking, "In order to help all beings attain the state of Samantabhadra, I will engage in this practice of Zhitro."

Having developed bodhichitta, we then make the seven-branch offering — homage, offering, confession, rejoicing in virtue, ask-

ing that the wheel of Dharma be turned, supplicating buddhas and bodhisattvas not to pass into nirvana, and the dedicating of virtue so that all beings can reach buddhahood.

The main practice of Zhitro involves visualizing ourselves as Vajrasattva with the 100 peaceful and wrathful deities residing inside Vajrasattva's body. We begin with visualizing ourselves as the deity. The environment is the embodiment of the dharmadhatu, the true nature of phenomena. This true nature of phenomena has two characteristics: no origination and freedom from cessation. For the absence of origination, we visualize that the outer environment is boundless empty space that embodies the dharmadhatu. But since the dharmadhatu is not just merely emptiness but also has unceasing cognitive luminous clarity inseparablefrom that boundless space, we visualize a sphere of multi-colored lights representing its embodiment of the unceasing luminous clarity. In the center of that sphere, we visualize our mind as the deity Vajrasattva. He is seated on a moon disk on a lotus throne. We identify our mind with Vajrasattva who is white in color, adorned with the sambhogakaya ornaments and clothes,[76] and is seated with his legs in the half lotus posture.

After visualizing ourselves as Vajrasattva, we visualize that in our heart, on a moon disk, is the white syllable HUNG. Surrounding this HUNG is the 100 syllable Vajrasattva mantra. Rays of light

76. The Sambhogakaya ornaments are headband, upper garment, long scarf, belt lower garment, jewels in crown, earrings, short necklace, armlets, two long necklaces, bracelets, anklets, and rings.

shoot outward from these hundred syllables making offerings to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. The rays of light strike all beings purifying them of all their obscurations and transforming them into Vajrasattva. Finally, the rays of light come back and are reabsorbed into the 100-syllable mantra in our heart. After this, we begin to visualize the peaceful and wrathful deities within our body. We visualize 36 of the 42 peaceful deities in your heart and 58 of the 60 wrathful deities in the head. The reason for this making up a total of only 94, not 100 deities, is as follows.

Because the nature of the eight consciousnesses is a continuity of luminous clarity that is empty of any substantiality, they are located in the heart which is the seat of consciousness. They appear in their pure form as peaceful deities who embody the eight consciousnesses and the five wisdoms in their true form. They comprise the dharmakaya buddha (Samantabhadra) as well as the five male and five female buddhas of each of the five families, and the eight male bodhisattvas and their consorts (the eight offering goddesses). Surrounding the offering goddesses are the four gatekeepers and their consorts. The gatekeepers and their consorts are wrathful, but they are classified as peaceful since they are part of the peaceful deities in the heart.

If we count these, we get 36 deities located in the heart chakra. There are also six more peaceful deities residing outside the heart who are the nirmanakaya sages (Skt. *muni*) of the six realms. These sages are

the buddhas who teach in each of the six realms of samsara. They are located in the six places within the body corresponding to the subtle channels connected to these realms. The sage who is teaching the gods in the god realm is Indra who resides inside the head. The sage of the jealous gods is located in the throat, more specifically in a subtle channel that is located in the back of the throat, almost at the base of the skull. The sage or teacher of humans, the Shakyamuni Buddha, is located in the heart. The sage of animals is located in the navel, the sage of the hungry ghosts in the lower abdomen, and the sage of the hell beings is located towards the inside of the sole of the foot, directly underneath the inner ankle.[77] These six peaceful deities plus the 36 peaceful deities in the heart make up 42 in all.[78] All of these embody the fundamental mind or consciousness, as opposed to thought or mental factors.

There are 51 types of thoughts and emotions often called the mental formations or mental factors (Tib. *sem jung*). They include the ones we have all the time and those that arise when we are doing positive, neutral, and negative activities. These thoughts or factors include sensations, perceptions, thinking, the five main disturbing emotions and so on. The point here is that these types of thoughts are active, more turbulent, and more intense than just luminous clarity. Therefore, they appear as wrathful deities and their appear-

77. See Appendix C for a more detailed description of these six realms.

78. See Appendix I for a more detailed description of the 42 peaceful deities.

ances are more intense than those of the peaceful deities. Because thinking occurs in the brain, the wrathful deities abide in there.[79]

Preparation Practice for the Zhitro Deities

We practice the self-visualization of the peaceful and wrathful ones in order to be able to recognize them in the bardo of dharmata. In addition, we can familiarize ourselves with the appearance of these deities in paintings to help our recognition of them and thus avoid confusion when encountering them in the bardo.

To prepare for the bardo we need to be able to visualize the wrathful deities located in our brain. These include the supreme Chemchok Heruka, and his consort Krodheshvari and the *Herukas* (*heruka* is Sanskrit for wrathful or wrathful) of the five buddha families and their consorts making twelve deities. Then outside of them are the eight fearful goddesses *Matarahs* (Tib. *keuris*) and the eight *Pichari* hybrid goddesses (Tib. *tramen*). Then there are four female gatekeepers who do not have male counterparts. In addition, there are the 28 *Ishari* (Tib. *wangchukma*) who are also goddesses who are also called Hybrids because they have animal heads and a human body. These are all visualized as being in our brain. The reason we visualize them in the brain is that in the normal living context, we experience them as the confused thoughts and feelings that occur in

79. See Appendix J for a more detailed description of the 58 wrathful deities.

the brain. When these thoughts appear in their pure expression, they appear as wrathful deities because they subdue negative thoughts.

This idea of the pure nature of consciousness and mental formations is depicted not only in the practices of the peaceful and wrathful deities, but also in other deity practices as well. For example, Vajrayogini is depicted wearing a tiara of five skulls. The five skulls represent the five wisdoms with the buddhas from each of the five buddha families. Because the five wisdoms are the nature of cognition itself, they are free from coarse conceptuality and are depicted as skulls rather than as heads with flesh on them. The 51 mental thoughts are depicted on the necklace of Vajrayogini that has 51 freshly severed heads (rather than skulls) to show that they are coarse conceptualizations.

We visualize the peaceful deities in our heart representing cognition and the wrathful deities in our brain representing thoughts. In between the head and heart is another group of deities located in the throat. The Zhitro liturgy says that in the throat chakra, in the midst of an expanse of rainbow light, we should visualize the five male and five female knowledge holders (Tib. *rigdzin*) surrounded by innumerable dakas and dakinis. In this bardo practice, we repeat the Vajrasattva mantra along with clearly visualizing the 42 peaceful deities in our heart, the ten male and female Vidyadharas in our throat on a moon disk lying flat. Each of the sixty wrathful deities in the brain has a sun disk and one of the hundred syllables of the

Vajrasattva mantra in their heart. The first syllable of the 100-syllable mantra, OM, which is in Samantabhadra's heart through to the last hundredth syllable of AH that is in the heart of the snake-headed goddess (Vajra Lambodara) of the wrathful deities.[80]

The mantra used in this bardo practice is actually two mantras that are recited together as one in repetition but visualized separately. The first mantra is the 24-syllable mantra which comes from the first sixteen syllables of the mantra for the 42 peaceful deities plus the last eight syllables of the mantra of the wrathful deities. So, each of the peaceful deities has the first sixteen syllables from OM AH HUM BO DHI CIT TA MA HA SU KHA JNA NA DHA TU AH (which make the eight words OM AH HUM BODHICHITTA MAHASUKA JNANA DHATU AH) and are located surrounding the seed syllable in the heart. Each of the wrathful deities has the last eight syllables of OM RULU RULU HUM BHYOH HUM in their heart. The mantra of the male deities is read in the normal way of reading by looking at the mantra from the outside. The female deity's mantra is arranged so that it would be read from the inside looking out. In summary, each of these deities has a particular seat, a particular seed syllable, and their mantra is facing in a particular direction.

The mantra of the peaceful deities contains within it the words that describe great bliss with the eight-syllable mantra BO DHI TSIT

80. The 100-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva is available from Rigpa Wiki.

TA MA HA SU KA (or BODHICHITTA MAHASUKA) and the four-syllable mantra JNA NA DHA TU (or JNANA DHATU) describing the expanse of wisdom making up the twelve syllables. The wrathful mantra called the RULU RULU mantra because it is said to embody the sound that the wrathful deities make. We visualize this RULU in the heart of each of these wrathful deities thinking that they are each saying their respective mantra.

In summary, all of the male and female peaceful deities are saying their peaceful mantra and all of the male and female wrathful deities are saying their wrathful mantra. We then visualize the mantra garlands and seed syllables in the hearts of these deities produce rays of light that shoot out in all directions. These rays go upward and present offerings to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. They absorb these blessings from the deities after which the buddhas and bodhisattvas are themselves reabsorbed into the seed syllables or mantras in the hearts of each of the deities.

The rays of light from all of these mantras shoot downward striking all sentient beings and purifying all of their wrongdoing and obscurations and transforming each and every sentient being into one of the peaceful or wrathful deities. So, the universe becomes filled more and more with peaceful and wrathful deities reciting the twelve-syllable mantra until the external universe is nothing more than a realm of pure peaceful and wrathful deities. Each and every sentient being is one of the male or female deities that make

up the peaceful and wrathful ones. All sounds are the sounds of the mantras of the peaceful and wrathful deities. We also reflect upon the fact that all thoughts that arise in our mind are nothing other than the display of the mind's nature (dharmata). We have just described the practice for reciting the twelve-syllable mantra (BO DHI TSIT TA MA HA SU KA JANA NA DHA TU) or (BODHICHITTA MAHASUKA JNANA DHATU).

This self-visualization and mantra repetition are part of the creation stage of the bardo practice. At the end of the mantra repetition session, we say HUNG three times to begin the practice of the completion stage. As we say HUNG, we visualize all the pure appearances that have made up the creation stage dissolving into emptiness. Then we rest our mind without any conceptual focus which is the main body of the practice of the completion stage.

At the end of the mantra session, we say PHAT (pronounced "pay") three times and visualize that the pure appearances re-arise. We then recite an aspirational prayer that the world be filled in all manner of goodness. We dedicate the virtue of the practice by making the aspiration that all beings achieve enlightenment or that they remain on the path until they do so. For convenience and ease, we create the belief that we are Vajrasattva with the peaceful and wrathful deities present within us and we maintain that belief throughout our postmeditation.

To practice the bardo of dharmata, we practice the self-visualization of the peaceful and wrathful ones in order to be able to recognize them at the time of the bardo. In addition, we can familiarize ourselves with their appearance as depicted in paintings or statutes and thus avoid any confusion that may ensue when encountering them in the bardo.

The Three Characteristics of the Creation Stage

There are three characteristics that must be present in the practice of selfvisualization: clear appearance, stable pride, and recollection of purity. "Clear appearance" means that we try to visualize the deity as clearly as possible. At best we can visualize each and every one of the deities completely clearly. If we can't do this, we should at least attempt to learn colors, mudras, clothing, and hand implements of the deities well enough to generate a fairly clear image of any one of them. We can do this one at a time. If that is too much, then we should at the very least learn the appearances of the deities so that, although we may not be able to visualize them, we know what the deities look like and know them when we see them.

The second characteristic of the creation stage of meditation is stable pride. When we visualize ourselves as a deity, we might think, "Well I'm not really this deity, but I'm going to pretend that I am." This is an incorrect outlook because from beginningless time, we have had this habit of believing we were a self. Nevertheless, it is

important to realize the fact that when we visualize ourselves as a deity, we are not *pretending* to be someone or something other than what we are because we possess buddha nature.

When visualizing the peaceful and wrathful deities within our body, we do so by remembering the fact that the peaceful deities, wrathful deities, and vidyadharas already exist in our body. For example, when we visualize ourselves as Vajrasattva, Vajrasattva is the embodiment of buddha nature which has always been part of our own true nature. Whether we think of our visualization as the embodiment of our own true nature or the embodiment of the pure nature of our eight consciousnesses in the form of the peaceful and wrathful deities, we should develop the confidence and trust that by visualizing ourselves as these deities, we are simply acknowledging that this is our true nature.

The third characteristic of the creation stage in meditation is called recollection of purity. This recollection implies that we do not visualize the image of the deity as a lifeless two-dimensional painting or threedimensional statue. While the visualized deity is utterly insubstantial, it is, at the same time, the living vivid appearance of the wisdom of the deity. It is important to incorporate these three characteristics — clear appearance, stable pride, and recollection of purity — in the practice of the creation stage. The result of practicing these three characteristics is described in the *Domjung* text when the practitioners pass away:

The herukas and so forth, and the yoginis,
Holding various flowers in their hands
As well as various banners and flags.
With different kinds of music
Send forth the sounds, "Death is but a thought!"
Thus are the practitioners led to the celestial realm.[81]

These two verses that describe the achievement of the celestial state which leads to an excellent rebirth.

Two Aspects of the Bardo of Dharmata

We have seen that the bardo of dharmata has two parts. The first part is the appearance of the ground clear light of dharmata. The second part comprises the appearance of the peaceful and wrathful deities. Briefly put, the preparation for these two phases is called the creation stage and the completion stage of Vajrayana meditation. Preparation for the creation stage allows us to recognize the deities which can lead to rebirth in a pure land and the completion stage enables us to first achieve liberation from the bardo of dharmata. Therefore, we should practice both the creation and completion stages of meditation as much as possible. But even if we cannot practice these with tremendous exertion, simply understanding that these two stages exist will put us in a much better position in the bardo than persons who have never heard of these two stages.

81. This is from *The Mirror of Mindfulness*, page 62-63.

The Meditation Days of the Peaceful Deities

There is a section in *The Great Liberation of Hearing in the Bardo* that summarizes the appearances in the bardo of dharmata as occurring in twelve successive meditation days.[82] As we have seen, a meditation day is how long a person can stay in one-pointed meditation multiplied by five.

On the first meditation day after death, the element of space arises. Vairochana and his consort, Vajradhatishvari, appear with a very bright piercing blue light together with a dim white light of the god realm of samsara. According to *The Great Liberation of Hearing in the Bardo*, the blue light is so bright that our eyes cannot look at it.[83] Without previous study and practice, we cannot identify the bright blue light as being the wisdom of dharmadhatu. And so, we escape towards the soothing white light by running towards samsara which we are all so familiar with. However, if we have studied the five buddhas, we will be able to recognize the Buddha Vairochana and move toward his light to take refuge in Vairochana by going toward his heart and the heart of his consort. If we are able to merge with Vairochana, we can skip all the following days.

82. This section of *The Great Liberation of Hearing in the Bardo* is found on pages 236-270 of Gyurme Dorje's translation.

83. Obviously, we no longer have eyes in the bardo, but our mind has manufactured an illusory body and this light is very bright for our illusory body to directly experience.

On the second meditation day, the element of water arises. The blue Buddha Vajrasattva, the embodiment of mirror-like wisdom which purifies the disturbing emotion of anger, is present in union with the feminine buddha Lochana. The blue Vajrasattva is one of the five buddhas of the buddha families. He is accompanied by the two male bodhisattvas, Kshitigarbha and Maitreya, and two female bodhisattvas Pushpa (goddess of flowers) and Lasya (goddess of beauty).[84] These six deities appear together in the bright white light of mirror-like wisdom which is apart from a small and dim smoky light of the hell realms. We should not be attracted to this dim comforting and smoky light. Instead, we should go towards the bright white light of mirror-like wisdom, visualizing that we will merge into the heart and his female Buddha.

On the third meditation day, the purification of the disturbing emotion of pride is transformed into the wisdom of equality. We see before us the yellow Buddha Ratnasambhava in union with his consort Mamaki. Appearing alongside them are two bodhisattvas, Akashagarbha and Samantabhadra, accompanied by the two female bodhisattvas, Malya (goddess of garlands) and Dhupa (goddess of incense). A very intense yellow light, which is the essence of the wisdom of equality, shines blindingly. Nearby is the dim blue light of the human realm. We are attracted to this dim blue light because it is not so intense and appears very familiar. We should, however,

84. These are the same offering goddesses that we make offerings to with the seven water bowls on the shrine.

not go toward the pale blue light and not be afraid of approaching the intense yellow light with the intent to merge into the heart of Ratnasambhava.

On the fourth meditation day appears the red light of Buddha Amitabha who is in union with Pandaravasini accompanied by Chenrezig and Manjushri two bodhisattvas, who are, themselves, accompanied by two female bodhisattvas Gita (goddess of song) and Aloka (goddesses of light). The intense red light shining from Amitabha is the essence of the wisdom of discrimination. At the same time, there appears the dim yellow light which we should not be attracted to because it leads to the realm of the hungry ghosts. We should not be afraid of the bright red light of the wisdom of discrimination coming from the heart of Amitabha and his female buddha and we should go towards it, visualizing that we are merging into the heart of the Amitabha and his female Buddha going to the pure land of Sukhavati.

When we are doing this practice, we should imagine that the heart has channels or petals like a flower. Ratnasambhava is on the southern petal (on our right) and Amitabha is on the east (our rear) and Amoghasiddhi on the north petal of the heart (on our left).

On the fifth meditation day, the element of wind arises. The green Buddha Amoghasiddhi with his consort Samayatara accompanied by the two male bodhisattvas, Vajrapani and Sarvanivarana Viskhambhin and two female bodhisattvas, Gandha (goddess of

perfume) and Nritya (goddess of dance) shines with a dazzling green light that is the essence of the wisdom of accomplishment. Along with this green light is the dim red light coming from the samsaric realm of the jealous gods. We should not be attracted to the dim red light of the jealous gods and shouldn't be afraid of the bright green light of Amoghasiddhi's wisdom of accomplishment. Instead, we should pray, "I take refuge in Amoghasiddhi's great compassion" and imagine that we merge into his heart.

All five buddhas have manifested successively in the previous five meditation days. On the sixth meditation day all five wisdom buddhas appear simultaneously in union with their female aspects accompanied by their retinue of male and female bodhisattvas. In addition, around them are the four male and four female wrathful gatekeeper deities,[85] along with the six buddhas of the six realms of samsara.[86] These are accompanied by Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri. At this time, we may experience great fear and terror and wish to flee from all these appearances. However, we shouldn't try to escape nor be afraid. Instead, we should have faith and devotion and make the sincere wish to be with these deities.

85. The male gatekeepers are Achala, Yamantaka, Hayagriva, and Amrita-kundali. The female gatekeepers are Angkusha, Pasha, Shringkhala, and Ghanta.

86. These are: buddha of the god realm (Indrashakra), jealous gods (Vemachitra), human realm (Shakyamuni), the animal realm (Sthirasimha), buddha of the jealous god realm (Jvalamukha), and Yama Dharmaraja of the hell realm.

The Meditation Days of the Semi-Wrathful Deities

If we do a daily bardo practice, we can visualize the five vidyadharas in our throat chakra. They would be visualized with one in the center and one in each of the four directions. We would supplicate them by asking them to help us to have no fear as we wander in samsara and especially when we enter in the bardo. We can also request them to help us gain a favorable rebirth.

On the sixth meditation day, the five vidyadharas in union with their five female consorts appear to us at the same time as a mandala. In the center is the vidyadhara of complete maturation (Vairochana) radiating all five colors who is with his red consort. In the east is the white vidyadhara (Vajrasattva) with his white consort; in the south is the yellow vidyadhara (Ratnasambhava) with his yellow consort; to the west is the red vidyadhara (Amitabha) with his red consort; and in the north is the green vidyadhara (Amoghasiddhi) with his green consort. In sum, all five pairs of vidyadharas and their consorts appear on the seventh meditation day.

On this seventh meditation day, the multi-colored light rays from the hearts of all the dakas and dakinis combine to make a frightening blazing light. Nearby is the soft welcoming green light of the animal realm. We should not be attracted to the green light of the animal realm and also not be frightened by the bright light of five

colors. Instead, we should go towards the bright light thinking that we are merging into the hearts of the dakas and dakinis. This seventh meditation day concludes the appearance of the peaceful deities. Next follows the dawning of the wrathful deities.

The Meditation Days of the Wrathful Deities

On the eighth meditation day, the wrathful deities begin to appear. The wrathful deities appear from our own karmic latencies and are very powerful manifestations. It is, therefore, very important that we are prepared for their appearance so that we recognize them for what they are. Otherwise, they will be very terrifying. Normally in deity practice we think, "I am the yidam deity," and we don't experience fear doing this practice. However, it is different when the wrathful forms manifest in the bardo.

There is one central wrathful deity called the Buddha Heruka or Chemchok. He is dark maroon in color, has three faces, six arms, and four legs. His jewelry and clothing are very frightening, and he is accompanied by his female partner. They are the pure manifestation of the disturbing emotion of ignorance. Surrounded by fire, they both make terrifying sounds like the roar of thunder. The Buddha Heruka has wings; his famine aspect does not have wings. The essence of Buddha Heruka is the dharmadhatu wisdom and the Buddha Heruka's sambhogakaya form is Vairochana.

Previously, we saw a bright light that shined from the heart of the peaceful deities and dim light from the six realms of samsara. However, no lights shine from the wrathful deities; instead, their appearance is so terrifying that we dislike and fear them so much that we want to run away from them. Trying to escape Chemchok will lead us onto the wrong path, we should think of him and all the wrathful deities as being our yidams, identify with them, and try to merge into their hearts. It is said that the peaceful deities manifest for a longer period of time, whereas the wrathful deities appear very quickly from the eighth meditation day onwards.

On the ninth meditation day, the Vajra Heruka (wrathful Vajrasattva) manifests in the east. He is dark blue in color, has three faces, six arms and four legs — the same as Buddha Heruka but holding different implements. The essence of Vajra Heruka is the mirror-like wisdom of the dharmakaya. The Vajra Heruka's sambhogakaya form is the wisdom deity Akshobhya. Vajra Heruka is the pure manifestation of the disturbing emotion of anger.

On the tenth meditation day the Ratna Heruka (wrathful Ratnasambhava) appears being the essence of the wisdom of equality. He is the pure manifestation of the disturbing emotion of pride which causes us to think that we are superior to others. When pride is eliminated, the wisdom of equality shines forth — the realization that all beings are innately equal because they all possess buddha nature. With the elimination of pride and the realization of the wis-

dom of equality, we have attained the state of the Ratnasambhava. Therefore, the essence of the Ratna Heruka is Ratnasambhava of the jewel family associated with increasing enrichment, development, and progress. It is said that "positive qualities cannot enter the solid lump of pride." The Ratna Heruka is yellow, has the three faces, six arms, and four legs and his female partner is Ratna-Krodheshvari (Tib. *ratna-khronmo*).[87]

On the eleventh meditation day, Padma Heruka (wrathful Amitabha) of the lotus family manifests in the west. His impure aspect is the disturbing emotion of desire, and his pure aspect is discriminating wisdom. His body is dark red, and his consort is Padma-Krodheshvari. With the attainment of buddhahood, the two wisdoms of the Buddha arise: the wisdom that realizes the true nature of phenomena and the wisdom that realizes the variety of phenomena. Dharmadhatu wisdom, mirror-like wisdom, and the wisdom of equality, the first three are classified as the wisdoms that know the nature of things as they are. The wisdom of discrimination, and the wisdom of accomplishment, and sometimes mirror-like wisdom belong to the wisdom that realizes the variety of phenomena.

If someone has attained buddhahood, they have the wisdom of discrimination which sees everything distinctly for what it is. With the wisdom of discrimination, that which is bad is not seen

87. *Krodheshvari* is the Sanskrit name for "the female buddha" which is just as valid and important as the male buddha. It is too bad that this is usually translated as "consort" which has many negative connotations.

as good, and good is not seen as bad. When the impure aspect of desire is mixed with ignorance, we don't recognize things for what they are, that is, we think that an activity or situation is bad when it is actually good and vice versa. When the disturbing emotion of desire or attachment is eliminated, we develop the wisdom of discrimination which distinguishes phenomena one for all these things from each other — the good, bad, and so on. The essence of Padma Heruka is the discriminating wisdom of the dharmakaya. The sambhogakaya manifestation of this wisdom is Amitabha. His appearance is the same as the other Herukas except that he is red in color and holds a lotus, trident, and club in his right hands.

On the twelfth meditation day, the Karma Heruka (wrathful Amoghasiddhi) appears as dark green in color and has the same features as the other Herukas. He is the pure manifestation of the disturbing emotion of envy. His essence is the wisdom of accomplishing actions. He is the wrathful form of the Buddha Amoghasiddhi, and his consort is Karma Krodheshvari.

Buddhas do not make mistakes and whatever they do is done correctly because they have the wisdom of accomplishment. When envy or jealousy (the impure aspect of this wisdom) prevails, it leads to a conflict between us and others. Due to this conflict, we are not able to accomplish what we intend to do. When envy is eliminated, the wisdom of accomplishment manifests because without envy, we engage Dharmic actions. The buddhas are free

of envy and can accomplish whatever actions they attempt. The wisdom of accomplishment is the dharmakaya aspect of the Karma Heruka. The sambhogakaya aspect is Buddha Amoghasiddhi who is the peaceful manifestation of the wrathful Karma Heruka.

Questions

> Rinpoche, do the peaceful and wrathful deities appear to people of varying cultures as not necessarily in the form in which they are depicted traditionally in the Tibetan iconography?

The appearances of the deities in Vajrayana iconography have, in the case of the peaceful and wrathful deities, nothing whatsoever to do with the Tibetan tradition. The appearances of these deities were taught by the Buddha in India. However, the noted twentieth century scholar Gendun Chöphel has said that there is something cultural about the way we depict and imagine deities. He said that the ornamentation and appearance of our deities are Indian because the Buddha was Indian. Had the Buddha appeared in another country, for example China, we would visualize the deities with long wispy beards and Chinese clothing and that, he said, was at least partly cultural. However, I think that Gendun Chöphel was more a speculative philosopher than a practitioner and that this particular statement can be disregarded for the following reason. There is a Nyingma practice called Leapover (Tib. *Tögal*), the result of which

makes use of either the light of the sun or of utter darkness in which a person will actually see the appearances which arise in the bardo of dharmata. These begin with practitioners seeing multi-colored lights and then, with practice, they begin to see drops of multicolored light. These appearances are not imaginary or produced by visualization, actually seen because they are inherent, or spontaneously present, in the subtle body. When Tögal is practiced intensely and for long enough, the practitioners will eventually see that inside these spheres of light are the peaceful and wrathful deities. They are not looking for them or imagining them. They are not produced out of habit, information, education, or belief. These deities are simply present within our subtle body and the Tögal practice allows us to actually perceive them. Therefore, the iconography really reflects a basic reality and not a tradition of any kind.[88]

> I can understand the appearance of the peaceful and wrathful deities as being a purified aspect of our nature. Did you say someone who had never heard of buddhas would still see them in the bardo in the same form?

Yes, because they are innate. Now, if someone has practiced meditation, then the peaceful and wrathful deities will appear for a longer time because their meditation days in the bardo will be longer. But even someone who has never practiced any meditation will still

88. Thrangu Rinpoche in his book *Luminous Clarity* describes these Tögal practices in much greater detail.

see the deities exactly as they are depicted. But they will appear only very briefly. I believe this because when you practice the path of Tögal, the deities actually appear to you physically as they are depicted. In Tögal you are not imagining them at all; you are actually seeing them. And since they appear without being visualized, then clearly, they are spontaneously present and not something that has been made up.

> You have said that the peaceful and wrathful deities are inherent within my body. If that is true, are the peaceful and wrathful deities who abide within my body different from the deities abiding within another person's body? And furthermore, are those peaceful and wrathful deities who abide within my body identical to or different from myself?

If we look at the ultimate nature of our physical body, we see that it is a mental appearance. The peaceful and wrathful deities abide in that body which is ultimately a mental appearance. Therefore, the peaceful and wrathful deities are the pure embodiment residing within the body and they have the characteristics of an appearance of mind. For example, in the impure state, they are the 51 mental thoughts and in their pure nature they are the 51 wrathful deities. In the impure state, the person has eight consciousnesses. But in the pure state, these consciousnesses become the eight bodhisattvas. What we experience in our impure or unenlightened state as the five aggregates are, in their pure or enlightened state, experienced as

the five male buddhas. What we experience as the natural luminous clarity of the nature of the expanse of phenomena (dharmadhatu) is the dharmakaya deity of Samantabhadra (male). And what we experience as the emptiness of that nature of the dharmakaya is Samantabhadri (female). All of these appearances are actually present within the body, but they appear to be external to us in the bardo.

Now, for your question of whether these deities have the same nature or a different nature as yourself: We would have to say these deities are inseparable from and also have the same nature as yourself. What we conventionally call "me" is actually made up of the eight consciousnesses, 51 types of thoughts, and so on. Since these factors are the embodiments of the true nature of the deities, we say that they are aspects of the true nature of what we call "ourselves."

The 100 deities appear differently to each person depending on their karma, yet the true nature of these appearances is the same. In a similar way, one person's dharmakaya and another person's dharmakaya are the same but it inhabits different bodies.

As for whether the peaceful and wrathful deities within one person are identical to those of another person, the answer is "no" because each person has their own makeup, just as each person has their own mental thoughts and their own consciousnesses.

> In the *Mahabharata*, Vishnu says that he emanated Krishna, and that Krishna is inherent in all phenomena. This Hindu

> notion of the immanence of the divine seems identical to the view expounded in the *Guhyasamaja Tantra* on which the bardo teachings are based. In his commentary on the Pramana, Dharmakirti refuted the existence of a basic nature pervading all phenomena, yet we find an idea of immanence in the *Guhyasamaja Tantra*. Could you please explain the difference between the presentation of the nature of deity in the *Guhyasamaja Tantra* and the externalist presentation in the Mahabharata as refuted by Dharmakirti? Also, is the statement in the *Uttaratantra Shastra* that buddha nature is allpervasive and pervades each and every being not the same thing as the proposal of this primal nature proposed by externalists?

The notion of buddha nature in Buddhism is not the same as the notion of pervasion in the Vaishnavism notion of Krishna because buddha nature pervades all individuals in the sense that each and every individual possesses buddha nature. It is not the case that there is one buddha nature that pervades and is contained in all individuals. For example, if I were to say, "Trees and forests all over the world are pervaded by wood," I would mean that wherever you find a tree, inside it you will find wood. It is not the same thing as saying that there is one huge chunk of wood that is somehow pervading and joining all the trees all over the world.

Now, what is refuted by Dharmakirti in his Pramana shastra is the substantialism of the idea that there is one pervasive, primal sub-

stance or creator. This is very different from the notion of buddha nature. Buddha nature is presented as a way to explain that there is a capability which allows all sentient beings to achieve buddhahood.

It is fitting for me to say, "If I enter the path, I will attain buddhahood." Why? Because I have the potential or basic nature for which that is possible, and I call this buddha nature. And this is also true for anyone else. If any other person enters the path, they will attain buddhahood because they have buddha nature. In brief, buddha nature refers to a potential that makes it possible for buddhahood to actually be attained. This is very different from the idea of Krishna presented in the *Mahabharata* and other texts because Krishna is presented as a primal creator and is an inherently existent being who contains within him all phenomena, the whole universe. This is very different from the peaceful and wrathful deities who do not contain the entire universe within them but are individually found within each and every being.

> And would the deities found individually within every being have the same look or details, i.e., the same specific scepters, numbers and varieties of heads, and so forth?

Yes.

THE BARDO OF BECOMING



• 10 •

REBIRTH

6. When the bardo of becoming dawns upon me,
I will concentrate my mind one-pointedly
And strive to prolong the results of good karma.
I will close the womb entrance and think of resistance.
This is the time when perseverance and pure thought are needed.
Abandon jealousy and meditate on the guru with his consort.

— The sixth Primary Root Verse of the Bardo

We now come to the last bardo called the karmic bardo of becoming, which lasts from the end of the bardo of dharmata until we enter the womb of our next mother. During the bardo of dharmata, someone who has achieved liberation through the practice of Phowa, by recognizing the ground clear light of dharmata or by fully recognizing the peaceful and wrathful deities as their yidams, will not wander in the bardo of becoming in the same way as an ordinary person would. But if none of these three conditions are achieved, they will enter this last bardo of becoming with the full re-arising of the negative habits and ignorance of the person's last

lifetime. They will have their previous thoughts and feelings, but without a physical body.

A person with no instruction in achieving liberation who has a great deal of negative karma or who did not reach liberation in the previous bardos, will experience the full bardo of becoming. After they have experienced the nine dissolutions, they will lose consciousness and go into a swoon. Since the ejection of consciousness has not been successfully performed, the person's consciousness remains in the body. At this point in the bardo of becoming, the karmic winds wake the consciousness back up and, because the body is no longer functional, the person's consciousness exits through one of its nine orifices. The individuals in this condition will have a strong familiarity with and much stronger attachment to the appearances of the six realms of samara, through which they have been cycling around and around for many lifetimes. As a result, their consciousness will re-arise in that impure state of appearance.

At the time of death, our 80 types of thoughts and feelings gradually shut down. Now, with the karmic wind shaking the consciousness and driving it out of the body, these 80 types of thoughts are reactivated. Having not recognized the ground of dharmata, the disturbing emotion of ignorance reasserts itself when the person regains consciousness; this is the beginning of the bardo of becoming. It starts with the arising of the disturbing emotion of ignorance, followed by the disturbing emotion of attachment to outer phenomena and,

finally, the disturbing emotion of anger — the three main disturbing emotions activating all 80 types of thoughts.

The Mind Separating from the Body

As the mind leaves the body, the karmic wind accompanies the mind and begins collecting the subtle winds of the four elements. First it collects the subtle wind of air, then the subtle wind of fire, then the subtle wind of water, and finally the subtle wind of earth. When these four subtle winds of the elements have been reactivated, the person returns to a state of fullfledged ignorance with the mind now being like the one they had before they started to die.

Until now, our mind in the bardo didn't have the usual four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind from the previous body. But, through the action of the karmic wind, the subtle winds of the five elements have been reassembled. In the bardo of becoming, these subtle winds of the five elements form a mental body.

The mental body is described in *Bardo Thodol* by saying that in the bardo of becoming "with senses complete, it can go anywhere." This means that even if we were deaf or blind before death, our mind creates a mental body that is a replica of our previous physical body but with all of our senses working. If we were blind, we will be able to see; if we had difficulty hearing, we could now hear normally, and so on. Also, this mental body is insubstantial. Our body will look like our previous physical body except that it will

appear to be somewhat luminous, projecting its own light. This luminous mental body also has the miraculous ability to travel anywhere. This ability does not come from meditation; rather, it is the result of the karma of not having a physical body. In this state we can go wherever we want to go because without a body, there is nothing that can stop us from ending up in any place that we think of. In this bardo we can pass through any kind of matter, even solid rock. Usually, if we want to get to the other side of a large boulder, we have to climb over it. But when we are in the bardo, we just go right through the rock. A person in the bardo of becoming can travel through solid objects, can go through houses, fly through space, and so on. We can go anywhere except that we cannot go into the womb of our future mother until there is actual conception. But we can go almost anywhere else by simply thinking of it. If we have a busy discursive mind with many thoughts, we will not be able to control where we go. Every time we think of a place in our continuous inner monologue, zip we are there, then zip we are somewhere else, and so on, making the whole situation very distracting and confusing.

Beings in the bardo of becoming also have a limited degree of clairvoyance called a karmically produced miraculous ability. This is not a true miraculous ability because the bardo beings do not have a solid body, so they don't perceive things through their eyes and ears but through extrasensory perception. This is not the type of extrasensory perception that arises from meditation but is simply a

result of being in the bardo of becoming. A person in the bardo can be aware of the thoughts and states of mind of others. Since bardo beings are usually attracted to their relatives and loved ones from their previous life, they may be aware of what is actually going on in a person's mind. For example, upon returning to their relatives, they may perceive the minds of their relatives to be loving and compassionate and think of them fondly. They will, of course, be delighted and their state of their mind will improve accordingly. On the other hand, if upon returning to their relatives they find their relatives are thinking dishonest, greedy thoughts and are only interested in the person's possessions, the bardo being may become sad and angry. So when someone close to us has passed away, it is important to be careful in our conduct and think of the deceased only with love and kindness.

When an ordinary person with no training arrives in the bardo of becoming and reawakens, they will probably not realize that they have died. Not knowing that they are dead is like when we dream and do not know that we are dreaming, so we believe that what is happening in the dream is real. Similarly, not knowing that we are dead, we will try to return to our home, relatives, and possessions, but we will not be able to use any of our possessions or to communicate with anyone. We will then become upset and angry when we observe our family and friends completely ignoring us and using our things, spending our wealth, living in our home, because we haven't realized that we have died.

We can prevent this situation by employing all of the aspects of practice that will enable us to recognize the experience of the bardo as the bardo and also those practices that prevent us from having a strong attachment to material things, such as continually recollecting impermanence while we are alive. In this way we will not become too attached to our possessions, wealth, or relatives.

As the person continues to experience the bardo of becoming, all sorts of bewildered appearances or hallucinations will arise. Some will be pleasant and some, unpleasant. But if we recognize that we are in the bardo of becoming and that these appearances we are experiencing are all hallucinations, we will know that we can transform these visions since we have previously trained in the recognition and transformation of dreams in dream yoga,. We will then be able to transform unpleasant appearances into pleasant ones and impure appearances into pure ones. In order to do this, we need to cultivate the faculties of mindfulness and alertness throughout our waking state while we are still alive. Not only must these practices that we need to rely upon at the time of death be cultivated before we die, but, in particular, we need to continually and regularly engage in these practices to reinforce them so we can rely on them in the future.

Selecting a New Rebirth

In the bardo of becoming, we need to remember that despite the distraction of the many appearances that arise before us, we need to focus on selecting a good rebirth. At some point in this bardo, we will think that we have a real body and at other times we will think that we are formless. Sometimes our mind may be very clear, and we may even have moments of clairvoyance and the ability to create miracles. At other times we may experience frightening, ugly things. During all of this, it is important that we do not lose ourselves in these strong appearances, but rather, recognize them for what they are — the confused appearances of our own mind. If we are able to do this, we can select a good rebirth in which we can engage in Dharma in our next lifetime. If we lose ourselves to these appearances, we will be lost to the power of our karma. Karma has a very strong influence on our mind. But if we remember and supplicate the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, and our meditational deity (providing we have one during this period of the bardo of becoming), we will be able to select a good set of parents.

To be more specific, at this point we can employ methods to ensure a good rebirth and to block bad rebirths. In the bardo of becoming, we may experience terrifying appearances and we will try to find a means of escaping them, which can lead us towards a bad rebirth. When we find ourselves being directed towards a bad rebirth due to fear, we need to realize that the terrifying appearances are simply

the negative aspects of our own mind; then we need to make supplications to the Three Jewels so that we can stop ourselves from choosing unhelpful births. This is called blocking the entry way to unfortunate births.

At other times, through strong passion, we may be drawn to take a particular rebirth. We may, for example, be drawn in by seeing our future parents making love. But we can block these kinds of rebirths by recognizing that these are nothing but confused appearances and by remembering that we shouldn't lose ourselves to them. In the bardo, we must not let our mind come under the control of these appearances caused by our negative mental states of mind. Instead, we should supplicate the Three Jewels, make aspiration prayers, and always remember the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The strength of these activities will prevent us from taking a poor rebirth caused by our negative emotions.

We cannot block all rebirths, however, because there is no particular place for us to stay in the bardo. When the loud horrible sounds and visions of dreadful things come at us in the bardo, we cannot close our eyes or cover our ears because we have no body. We need to use this time to choose a favorable rebirth, and there are several different methods to do this. If we have practiced the creation stage of deity practice, we can visualize ourselves as the yidam and our future parents also as yidams. This is one way of ensuring a good rebirth.

We may also choose to meditate on emptiness which will prevent us from taking an unfortunate rebirth. If we are a monk or a nun and wish to continue being a monk or a nun in a future birth, we should try to remember our vows at this time. This will help ensure that we are reborn in a situation where it is possible to become a monk or a nun again and to continue practicing. Many practitioners have also taken the five vows of householders. If we follow these vows carefully in this lifetime and remember them in the bardo, this can also help us to obtain a good rebirth.

We should also try to remember that these experiences in the bardo are created through the force of karma and that they are part of our present lived life except that while alive, our mind was confined to our body. The karmic force can make our mind very unstable. But if we are clever, we can use this ability to be reborn in a pure land. In the bardo of becoming, it is possible to clearly visualize a pure land (for example the blissful realm of Amitabha) and make the aspiration, "May I be born in the blissful realm of Amitabha." If we then focus on this one-pointedly while visualizing this pure land, there is a possibility that we will be reborn there. To accomplish this in the bardo, we must do this practice while we are still alive and even try visiting this pure land in our dreams again and again.

During this bardo of becoming, we will experience a mixture of pure and impure appearances. We will have fleeting visions of pure realms as well as visions of the six impure realms of samsara. If we

are working with pure appearances in our Dharma practice, we will respond to the visions of pure realms with delight and enthusiasm, which will help us take rebirth in one of them. If we are not familiar with the pure appearances of deities, realms, and so on, we will find the appearances of these pure realms in the bardo to be uninteresting and possibly even threatening. They will seem a long way off and not worth seeking out. If we have not practiced well in life, we will return to our great attachment to familiar things of this world and will take delight in those things causing us to proceed on the wrong path right back to samsara with all its suffering.

Whether or not we engage in the formal practice of meditation, it is important to develop at least some familiarity with, and enthusiasm for, the true nature of phenomena (dharmata) and for the pure realms and the pure appearances such as yidam deities and their environments. While we were living, it is only to the extent that we had enthusiasm and delight for these pure appearances that we will respond with enthusiasm to their appearance in the bardo and be less attached to the accompanying impure appearances.

When cultivating enthusiasm for pure appearances in this life, it is equally important to lessen our attachment to impure appearances — our possessions, our wealth, our property, our relationships — by continually bringing to mind their utter impermanence. The more we are interested in and appreciate pure appearances and let

go of attachments to impure appearances, the better our passage through the bardo will be.

This experience is described in *Bardo Thodol* which describes experiences of two different types: the brilliant light of the pure realms and the dull but familiar light of the path back into samsara. It is important to prepare ourselves for this by lessening our attachment to the familiar world of impure appearances (experienced as dull light paths in the bardo) and increasing our familiarity with and enthusiasm for pure appearances (especially the appearances of yidam deities as paths of brilliant light in the bardo).

Although we experience the appearance of a physical body in the bardo of becoming, it is not really a physical body and so it is unstable. While we were living, our mind was seated in the body and was connected with the subtle channels, subtle winds, and subtle drops, creating a vast number of thoughts that flit about our mind. These thoughts could move our mind, but they did not really affect our physical body. The mind in the bardo of becoming, however, has a very hard time coming to rest. Therefore, the hallucinations we experience in the bardo are intense and quite numerous. Our mind is so bewildered by all of this that we cannot control our thoughts. Therefore, the most important preparation to develop stability of mind is the practice of Shamatha meditation. To the degree that we can control our mind right now while we are alive, we will be able to control it in the bardo. By doing Shamatha while we are

alive, the hallucinations in the bardo will be less intense, and we will be better able to withstand the onslaught of our own thoughts.

When we are alive and try to cultivate virtuous thoughts such as devotion, loving kindness, and compassion, often these qualities of mind seem to be weak. This is because they are inhibited by our physical body and by the movement of our karmic winds. However, without a corporeal body in the bardo, our mind is clearly the most powerful thing in our experience. Therefore, virtuous states of mind developed by meditative absorption have much more power in the bardo than in our ordinary lives. Also, Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation as well as the practice of the creation stage in the visualization of deities will be more powerful and clearer in the bardo if we can remember to do these practices.

For example, we might visualize ourselves as a deity during our lifetime but we will still be conscious of the physical sensations and appearance of our ordinary body which will inhibit the clarity and confidence of our visualization. But, when we are in the bardo, the visualization of ourselves as a deity will end with the appearance of the imagined mental body and so our deity visualization will be extremely clear and vivid. Also, as we practiced Shamatha in life, there were limits placed upon the meditation by the disturbances our living body produced. In the bardo these disturbances are gone so that when we place our mind firmly in a state of Shamatha, it will stay put. When we were alive and practicing Vipashyana, the

glimpses of the true nature of mind tended to be very fleeting and quite weak or indistinct. Whereas, when we do the same practice in the bardo, these experiences will be much more vivid and clear.

It is usually taught that the bardo of becoming lasts 49 days. In the Abhidharma it says that during this bardo of becoming, our mental body will have the same appearance as our body will have in the following life. But according to Natsok Rangdrol and other texts on the bardo, during the first half of the bardo of becoming, our mental body will appear as the body of the preceding lifetime; for the second half of the bardo of becoming it will appear as the body of the next lifetime, and during this transition there is a period where it oscillates back and forth.

During the bardo of becoming, we need to cultivate the six recollections to maintain mindfulness and alertness so that we will not be caught by the confusing appearances. These recollections are: supplicating (1) Buddha, (2) the Dharma, and (3) the Sangha, and further recollecting (4) our acts of generosity to reverse our attachment, (5) our yidam, and (6) moral discipline. By recollecting these six, the disturbing appearances in the bardo will be pacified, because in the bardo with our mental body, when the state of our mind changes, the appearances around us will also change.

We can bring these six recollections to mind when dealing with specific types of confusion. The karmic latencies developed from these six actions can help us in the bardo to deal with and transform

various states of confused appearances. For example, while we are alive and are about to be crushed by a landslide, it would be too late to pray to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. However, if we perceive this happening to us in the bardo of becoming, we can stop these appearances from happening by praying to the Three Jewels because the landside in the bardo is just a projection of our mind rather than a substantial event.

In the bardo of becoming, we may find ourselves being driven towards or attracted to a rebirth in a lower realm. When this happens, we must earnestly pray to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha and make aspirations for a good rebirth, which can prevent an unfortunate rebirth by changing our state of mind and thus the appearances around us. If possible, when we are in the bardo of becoming, we will want to avoid a rebirth in any of the six realms of samsara. But if that is not possible, we must at least avoid rebirth in the three lower realms. For example, taking rebirth in the hell realms can occur in one of several ways. Sometimes we may actually flee something in the bardo that terrifies us, and in the process of fleeing, we will be driven into a hell realm. Or we may perceive the hell realms as something very attractive or desirable and end up there because of our attachment and desire.

In the same way, if we find ourselves having a great attachment to our previous possessions or relationships, we can overcome this attachment by recollecting our acts of generosity and rejoicing in

them which diminishes our personal attachment. Or when we find ourselves afflicted by a wrathful desire for something, we can reflect on moral discipline to alleviate that desire. Finally, through recollection on our yidam, we will be able to transform the impure appearances of this bardo into the pure appearances of our yidam deity.

In the bardo of becoming, we will experience a variety of hallucinations and appearances and we will react with attachment to some of them and with fear to others. The way to deal with these hallucinations is to keep in mind the fact that everything that appears to us in the bardo is our own mind's display no matter if it appears as pleasant or unpleasant. If we know we are in the bardo, then whatever experience we have will not cause us to suffer. The way to prepare for this recognition during our lifetime is to cultivate a definite belief that emptiness if the true nature of all phenomena. If this understanding of emptiness is stable enough, it will help us to deal with the various appearances in the bardo. But if we believe phenomena to be real while we are alive, we will then believe that the appearances in the bardo of becoming are external to us and very dangerous.

We need to recognize the empty nature of phenomena, or as is taught in the Heart Sutra, there are "no eyes, no ears, no nose," and so on. The appearances in the bardo, like those in our dreams, are internally created illusions of our mind and lacking in inherent existence.

The experience of this bardo will become more and more threatening and we will become more and more agitated. This provokes in us an almost overpowering desire to find a reprieve, a sanctuary from these frightening visions and sounds, so we actively start to seek a new rebirth.

At this time, it is of utmost importance that we apply stable mindfulness and alertness in choosing where we should take rebirth. There are two methods to prevent choosing an unfortunate rebirth called blocking the womb and choosing a womb. Through the force of powerful karma, we are being propelled into a state of agitation that tempts us to take rebirth in the first womb we perceive. If we just go along with the impulse of our karma, we are apt to be reborn in an unfortunate circumstance and will have no control whatsoever over our subsequent rebirth.

The way to stop an undesirable rebirth is to see the visions and sounds in the bardo as being completely pure and to regard whatever beings we see as deities. This will stop the forces propelling us into an undesirable rebirth. To utilize mindfulness and alertness at this time, it is essential that we cultivate these mental abilities during our lifetime. This first technique of blocking the womb involves changing the perception of impure appearances into pure appearances.

The second technique is choosing a womb. Usually, a being who is about to be conceived as a human, will see their future parents as they are about to engage in sexual union. At that point, a bardo

being tends to create an attachment or desire for one parent and an aversion for the other. The actual conditions that force the bardo beings into a womb are a combination of desire and attachment to one of the parents and a dislike or disgust toward the other one. It is generally said that if we are going to be reborn as a male, we will be attracted to the mother and feel a dislike for the father; if we are going to be reborn as a female, we will feel an attraction for the father and dislike for the mother. The combination of these two disturbing emotions propels us into the womb. If we can prevent ourselves from having these two reactions, we can consciously choose the womb of our rebirth.

These reactions of attraction and aversion refer only to what happens in the bardo and not to what happens in the ensuing lifetime. At that time, we are not perceiving these two individuals as parents because they are not yet our parents. In fact, we do not see the individuals themselves. What we are reacting to is the perception of the sperm and ovum. The actual emotional state that is generated is a desire for sexual intercourse in which we become sexually aroused by the substances of the sperm and the ovum. We perceive the sperm as male and the ovum as female and react on that basis. The emotions of attachment and aversion are not actually directed at the personalities of our future parents but at the substances which will make up our body.

One of the best ways to prevent disturbing emotions from taking hold of us in the bardo is to always be careful in our sexual behavior in this life. Abandoning sexual conduct altogether and maintaining celibacy by taking the vows of celibacy for either a period of time or for our lifetime would be very beneficial. For example, the lay-person's vows (Skt. *upasaka*)[89] can be taken for a week or a month or longer and doing this will lead to some degree of mindfulness and alertness in the bardo. If we cannot take this level of vows, we should at least commit ourselves to the vow of abandoning inappropriate sexual behavior. The point of these commitments is to cultivate a state of mind that is habitually mindful and spacious enough to deal with the conditions of sexual attraction in the bardo of becoming. The result of these vows — either in celibate or non-celibate form — is that when we are being drawn into the womb, we will have the necessary mindfulness to think clearly of the advantages and disadvantages of various birthplaces and be able to choose consciously where we want to be reborn.

If we seek a rebirth higher than a human birth, we need to find some way of stopping these two emotional states. One very powerful tool to reject the attraction of being reborn as a human is to have particularly good moral discipline connected with sexuality. If we were a monastic in the preceding life, the habit of maintaining monastic discipline will be a strong force enabling us to shut

89. There are five main vows that non-ordained individuals can take: not to kill, not to lie, not to steal, not to engage in sexual misconduct, and not to take intoxicants.

down the emotions of desire and aversion. But, even if we are not a monastic, receiving the layperson's vows will be a tremendous help as well because the mindfulness that is developed from such vows throughout our life will result in our ability to have mindfulness in the bardo. To reinforce this, we consciously recollect and repeatedly reinforce our aspiration to obtain a higher rebirth. The combination of preventing an undesirable birth and aspiring toward having a rebirth higher than a human will allow us to consciously choose the circumstances of our rebirth.

Choosing a Favorable Rebirth

During the bardo of becoming, we have the possibility of rebirth in any of the six realms of samsara. In this bardo we see six very dull lights of different colors. A dull white light leads to rebirth in the god realm, a dull red light leads to rebirth as a jealous god, a dull blue light leads to rebirth as a human, a dull green light leads to rebirth as an animal, a pale-yellow light leads to rebirth as a hungry ghost, and a smoke-colored light leads to rebirth in the hell realm. We should not go towards any of these dim lights. When they appear, the best thing to do is to intensely supplicate the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha and to avoid these paths back to samsara altogether.[90]

90. We must remember that in the bardo, we don't walk towards a light but will go there in a flash if our mind wants to be there. Also, when we see the bright lights of the deities, again, we don't try to move towards them, rather, we visualize the heart of the deity and should then instantly be there.

In *The Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo*, it is stated that the dull lights that cause rebirth in the six realms of samsara appear at the same time as the brilliant lights of the buddhas of the five families. But according to Natsok Rangdrol they do not actually appear at the same time. He says the buddhas of the five families with their brilliant lights appear during the bardo of dharmata and the dull lights of the six realms appear during the bardo of becoming. He also says the reason *The Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo* says that these two kinds of lights appear simultaneously is to show that if we make the right choice by choosing the brilliant lights of the buddhas of the five buddha families, this will allow us to achieve a pure rebirth. But if we fail to do so by choosing the dull lights of the six realms, we will be reborn in the corresponding realm and return to samsara.

Why is there a strong tendency to choose one of the dull and comforting lights? This tendency comes from the fact that, at this point in the bardo of becoming, we are starting to realize that we are dead. When we know that we're dead, we begin to strongly desire to be reborn in a hurry. Also, along with the presence of these dull lights, we will begin to perceive different appearances, which will vary from person to person depending upon their karma. If we have karma that is likely to lead to rebirth as a god, we will see very fine palaces there at the dim light. If we have karma that is likely to lead to rebirth as a jealous god, we will see wheels of light and a lot of warfare that we want to get involved in. If our

karma points to being reborn as an animal, we will see caves and forests. If we are likely to be reborn as a hungry ghost, we will see dead or petrified forests and mountains with nothing growing on them. If we are likely to be reborn in hell, we will see dark pits and possibly be dragged into them by various wrathful demons. If we are likely to be reborn as human, especially as someone with no access to Dharma, we may see mist and misty places. If we are going to take a good human rebirth, we may see beautiful houses and fine cities and so on.

At this point in the bardo of becoming, the main thing we need to do is not panic: to avoid not only fear, but also a feeling of obsessive misery or regret. We need to turn away from these because in this bardo there is a tendency to feel utterly miserable and full of regret. We should also avoid any craving that will lead to an inappropriate rebirth. If we have a stable mind, we will have the ability to choose a good birth.

At this time in the bardo of becoming, we recollect the virtue that we accumulated during our previous lifetime, such as our yidam and the meditation based on our yidam; whatever we did that was a source of merit; and all of the virtue dedicated to our achieving a good rebirth while praying that such a rebirth would happen.[91]

91. This refers to the practice of dedicating the merit to all sentient beings of any virtuous or dharmic activity that we have done.

Questions

> Would you please explain the difference between karmically produced clairvoyance and clairvoyance produced by meditation?

The mind has to be extremely stable to develop clairvoyance or other extrasensory perceptions during meditative absorption. Through the incredible stability and clearness of that mind, the practitioner is capable of knowing and seeing things that others ordinarily cannot perceive. This is very different from karmically produced clairvoyance in the bardo, because even though the mind is not particularly clear or stable, perceptions still arise that don't come through the sense organs. For example, a karmically produced extrasensory perception might be having the thought, "Oh, that person is thinking about such and such," which is very different from actually knowing the exact words that the person is thinking. In the case of true clairvoyance, the information is actual knowledge which is very correct.

> Rinpoche, could you tell me how I will recognize favorable circumstances to take rebirth in?

Well, the basic point is not to come under the influence of your own sexual desire, because what propels you into the womb — into any kind of womb — is the desire for sexual intercourse. And if you come under the influence of that, you just cannot control yourself

and you will not have the time to look at what kind of parents you will have and, instead, will just find yourself in the womb. If you are not overpowered by sexual desire, your mind will become stable, and the everything will slow down somewhat so that you can examine the situation you are moving towards. You can say: "Well, who are these people? What kind of parents are they going to be? What kind of life am I going to have?" And then it is up to you as to where you want to be reborn and to whom. For example, if you are completely under the power of sexual desire, you might not even notice the species of your parents. But if you can slow down a little bit, then you will be able to recognize those conditions and say, "Wait a second…these are pigs!" or "Wait a second…these are dogs," or "This is a human being," and so on. [laughter]

> The Prajnaparamita literature describes the craving that causes one to take a rebirth not so much out of sexual desire but as a desire for a habitation. This literature describes the basic perception of the womb or birthplace as a house or dwelling. That seems different from characterizing the drive as a desire for sexual intercourse. What exactly is the focus that impels one to mix one's consciousness with the sperm and ovum? Is it the desire for a dwelling or is it the desire for sexual intercourse?

The difference between the Prajnaparamita treatment of interdependence and the discussion of the bardos is that the scope of the

Prajnaparamita is wider. Four different types of rebirths are mentioned in the Prajnaparamita[92] where some of these types of rebirths are perceived as a dwelling place or house. For example, if one has an instantaneous rebirth, one will perceive the place of rebirth as a dwelling. This would not be particularly connected with sexual desire. The bardo teachings are more concerned with the process of birth from a womb or birth from an egg. In both of these cases, the conception is produced through sexual intercourse and causes the motivating force of the person trying to enter a womb to give rise to sexual desire. The bardo presentation basically describes what precedes a womb birth and that is why the rebirth process is called entering into a womb. Some texts say that when you approach your future birth from a distance, it appears to be a dwelling. It could be very elegant like a palace, or it might be a hovel. But in any case, as you get closer to the situation, the force that impels you is the desire for sexual intercourse, and you start to perceive the sperm and ovum as male and female.

> When and how does the mind go from a dead body to a new one? Is it at the moment of conception?

What usually happens is that at the end of the bardo of living, the body is afflicted with some kind of disease and the mind can no longer remain attached to it. So, the mind leaves the body and death

92. The four types of birth are born from a womb, born from an egg, miraculously born and born from heat and moisture such as with insects.

occurs. The body deteriorates. Then, sometimes very quickly, the mind perceives another body, identifies with that body, thinking, "This is my body." and thus forms an attachment to that body. This relationship of attachment is the sense in which the mind and body are connected.

According to the scriptures, semen cannot enter an ovum unless there is also an attaching mind present, that is, a mind is a necessary condition for impregnation. It would seem logical then that at the moment of conception, when the semen enters the ovum, the mind becomes attached to that physical form. From the moment of conception, the being is alive.

> That sounds as though the mind is choosing the body.

In fact, there is no choice involved. When the mind becomes separated from a body, the visions which appear to it are disturbing and erratic and, due to this, the mind has virtually no possibility to make any kind of choice.

> So where are the reincarnated lamas (Tib. *tulkus*) coming from?

Do you think they are new ones? Sentient beings go from one birth to another, from one realm to another. Some humans die and are reborn as animals or in other, distant human realms. Some animals die and are reborn as humans. If you catch a fly in a vase and stop up the top, the fly will keep flying around in the vase. It will fly up

to the top, down to the bottom, around in the middle and keep on moving — its exact position will fluctuate greatly. Just so, sentient beings wander from one realm to another, from the highest realms to the lowest. But as long as they are caught in cyclic existence, they continue to move around. The Buddha Shakyamuni referred to sentient beings as "movers" because they go from one condition to another. They never remain in the same condition; they just keep on migrating.

> But the Buddha also said that the highest rebirth we can take is as a man or woman because it is only from the human realm that we can reach enlightenment. That the world population is increasing would seem to indicate that more and more sentient beings are accumulating the merit to come back as men and women.

The Buddha Shakyamuni referred to the precious human rebirth as the most favorable state of incarnation; however, the mere possession of a human body does not constitute precious human rebirth.

The extremely favorable kind of rebirth that the Buddha meant was not merely as a human body but a human body with the potential to practice Dharma. It is the potential to practice Dharma that is difficult to obtain and very precious. Not every human birth is a precious human rebirth, because there are a huge number of people who are born human but who have no connection with the Dharma.

The increase in the number of humans in the world is no sign of increasing merit if they don't practice the Dharma.

> But more and more lamas are going to the West and more and more people are coming to Dharma.

Possibly the general Dharma is increasing, but the Dharma of realization, the number of people actually attaining realization, is certainly not. In the time of the Buddha Shakyamuni, there were 500 arhats in one small area. Now, in any area, try to find even one arhat.

> When we are small children, our minds are comparatively unclear or immature. Even with the rebirth of a very highly realized being, some type of learning process, some reacquisition of knowledge, and some ripening of the intelligence appears to be necessary. And there also seems to be a natural process of the growing clarity of intelligence that seems to coincide with the development of physical maturity. Why is this so?
>
> Humans appear to be much more intelligent than animals. What is the actual cause for the difference in intelligence between humans and the various species of animals on this planet?

Well, the long-term cause of the particular intelligence of a being born as a member of a given species is the particular karma that sentient being has accumulated. If a sentient being has accumulated

a great deal of karma connected with ignorance, then they will be born being afflicted by bewilderment. If they have accumulated a great deal of the karma of a particular type of virtue, they will be reborn as having a very sharp intelligence. The short-term cause is that a being who has accumulated a particular type of karma will be reborn with a particular type of body. Because they are born with a particular body, the subtle channels within that body will take a particular shape or form themselves in a certain way. Based on the formation of those channels, the subtle winds within them will move in certain ways which will cause the mind of that person to function in certain ways. If, because of a person's karma, they are born in a body that has a disposition towards a certain kind of bewilderment, their body structures cause the winds in the subtle channels to move in a slow, depressed way which causes their mind to be particularly torpid and unclear. On the other hand, a being born with positive karma will be reborn with a certain type of body in which their subtle channels are structured in a certain way which causes their subtle winds to move in a certain way which causes their mind to be particularly clear. And so, they will be reborn with extremely good intelligence.

> Is there a maximum period of time between death and rebirth?

It is said that, for most beings, no more than 49 days will elapse between death and being drawn into the next rebirth. However, this is not an absolute rule. It is said, for example, that beings who are

particularly attached to the circumstances of their previous life may wander around in the bardo in extreme misery for a lot longer time.

> I was told that when you die, you should go to the bright light, not to the calm, gentle light. Is that because the dull lights are the wrathful deities that you are supposed to avoid?

The dim comforting lights lead to a samsaric rebirth. The lights of the peaceful deities are very bright and appear at the same time as the dim lights. Because these are comforting and familiar and not threatening (unlike the bright lights of the deities), there is the danger that you might choose them and be reborn in samsara.

All 100 peaceful and wrathful deities emit the lights of the five wisdoms which are brighter and more irritating than the light of the gateway to samsara. They are so bright that they could potentially be frightening because of their brilliance. The light that is the gateway to the six realms of samsara is muted and familiar.

So, it's not that the peaceful deities' light is familiar or non-threatening or less threatening than the wrathful deity's light. Both radiate very bright lights. The texts say the dim light of the six realms of samsara arrives at the end of the appearance of each of the peaceful deities. The peaceful deities originally appear in their individual families one by one and then appear all together and, at the same time, the dim light of the samsaric realm starts to appear, too.

PREPARING FOR APPEARANCES IN THE BARDO

There is an actual technique for preparing for the appearances that arise in the bardo and is similar in nature to the bardo experience, but it is less intense. The method is to close our eyes very, very tight, so that our eyelids, our upper eyelid in particular, are actually pressing on our eye. As we squeeze our eyes shut quite tightly, we'll see darkness. But then because of the pressure on the eyes within the darkness, we will start to see a light. It will be various colors — green, blue, yellow, red — and of various shapes. This is a little bit of what we will see in the bardo immediately after death.

When doing this practice, we will initially what we see is quite surprising. We can't think of a reason why we should be seeing these things simply by squeezing your eyes. But what we see is called clear light (Tib. *ösel*), or we natural display of dharmata. We see this because this is the nature of our mind and the nature of all phenomena and has no existence outside of ourselves As we look at this light and these appearances,

they don't disappear and we are able to see their nature. In other words, we recognize that they are not external to us.

Also, in the bardo there are sounds that are similar to these lights or appearances. We can prepare for that with a similar technique which involves gritting your teeth so that our jaw is clenched. If we do this in the right environment, we won't hear anything at first. But if we do it long enough, eventually we begin to hear a hum that eventually becomes a roaring sound. This is called "the empty sound of dharmata." By familiarizing ourselves with these appearances in their full intensity, we will be prepared for these visions and sounds and our mind will stay relaxed through this process of the bardo.

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REBIRTH IN SUKHAVATI

Ideally, we want to have a rebirth in a pure realm because this is the best possible outcome in the bardo at this point. There are many pure realms, including the dharmakaya pure realms and the sambhogakaya pure realms, which include the five pure realms of the five wisdom buddhas.[93] But, we can achieve rebirth in these realms only if we have already reached the first bodhisattva level. If we have not, we can achieve a rebirth in a pure realm in the bardo — with one exception. According to the Buddha in the Amitabha sutra, someone who has not yet reached the first bodhisattva level can be reborn in Sukhavati — the pure realm of the Buddha Amitabha. This pure realm is comparatively easy to be reborn in. This is wonderful because once we are born in Sukhavati, we will never again have to return to samsara.

We might wonder why some ordinary people can be reborn in Sukhavati and can't be reborn in any of the other pure realms?

93. The five wisdom buddhas and their pure realms are described in Appendix G and Appendix H.

According to the Buddha, the reason Sukhavati is an exception is because Amitabha, in his great compassion after achieving awakening, gave rise to a realm in which ordinary beings can be reborn. However, to be reborn in Sukhavati (Tib. *Dewachen*) we must meet four conditions during our lifetime. According to the Amitabha sutra if these four conditions to be reborn in Sukhavati are not present, then it is unlikely that one will be reborn in Sukhavati.

The First Condition for Entering Sukhavati

The first condition is "recollection of the realm" meaning keeping the realm in mind so that we repeatedly, throughout our life, think about Sukhavati. We think about what it is like, imagine being born there, and try to visualize the realm as it is described. We visualize this realm as being presided over by Amitabha with Chenrezig to his right and Vajrapani to his left. They are surrounded by buddhas, bodhisattvas, and arhats. We imagine the realm and imagine that we have been born there. We do this repeatedly, thinking: "I have been born in Sukhavati. I'm there, and what I am seeing is good."

This is particularly effective if we can use dreaming to cultivate this recollection. For example, if we develop a facility for lucid dreaming — of recognizing that we are dreaming while we are dreaming — we should try to actually go to Sukhavati in the dream. We try to create the appearances of Sukhavati, of our birth in Sukhavati, and of the ensuing experiences in Sukhavati as realistically as possible.

We do this throughout our waking state as well — whether we are eating or getting dressed, and so on — using our mindfulness to recollect the realm of Sukhavati repeatedly and continually.

Why is it worthwhile going to this trouble? We have achieved some happiness by being reborn as a human being which, compared to other realms, is a very great accomplishment. But human existence always involves the suffering of birth, aging, sickness, and death. If we are born a human, there is no way that we can avoid these four types of suffering. In contrast, Sukhavati has little suffering. Being born in Sukhavati does not mean we have achieved perfect awakening, or buddhahood, because we must still gather a vast accumulation of merit and wisdom and we must still continue to practice the Dharma to achieve enlightenment. But while we are practicing in Sukhavati, we do not suffer repeated rebirth, aging, sickness, and death. Although we are born in Sukhavati as an ordinary person, the Sukhavati realm has all the possible conditions conducive[94] to the practice of Dharma and is free of conditions that would otherwise obstruct it.

If we achieve a rebirth in Sukhavati, this is tremendous and of great benefit to ourselves and to others. Because of the progress of our practice in Sukhavati, we will quickly develop extraordinary faculties of supercognition. Having developed these, we will be able to see

94. These conditions or certainties of Sukhavati are the perfect teacher, perfect teaching, in perfect place, surrounded by perfect disciples, and a perfect time.

those people that we knew in the past, such as relatives, friends, and others. Not only will we be able to see them but, as time goes on in Sukhavati, we will gradually gain the ability to protect them and create opportunities for them to encounter and practice the Dharma. To sum up, being reborn in Sukhavati puts us in a far better position to benefit others than being reborn in samsara again.

Through the tradition of the oral instruction, we also have a systematic and precise way of practicing entering Sukhavati through the Amitabha practice. There is a long and a short form of the Amitabha practice. In both practices, we visualize that we have been reborn in Sukhavati. First, we visualize ourselves as Chenrezig seated within a white lotus flower with the lower half of our body still inside the flower and the upper half of our body emerging from it. Since we are actually reborn in a lotus flower in Sukhavati, we imagine ourselves just emerging from it. In front of us, we visualize the Buddha Amitabha with his retinue of two bodhisattvas and the rest of the entire realm. Whether we do the long or short form of the Amitabha practice, the visualization is fundamentally the same. The main body of the practice is doing this visualization and repeating the six-syllable mantra of Chenrezig with HRI on the end (OM MANI PEDME HUNG HRI). This is the first cause or condition of rebirth in Sukhavati called, "recollection of the realm."

The Second Condition for Rebirth in Sukhavati

The second condition necessary for rebirth in Sukhavati is "the accumulation of merit." In general, we accumulate merit by performing the seven branch offerings.[95] In the formal Amitabha practice, we cultivate merit by making offerings and praises and especially by giving homage to the Amitabha buddha and his retinue. We first visualize ourselves making offerings, praises, and so forth. Then, equally important, we make actual offerings. We set up the offerings (such as the eight common offerings of flowers, incense and so forth)[96] in front of an image of Amitabha. When making these offerings, we should do it with the conscious motivation and aspiration to achieve a rebirth in Sukhavati. We should think, "I am making these offerings so that I can accumulate the merit necessary to achieve rebirth in Sukhavati." Along with this we should have an image of Amitabha and frequently look at it, making physical offerings in front of it, doing prostrations to it, and so on.

Another way to accumulate merit is to do the four Preliminary Practices (Tib. *Ngöndro*). The first Preliminary Practice is taking refuge by doing about 100,000 refuge prayers and prostrations to gather

95. The seven branches are: prostration, making offerings, confession, rejoicing, requesting the turning of the wheel of Dharma, asking lamas not to pass into nirvana, and dedication of the merit.

96. These eight traditional offerings are: offerings of water for washing, water for drinking, a flower for beauty, incense for smell, a candle for light, scented water for perfume, food, and an instrument for music.

the accumulation of faith and devotion. The second Preliminary Practice is Vajrasattva practice to purify our wrongdoing and obscurations and to accumulate merit. The third Preliminary Practice is gathering the accumulation of merit with Mandala Offering practice where we offer the mandala, our own body, and everything around us. We make this offering about 100,000 times to accustom our mind to giving. When this is done properly, it can be as effective as actually giving material things. Still another way to accumulate merit is to purify our wrongdoings and obscurations through the act of purification which has four powers. Then there is guru yoga in which we do 100,000 prayers to our guru.

The first power of purification is to renounce the negative actions we have done. To purify an action, we must renounce it once we see the action that we did is something wrong. As long as we regard a particular action as unworthy, harmful, or dangerous, we are unlikely to repeat it. On the other hand, if we think of an action as worthwhile, profitable, or positive, we are likely to repeat it. For example, if we kill someone, we can have two attitudes. One is: "That's terrible. I killed somebody. How could I have done that?" With this attitude, we are less likely to kill someone again. On the other hand, if we think: "Wow! I killed him. He deserved it. I'm really brave — a warrior." Then we're probably going to do it again. So, the first power of purification of a wrongdoing — whether it's physical, verbal, or mental — is to recognize that the action was bad.

The second power is to renounce the act by saying, "I will not do this negative action again." Also, we can purify our actions by doing the Vajrasattva practice and repeating the 100-syllable Vajrasattva mantra.

The third power is the power of support which is rely upon the support of the Three Jewels. We need to supplicate the Three Jewels asking that they help us purify our misdeeds and obscurations in the past.

The fourth power is applying the antidote. This means that we don't just supplicate the Three Jewels to purify our misdeeds, but we apply the antidote by doing positive and virtuous actions to purify the misdeeds.

The Third Condition for Rebirth in Sukhavati

The third condition necessary for rebirth in Sukhavati is the generation of compassionate mind — bodhichitta. To achieve rebirth in Sukhavati, we need to accumulate a great amount of virtue. The most effective way to accumulate that virtue is to generate bodhichitta. Bodhichitta is the intention to achieve perfect awakening for the benefit of all beings: an intention that is both vast and virtuous. It is very different from most of our other motivations which are either selfish or negative. So, we should generate bodhichitta while we are alive to help us reach Sukhavati.

The Fourth Condition for Rebirth in Sukhavati

The fourth condition necessary for rebirth in Sukhavati is the actual "aspiration to achieve rebirth" in Sukhavati. This aspiration basically consists of the thought: "I really must be reborn in Sukhavati. I desperately want to be reborn in Sukhavati. May I and everyone else be reborn in Sukhavati." It is very important to make this aspiration just before our death.

We generally think of aspirations as being ineffective and having no power. But, in fact, aspirational prayers are very powerful. While making aspirations, we need to make a distinction between achievable aspirations and impossible aspirations. For example, when we contemplate the Four Immeasurables and say, "May all beings possess happiness and the causes of happiness," since our aspiration for beings involves the accumulation of the secondary conditions (the causes of happiness), it can be successful. For instance, I might make the aspiration, "May a flower grow on top of this table." If that's all I do, no flower would ever grow on this table even if I sat here year after year making that aspiration. This is because the necessary conditions would not have been there for the flower to grow.

If I really aspire for a flower grow on my table, I will get a pot, fill it with earth, plant a seed, and water it. Then, with these secondary conditions motivated by my aspiration, the flower would grow.

So, when we make aspirations, we also need to have the virtuous behavior that makes the aspiration possible. When we make the aspiration to achieve rebirth in Sukhavati, we need to create the conditions for the aspiration by saying, "Wondrous Buddha Amitabha with Lord Chenrezig to your right and Vajrapani on your left and surrounded by innumerable buddhas and bodhisattvas, in this realm of Sukhavati, which is filled with immeasurable well-being and joy, may I be reborn there immediately after this life." By consciously bringing to mind the qualities of the Sukhavati realm, visualizing them, and strongly aspiring for a rebirth in that realm, we establish the fourth condition — the aspiration for rebirth in Sukhavati.

Questions

> Rinpoche, after hearing the description of the practices to achieve rebirth in Dewachen, I can understand how some other forms of Buddhism, such as the Pure Land Buddhists, devote their entire system to these practices. How is it, given that it seems so important and not as difficult as many other practices, that we don't just do this practice?

It's a little bit like having a restaurant. A person could survive on just one type of food. A person could just eat rice or bread for the rest of their life, and they could fill their belly. But if you opened a restaurant and only served one type of bread, no one would go there. For the sake of the survival of your business, you would

serve a variety of food that appeals to people's tastes. Also, it is better for people to eat more than just bread. In the same way, to attract beings to Dharma and to supply all of their spiritual needs, it's better if there are a variety of teachings.

> We hear a lot about the Copper Colored Mountain pure land associated with Padmasambhava and also about the celestial kingdom of Shambhala. Do both of those realms fall into the category of the dharmakaya or the sambhogakaya pure realms?

Sukhavati is a pure realm which means that you can't physically get there on planet earth. *The Sukhavati Prayer* says Sukhavati is enumerable worlds distant from here in the direction of the setting sun. You can't travel to Sukhavati physically, and you can only be born there under certain circumstances.

Shambhala and the glorious Copper Colored Mountain are places that are located on this earth so anyone could be born there. The thing about realms within this planet is that they are like countries. So, the circumstances change tremendously in these places over time. For example, if you had been in the United States long enough ago, there would have been nobody here. If you had come later, there would have been only Native Americans living in the Americas. If you are born now, it would look like it is now. And if you were born here two or three hundred years from now, who knows what it will look like. So, it's taught that there are good things about Shambhala

and good things about the glorious Copper Colored Mountain, but the texts don't specify what time they are talking about. Are these places like that now? Were they like that in the past? Or are they going to be like that at some point in the future?

For example, when they talk about Shambhala, they talk about an enlightened society in which everyone behaves in an exemplary fashion, and everything is good. But we don't know if Shambhala is like that yet or if that is a prediction of something that's going to be true hundreds of years in the future. When they talk about the glorious Copper Colored Mountain, they talk about a place that is filled with dakas and dakinis. But again, we don't know if that place is like that yet. It might be talking about the distant future. So, in that way, we can say that terrestrial realms such as Shambhala and Copper Colored Mountain are somewhat unstable.

• 12 •

THE CONCLUSION

7. *With our mind far off, not thinking of death's coming,*
We are performing these meaningless activities,
Returning empty handed now which is complete confusion.
We need the recognition of the Holy Dharma.
So why not practice Dharma at this very moment?
From the mouths of siddhas come these words:
"If you do not keep your guru's teaching in your heart,
Will you not become your own deceiver?"

–The seventh Primary Root Verse of the Bardo

I have presented four main bardos: the bardo of living, the bardo at the time of death, the bardo of dharmata, and the bardo of becoming. When we discuss the bardo in general, we usually refer to the bardo at the time of death, the bardo of dharmata, and the bardo of becoming. We may think that these last three bardos are the most important bardos. However, what happens to us in these last three bardos really depends almost completely on what we do while we are alive in the first bardo of living. If we want to experience

dying without suffering, seeing phenomena as they really are, and consciously choosing a favorable rebirth, it all depends principally upon the habits and karmic latencies that we have created during the first bardo of living.

The most important bardo, therefore, is the bardo of this lifetime. We are extremely fortunate that we have a precious human existence. If we possess the freedoms and resources of the bardo of life, the best thing we can do is to cultivate a mind of benevolence and to have good behavior. People unpracticed in the Dharma can also be benevolent and behave well. Therefore, they can accumulate positive karma because all beings have buddha nature. However, these individuals cannot develop the ability to have a good rebirth outside of samsara if they do not have access to Dharma and are not specifically prepared for the bardo.

However, we can prepare for the bardo effectively because we have the resources and freedoms to access the Dharma. Therefore, we have the resources to ensure that all our future lives will be more pleasant as well. So, use this life of yours the best you can and practice as much as you can.

Some commentaries on the bardo say that once you're dying, it's too late and there's nothing you can do. However, I have offered many things that we can do to improve things to receive a good rebirth. Also, there are special death rituals and purification ceremonies that

are beneficial and help tremendously.[97] When the commentaries say these activities are not of much use, they are trying to prevent people from thinking: "Well, I don't have to practice. All I have to do is make sure that after I die, people will perform purification rituals and that will take care of it." We need to take these comments in context and understand that in our own case, and in the case of people we know, the practice of making aspirations, doing purification ceremonies, and the making of offerings are all of tremendous benefit.

Likewise, some commentaries say that if we didn't practice assiduously in life, then it is too late. But this also is not actually true. These statements are said to encourage persons to practice by recognizing the tremendous value and importance of bardo practice. But actually, what we do while we are dying and are in the bardo is very important. A great deal can be achieved while we are in the bardo. Therefore, at the time of death we need to pay careful attention to our mind and body and most importantly try to maintain our mindfulness and alertness and surround ourselves with caregivers and companions who are supportive of the proper stages of the bardo. And above all, try to rest your mind.

97. In the bibliography, is a PDF booklet of *The Bardo of Hearing* in English that can be read to the dying person. See Bibliography. Also, Karma Triyana Dharmachakra has a Bardo Kit with special materials for the body that has died which includes a shroud, various materials to apply to the body, and an audio CD of Khenpo Karthar reading *The Bardo of Hearing* in Tibetan. See Bibliography.

THE FIVE MAJOR AND FIVE MINOR SUBTLE WINDS

These major subtle winds (Tib. *lung*) provide the energy for most bodily functions. Since these subtle energies control many of the bodily functions, they are intensively studied in Tibetan medicine.

1. The **life-supporting wind** (Tib. *sokdzin lung*) is located in the brain. This subtle wind regulates functions such as swallowing, inhalation, sneezing, concentration and stabilizing the mind. This life-supporting wind assists breathing and is located in heart center.

2. The **upward-moving wind** (Tib. *gyengyu lung*) is located in the chest and thorax. This subtle wind is responsible for speech, general body energy and health, maintaining the skin, and mental diligence. It is located in the mouth and nose through which the wind passes upwards or downwards and the rules the faculty for speaking which has its seat in the chest.

3. The **downward-clearing wind** (Tib. *thursel lung*) is located in the rectum, bowels, and perineal region. This wind's function is to expel feces, urine, semen, and blood in menstruation. If the woman is pregnant, this subtle wind also nurtures the fetus and regulates uterine contractions during labor.

4. The **all-pervading wind** (Tib. *khyap ché lung*). Residing in the heart, this subtle wind is responsible for all the motor activities of the body such a lifting, walking, opening the mouth, closing the eyelids, and so on.

5. The **fire-accompanying wind** (Tib. *me nyam ne lung*) is found in the stomach and abdomen area and regulates digestion and overall metabolism.

The Five Branch Subtle Winds

These five branch winds enable the senses to operate.

1. The **naga wind** (Tib. *lu'i lung*). This subtle wind is connected with the eyes and sight.

2. The **tortoise wind** (Tib. *rubal gyi lung*). This subtle wind connects with the heart and the sense of hearing.

3. The **lizard wind** (Tib. *tsangpe lung*). The subtle wind is associated with the nose and the sense of smell.

4. The **devadatta wind** (Tib. *lhejin gyi lung*). This subtle wind is related to the sense of taste.

5. The **king of wealth deities wind** (Tib. *nor lha gyal gyi lung*). This subtle wind is related to the body sensations and the sense of touch.

APPENDICES



• A •

THE FIVE ELEMENTS[98]

The elements in Tibetan Buddhism are not the same as the physical elements in chemistry. In Buddhism these elements can be thought of as forces having characteristics that give matter a fundamental energy. This may seem rather esoteric, but in understanding the dissolution of the body at death, they are very specific and meaningful.

The Earth Element

The element of earth has the characteristics of solidity, weight, immobility, and hardness. The earth element gives both living beings and inanimate objects their shape and form. Like all the elements, earth is subject to impermanence, but it changes so slowly that it may appear to be permanence.

Within the human body, the earth element provides our flesh and bones and gives us structure and strength. The earth element of our food sustains our bodies. The qualities of earth are also a characteristic in the emotional realms. The earth element makes a person steady and reliable and is present in our family, in society, and in

98. This discussion is based upon Fermalde's *Luminous Emptiness*.

organizations. Every plan or activity needs the kind of basic structure and foundation which the earth element provides, and if it is not present it will fall apart. Also having a lot of earth quality in our body may make us feel dull, heavy, and unable to rouse ourselves.

The Water Element

The element of water embodies the principle of cohesion possible. If we try to mix different foods together, it is the moisture in them that allows them to mix. Water flows in a continuous, unbroken stream and pervades our body in all our bodily fluids: lymph, pus, phlegm, sweat and, blood which is the symbol of life itself. Mind also has the water quality because it is a stream of experiences, continually changing. In the Buddhist texts the water element of mind is often compared to a river because of its endless flowing of thoughts, feelings, emotions, and desires. The cohesive quality of water provides the connection of friendship and affection that holds people together in relationships.

The Fire Element

The element of fire gives us heat and light with its nature being to burn. The outer manifestations of the fire element are as important to us as the sun. In animals and humans, the fire element provides body heat. Fire stands in the center between the dense nature of

earth and the insubstantiality of the natureair and space by beginning with solid fuel and eventually disappearing into hot air.

Emotionally, fire manifests as both intense love and intense anger. Sexual desire burns, but friendship and affection are like a warm, glowing, domestic fire. Even in the case of hatred (which has a fire element), fire is a hot and blazing, then hatred that is a cold, icy rejection. The three disturbing emotions of attachment, aggression, and ignorance are all symbolized by raging fires.

The Air Element

The fourth element is called either air or wind with wind being moving air which is inhaled and exhaled, and air is the breath of life to living things.

Emotionally, there is a connection between breath and emotion. That is why we are asked to take a deep breath before acting impulsively and to breathe slowly and deeply when we feel frightened or aggressive.

The word for breath in Sanskrit is *prana* which means more than ordinary breath but also means life force. When we breathe in, we get oxygen for our lungs, but we also take in a "life force" which nourishes our subtle body. Because the Tibetan word *lung* is used for wind, as in the wind blowing in the trees, and also for subtle energy in the subtle body, we use "subtle winds" to indicate the internal energies in the body.

The Space Element (Ether)

Space is the fifth of the elements. The Sanskrit word *akasha* for space is the same as the word for "sky" and that is why this element is often called "space." This element of space is the dimension in which everything exists and is often said to be all-pervading and boundless.

The Tibetan Buddhist concept of space is akin to the Greek idea of "ether" which is an invisible element that contains or holds all the other elements and our world.

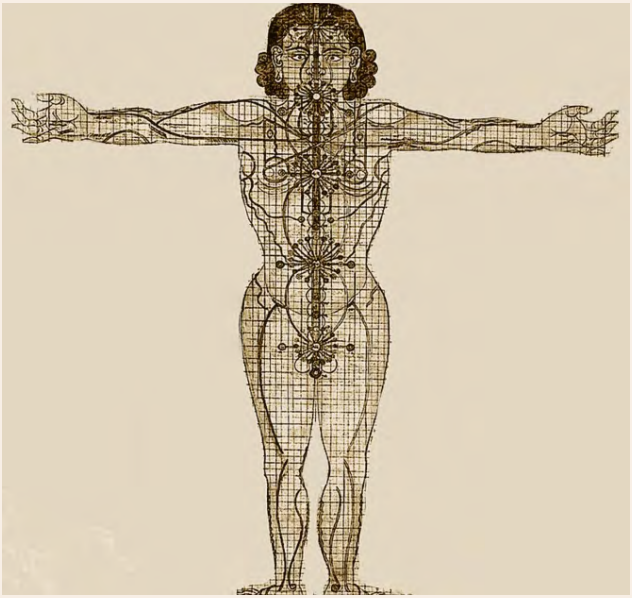
The element of space dwells within us as our consciousness. Like space, mind is infinite and boundless and having no shape or size or color, it does not dwell anywhere. Space contains all the other elements, yet it is beyond all characteristics being a pure, shining intelligence, complete openness, and allseeing awareness.

This concept of ether was part of western thought and physics in the West until it was discredited by scientists in an 1890s in an experiment showing that light goes through space without there being ether. So, this concept of space has not been used much in modern times.

• B •

THE FIVE CHAKRAS

The male and female bodies have five main chakras, or energy centers, which distribute the subtle energy (Skt. *prana*, Tib. *lung*) throughout the body. The chakras are at the forehead, the throat, the heart, naval chakra, and the sexual organs as seen in the diagram.



On the person's right side[99] is the red channel that holds the subtle energy breathed in and out in the right nostril. This is called "the wind of karma." On the left side of the body is the white subtle channel holding the air, or prana, breathed through the left nostril called "the wind of wisdom." There are hundreds of smaller subtle channels (Skt. *nadi*, Tib. *tsa*) going out from these main energy centers (Skt. *chakra*, Tib. *khorlo*) throughout the body as shown in the diagram.

There are many descriptions of chakras in India and Tibet. But in one system, the first crown chakra at the top of the head is multi-colored with 32 branches facing downward. It is often visualized as a point just above and between the eyebrows sometimes called the "third eye." The second throat chakra is red and has sixteen major branches opening upward. The third heart chakra is located at the heart and is white and has six major branches that point downward. The fourth navel chakra is red and is a major energy center with 64 major subtle channels that point upward. Finally, there is the fifth secret chakra which is located in the genital area of male and females.

99. It should be noted that some texts say that for a female body, the right and left subtle channels are opposite to what is described here for the male body.

• C •

THE SIX REALMS OF SAMSARA

Thrangu Rinpoche has said that when you are living in a Western or Eastern country, you believe that this is your house or apartment because you are living in it. He says, however, that while you are living in samsara, there are many other invisible beings from other realms living there too, and they are thinking "this is my house."

Thrangu Rinpoche said that when he was young and learning about emptiness, he thought that doing daily offerings to the deities was not important because he had been taught that everything was empty. But things were not going well for him, so his tutor suggested that he should start making offerings to these beings. When he started doing so, he found that things began to go well for him. Even today, whether at his monastery, in a room hotel, or staying at someone's house, Thrangu Rinpoche and his attendants always offer prayer before eating and do the complete Mahakala practice every evening. Rinpoche's life has been very fortunate, and in his biography, there is a passage on how one of these invisible beings, the *genyen* of his monastery, actually saved his life.

These invisible beings or spirits are vast in number. For example, Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1969) has catalogued and described hundreds of different kinds of helpful and harmful spirits. These spirits occupy the land of Tibet with only a handful of them having ever been described as being in India. We can conclude from this that these spirits definitely did not come from Indian Mahayana Buddhism and that many were known to the pre-Buddhist Bon religion, and these have been incorporated into Vajrayana Buddhist practices and rituals.

There are many realms of samsara populated by a vast number of sentient beings that we cannot see. The realms of samsara have been simplified into six categories which originally came from India. These categories are visually depicted as the six realms of samsara with each realm associated with a particular disturbing emotion. Thrangu Rinpoche says these six realms really exist and are not symbolic of the different emotions that we have. He said that in the early days of Buddhism, the great mahasiddhas would visit these realms and come back and describe them. From these descriptions, the wheel of life was painted to show others what they were like. There are also many stories in Tibet of high lamas who, in their great compassion, actually visited the lower realms in their meditation where they helped those sentient beings move to a higher realm.

The Three Higher Realms of Samsara

1. **The god realm** (Skt. *deva*). This samsaric realm is depicted as a celestial paradise with the gods having great pride because they are living a life where they are getting everything they have ever dreamed of or wanted. However, everything in samsara is impermanent. Because they enjoy themselves so much, they do little Dharma practice to reach true enlightenment and, therefore, suffer from the constant fear of losing their situation and falling into a lower realm. Persons who have the good karma to get into the god realm but not enough to transcend samsara exhibit the emotion of pride, one of the five major disturbing emotions.

2. **The jealous god realm** (Skt. *asura*). In this realm are beings who, in spite of being in the second highest realm, are bitterly jealous because they didn't make it into the god realm. They are depicted as trying to cut down the wish-fulling trees of the gods. These jealous gods are an unhappy and disagreeable lot. When Tibetans get into disputes and arguments because they are jealous of something, they say a jealous god is resting on their opponent's shoulder even though they are rarely seen.

3. **The human realm** (Skt. *manushya*). We all know about the human realm with its meaningless entertainment, its vast drive to acquire material possessions, and its grinding work to make money. The other side of the coin is that it is also the only realm where there is a real chance of practicing the Dharma and getting out of samsara.

The Three Lower Realms of Samsara

4. **The animal realm** (Skt. *tiryagyoni*). Our wonderfully spoiled pets are just one small part of the animal realm. The rest of the animals are hunted and killed, raised in huge factories, and slaughtered for food, and often face having little food and comfort. Since animals can do positive deeds, we should feel pity for them because they cannot practice the Dharma since their major disturbing emotion is ignorance.

5. **Hungry ghost realm** (Skt. *preta*). These invisible beings are depicted as looking like humans but with a large belly and a miniscule mouth representing insatiable hunger and thirst. Their main disturbing emotion is greed, but it is much more than this. Our world is full of extreme greed in which some are acquiring great amounts of wealth and power without trying to share it with others. They can then be reborn with all these desires and cravings in our world where they see all the wonderful things, food, and water, but they cannot touch it or enjoy them because these are material objects and they are immaterial ghosts.

6. **The hell realms** (Skt. *naraka*). When one has committed negative deeds such as lying, stealing, sexual misconduct, murder and so on, one can be reborn in one of the hell realms depending on the severity of the offence. Unlike Christian hell where one is condemned for every in them, being reborn in a Buddhist hell realm can be temporary depending on the severity of the negative deeds.

These realms have been vividly described such as one having razor blades everywhere so one is naked and constantly being painfully cut or one is in the hot realms where one is continually burning up, or one is in realms of being continually eaten alive or being beaten over and over again. Unlike Christian hell where one is condemned forever, once a person's negative karma has been burned out, they return to one of other six realms.

An example is given of these invisible beings in other realms in the *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*. When Milarepa was meditating in a cave, these invisible beings, wanted him out of their cave. They appeared and made fun of him and harassed him, but he ignored them and continued meditating. One time, a hungry ghost took the visible shape of a dog and bit Milarepa's big toe and wouldn't let go of it no matter what Milarepa did. Another time the invisible being named Tseringma took on the visible shape of a beautiful woman with flowing silks and ornaments and brought him food and told him that she had done many wicked things in her previous human life. She then asked Milarepa to teach her the Dharma. Milarepa did it and she promised that she would help any yogi that came to this mountain to practice. This then made her a Dharma protector so that with these positive deeds she could be reincarnated into a higher realm.

• D •

DREAM YOGA

One of the main purposes for Vajrayana students of Tibetan Buddhism is to practice creation and completion stages during the waking state and visualize transforming death into the dharmakaya (Buddha mind), the intermediate state into the sambhogakaya (Buddha speech), and rebirth into the nirmanakaya (Buddha body). In effect, one is preparing for one's upcoming death, bardo, and rebirth after the mind separates from the physical body at death.

While this daytime creation stage practice prepares one for death, the nighttime practice of dream yoga transforms falling asleep into the dharmakaya, dreaming into the sambhogakaya, and awakening into the nirmanakaya. To prepare for dream yoga, it is important to view all of experiences in the waking state as being dreamlike or illusory in nature. This preparation is part of the completion stage practice of illusory body yoga, one of the six yogas of Naropa. In Gelug system of the six yogas, dream yoga is listed as a subset of illusory body yoga whereas the Kagyu lineage dream yoga as one of the original six yogas. Regardless of its classification, dream yoga shares many similarities with illusory body yoga and many practi-

tioners recommend becoming proficient in the daytime practice of seeing all daytime appearances as dreamlike as necessary preparation for dream yoga.

Before falling asleep, we make a very strong heartfelt intention to have good dreams, to remember dreams, and to become lucid while dreaming. As we are falling asleep, we visualize ourselves and the world around us dissolving into emptiness which then becomes the clear light of sleep or dharmakaya. Often this is visualized as the world dissolving into our body, the body dissolving into the seed syllable at our heart chakra, and the seed syllable dissolving from the bottom to top into emptiness. We then rest in the clear light of sleep.

A typical nighttime sleep session consists of roughly four to five 90-minute cycles where we go from stage 1 waking consciousness (alpha brain waves at 8-12 Hz) to stage 2 falling asleep (theta waves at 4-8 Hz) to stage 3 deep dreamless sleep (delta waves at <4 Hz) back to stage 1 REM (rapid eye movement) dream sleep (alpha waves at 8-12 Hz). During the earlier sleeping cycles, REM dream periods are short and become increasingly longer as sleep progresses. The best opportunities to have lucid dreams occur during the last 2 hours of sleep. To increase the chances for lucid dreaming, practitioners are advised to set their alarm clocks for 4 ½ hours after falling asleep (following three 90-minute sleep cycles), then awake and reset their

alarms for 1 1/4 hours later. This increases one's chances that one will awaken during a REM dream period.

After wakening from a dream, we can then write down the dream in a dream journal which can be read and revised during waking hours. After at least 20 dreams have been recorded in our journal, we look for "dream signs" or recurring themes in one's dreams (such as being lost and trying to find one's way home). We then make a list of the most common dream signs which are then memorized. We then formulate that the next time we encounter a dream sign (such as being lost with no cellphone), we will perform a "dream state check" such as jumping into the air while dreaming and asking, "Am I dreaming?" Jumping into the air while dreaming is a great dream check because as we often descend to earth more slowly than normally or we begin to fly.

Lucid dreaming is attained when we realize that we are dreaming while we are actually dreaming. Once lucidity is attained, the dreamer can then control the contents of the dream and direct these dreams in whatever direction desired. For Tibetan Buddhist dream yogis, this can mean transforming our dream body into the body of a deity or traveling to pure lands to make offerings, receive blessings, and do Buddhist activities.

One of the key instructions for becoming proficient in dream yoga is to recognize that the dream is a fabrication of our own mind rather than something which is exists in the external world. Upon

awakening, this sambhogakaya form of the practitioner's deity (often in the form of a white deity with the same shape but smaller in size than the nirmanakaya deity) is visualized to re-enter into our physical body through the central channel and descending to the heart chakra.

Then the person arises from sleep as the nirmanakaya emanation seeing him or herself as the deity, that the environment as a pure land, and that all other beings are enlightened Buddhas.

Just as the waking practices of creation and completion stages prepare us for dream yoga, dream yoga prepares us for death, the bardo, and rebirth. It is said that practicing these transformations is easier while awake than while asleep and easier while asleep than while dead.

Special thanks to Baxter Pharr who prepared this Appendix.

• E •

THE NINE STAGES OF DISSOLUTION

As the person is dying, the channels are breaking down and the elements are dissolving one by one resulting in a gradual impairment of the senses. The dying person gradually ceases to see, hear, taste, smell and feel and then stops breathing. With the cessation of breathing the element of consciousness dissolves into space and resuscitation is no longer possible. Below are the nine stages of this dissolution.

Stage 1. The equal abiding wind begins to weaken

This causes the dissolving of the navel chakra and the earth element dissolves into the water element.

Outer Sign: The body loses the strength to support itself and the ability to move. The face is pallid.

Inner Sign: Thinking is less clear and there are vague appearances of a mirage.

Secret Sign: The clear light begins to emerge, and the person sees a shimmering light.

Stage 2. The life supporting wind begins to weaken

This causes the dissolving of the heart chakra. The water element dissolves into the fire element.

Outer Sign: The mouth, nose, and throat become dry, and the person may be thirsty.

Inner Sign: The mind becomes irritated and agitated.

Secret Sign: Appearances intensify and appear like smoke.

Stage 3. The downward clearing wind begins to weaken

This causes the dissolving of the throat chakra. The fire element dissolves into the air element.

Outer Sign: Breath becomes cold and body warmth diminishes.

Inner Sign: Mind oscillates back and forth between being lucid and being unclear or confused.

Secret Sign: The dharmata appears as small flashes of red light, somewhat like fireflies. This indicates a clearer perception of dharmata than the previous stages.

Stage 4: The life supporting wind begins to weaken

This causes the dissolving of the secret chakra. The air element dissolves into the consciousness element.

Outer Sign: The person has difficulty breathing. Then outer breathing stops.[100]

Inner Sign: The person experiences various hallucinations. Persons with bad karma will see frightening things. Persons with mostly good karma, will see pleasant things.

Secret Sign: Dharmata becomes more stable like the flame of a lamp. The recognition of the Dharmata depends on the person's meditational training.

Stage 5: Dissolution of the downward clearing wind

The consciousness element dissolves into the space (ether) element.

Outer Sign: The "inner breathing" stops.

Inner Sign: The "white appearance." The person sees all white like moonlight.

Secret Sign: The white constituent from the father begins moving down from the crown of the head towards the heart along the central channel. The person cannot be revived except in cases of a delog. The seventh afflicted consciousness dissolves back into the eighth all-basis consciousness.

100. The outer breathing is the normal breathing we do while alive. The inner breathing occurs after a person stops breathing. This is an inner current in the subtle channels that keeps various processes continuing until the person has completely left the body behind.

Stage 6: On the border of the Bardo of Dying and Bardo of Dharmata

The element of space (consciousness) dissolves into the ground clear light.

Outer Sign: The person has stopped breathing and can no longer be resuscitated.

Inner Sign: The person sees everything as red, like a setting sun. This is the best time to perform Phowa. Thoughts of attachment dissolve.

Secret Sign: The red constituent from the mother rises towards the heart to meet the white element.

Stage 7: Dissolution of space into luminosity or dissolution of the wind that stabilizes warmth

Outer Sign: The body becomes cold.

Inner Sign: An untrained person sees a blackness and remains in a swoon for some time. Their thoughts of confusion cease. If trained, they will see the ground's luminous clarity of dharmata, and the winds of the body will enter the central channel causing thoughts of ignorance to dissolve. The wrathful and peaceful deities appear.

Secret Sign: The red and white constituents are encapsulated by the indestructible drop in the heart chakra. The all-basis

consciousness which has been in a state of ignorance all during our lifetime becomes briefly non-functional causing a "swoon" allowing the appearance of ground luminosity to arise.

Stage 8: Dissolution of unity into wisdom at the heart chakra

The wisdom dissolves into the wisdom of the Vidyadharas.

Outer Sign: This stage is not detectible from outside.

Inner Sign: The deities that appeared to be outside us not dissolve into us. They emerge from our heart as rays of light of the four colors shooting out of our heart and these rays are adorned with colored spheres and rings of light of their corresponding colors. The person experiences "clear light" that looks like the light of the autumn sky at dawn.

Secret Sign: The encapsulated red and white elements break open at the heart.

Stage 9: Dissolution of wisdom into the Vidyadhara's "parasols of light"

If the person is realized and feels the same samsaric self if untrained like autumn sky at dawn. Person sees parasols of light. After all of these sights and sounds have dissolved, comes the "unity dissolving into wisdom."

Outer Sign: This stage is not detectible from outside.

Inner Sign: The person begins to experience domes of light like parasols above us in four colors. These last two stages of dissolution will be experienced by both individuals who fail to recognize clear light and individuals who succeed in recognizing the ground clear light. The difference is the individual not recognizing the clear light or emerges from swoon, will have a brief experience.

For more advanced practitioners the ninth stage will last longer, be more vivid, and be more stable.

· F ·

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF ENCROACHING DEATH

Thrangu Rinpoche never discussed the signs of encroaching death because of time limits on his teachings and also the fact that there is a vast array of these signs (some contradicting each other) with many fairly specific to the Tibetan environment. So, presented here are just a few of these signs to show what they are like.

Some Signs of Impending Death that Appear in One's Dreams

A fox or a human corpse is an indication of death.

The rest are dreaming of the following things:

- Of riding a cat, a monkey, a tiger
- Of riding southward, naked, on a buffalo, a horse, a pig, a donkey
- Of a bird's nest in a bush growing on the crown of your head
- Of a lotus emerging from the heart
- Of falling into an abyss
- Of having your skull fractured
- Of being surrounded by ravens

- Of reentering your mother's womb
- Of being swept away by a river current
- Of sitting naked
- Of having a haircut or the beard shaven
- Of wearing red clothes or a red necklace

If a healthy person has these kinds of dreams, they do not necessarily foretell death because with the appropriate methods, death can be delayer to a later time.

As the condition of the person worsens, the signs of impending death described in the Tibetan medical tantras are:

- Bleeding, not due to poison or a wound, from any of the nine orifices
- Forgetting what you have just said
- Retraction of the penis and protrusion of the testicles or vice versa
- Coughing or sneezing with an unusual sound
- Having an insensitivity to the odor of an expiring butter lamp
- Feeling no pain when hair is plucked out
- The formation of bristles of the hair and eyebrows
- Lines resembling a crescent moon on the forehead and above the bladder.
- Perceiving imaginary forms and sounds
- Inability to perceive light when the eyes are pressed

• Remaining for long periods with the eyes wide open, like a sleeping rabbit
• Sunken eyes and lusterless pupils
• Adherence of the ears to the skull
• Interruption of the humming sound usually heard when the ears are cupped
• Distension of the nostrils and nostrils covered in dry mucus
• Darkness, dryness, and shortening of the tongue
• A cold breath flowing through the nostrils
• The refusal of food of a hot nature in the presence of a cold nature illness
• A slight recovery brought about by wrong therapies

These are a few of the many signs from Gyurme Dorje in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, pages 160-162.

• G •

THE FIVE BUDDHA FAMILIES

This information comes from two of Thrangu Rinpoche's books: *The Five Buddha Families* and *The Eight Consciousnesses and Transcending Ego.*

1. Buddha Akshobhya (Tib. *Mikyöpa*)

- His color is blue, and the female buddha is Mamaki.
- He lives in the Abhirati pure land in the East.
- He represents the aggregate of consciousness.
- He overcomes the disturbing emotion of anger with mirror-like wisdom.
- His impure nature is the element of space.

The first disturbing emotion is anger or aggression, and it is usually the strongest of the five disturbing emotions. We develop anger against a person or a situation that we dislike or that frustrates us. If we look at our anger carefully, we will see that anger does us no good in the short-term and also is harmful to us in the long-term. In the short-term, anger leads to a great number of conflicts in this lifetime. In the long-term, excessive anger can lead to rebirth

in a lower realm because this emotion leads to the development of negative karma. Because intense anger can cause rebirth in the lowest hell realm, anger not only causes suffering and pain in this lifetime, but also can cause suffering in the next lifetime.

As anger is purified, we gradually begin to realize mirror-like wisdom. With mirror-like wisdom, there is no distinction between self and outer phenomena so that everything is experienced in unity and harmony. It is called "mirror-like" wisdom because phenomena appear to the mind in the same way that things appear in a clean mirror — completely accurate with no distortion. Understanding and realizing mirror-like wisdom can only take place in the absence of the negative emotion of anger. This mirror-like wisdom is represented as Akshobhya who is blue and holds a vajra in his left hand. His activity is pacifying the emotions.

2. Buddha Ratnasambhava (Tib. *Rinchen Yungdan*)

- His color is yellow or gold and his female buddha is Sangyechanma.
- He lives in the Paldenzepa pure land in the South.
- He represents the aggregate of feeling.
- He overcomes the disturbing emotion of pride with the wisdom of equality.
- His impure nature is the element of earth.

When the disturbing emotion of pride is purified, it becomes the wisdom of equality. This wisdom is represented by Ratnasambhava. As soon as we are born, we develop a belief in a self which is thinking, "I am separate from others." This feeling of separation leads to pride because we begin to think that we are better or more deserving or superior to others. As long as we hold onto this belief, we will never be able to learn from others. To purify our pride, we must give up our strongly held belief in a self — ego clinging — and develop the wisdom of equality. The wisdom of equality is the realization that all sentient beings are of equal value because they all possess buddha nature. Ratnasambhava is gold in color representing his enriching qualities. He holds a wishfulfilling jewel in his hands.

3. Buddha Amitabha (Tib. *Öpakme*)

- His color is red and the female buddha is Pandaravasini.
- He lives in the Dewachen pure land in the West.
- He represents the aggregate of perception.
- He overcomes the disturbing emotion of attachment with discriminating wisdom.
- His impure nature is the element of fire.

When the disturbing emotion of attachment or desire is purified, it leads to the realization of discriminating wisdom. The obscuring emotion of desire causes much suffering because it distracts us and keeps our mind restless and busy. When we are attached to things,

we are never satisfied and always crave more and better things. Since we continually want more and often lose what we desire, this desire leads only to dissatisfaction in life. By eliminating attachment, discriminating wisdom shines forth. With discriminating wisdom, we develop empathy for each and every living being and appreciate the qualities of others.

The Buddha Amitabha's nature is the absence of attachment and desire, and his activity is magnetizing. As already described, desire leads to a state of always wanting and striving for more and better things which leads to dissatisfaction and unhappiness. With the discriminating wisdom of the Buddha Amitabha, there is no attachment or desire and thus no dissatisfaction or craving for more and better things.

4. Buddha Amoghasiddhi (Tib. *Dönyö Drubpa*)

- His color is green and female buddha is Tara.
- He is located in Prakuta pure land in the North.
- He represents the fourth aggregate of formation.
- He overcomes the disturbing emotion of jealousy with all-accomplishing wisdom.
- His impure nature is the element of air.

The fourth buddha is Buddha Amoghasiddhi. He is realized in the absence of the negative emotion of jealousy of others' wealth, success, and good fortune. Jealousy prevents and impedes individu-

als from accomplishing their own well-being and as a result they experience more suffering and continue to develop further jealousy towards those who have more. This is the reason allaccomplishing wisdom is experienced when jealousy is eliminated, and all wishes are naturally and effortlessly accomplished. Amoghasiddhi's activity is wrathful. He decisively cuts and removes all obstacles and hindrances which prevent spiritual maturation and success. He is green in color (the same color as growing plants) symbolizing the numerous activities he employs to remove hindrances.

5. Buddha Vairochana (Tib. *Nampar Nangdze*)

- His color is white and his female buddha is Yingchukma.
- He lives in the Akanisha pure land located in the center of the mandala.
- He represents the aggregate of form.
- He overcomes the disturbing emotion of ignorance with dharmadhatu wisdom.
- His impure nature is the element of water.

The fifth buddha is Vairochana. He is realized when the obscuring emotion of ignorance is overcome. Ignorance is failing to recognize what is wholesome and unwholesome, failing to know ultimate reality from conventional reality, and failing to realize the highest state of dharmata. Ignorance is the root of the other disturbing emotions. For example, it is only out of ignorance that we act aggressively

towards others because we do not realize that anger will only bring on pain and sorrow to ourselves and others. Likewise, it is only due to ignorance that we have pride, desire, and jealousy.

Elimination of the darkness of ignorance is the realization of Vairochana. The wisdom that shines forth when ignorance is overcome is the wisdom of dharmata, that is, the realization of the highest state. We have failed to realize the ways things really are up until now because we have ignorance which causes our mental confusion and leads to negative actions. Purification of ignorance engenders realization of the wisdom which sees the true nature of phenomena. The natural body of the purity of the wisdom of dharmata is Vairochana. Since he eliminates the darkness of ignorance, he is depicted as being white in color.

For more information see Thrangu Rinpoche's *The Five Buddha Families* and his *Distinguishing Consciousness from Wisdom* at NamoBuddhaPub.org.

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THE FIVE WISDOMS

Each of the five buddha families has an associated wisdom as described above. When a person becomes enlightened, their eight consciousnesses are transformed into the five wisdoms of the five buddha families.

1. The mirror-like wisdom of Akshobhya

A mirror reflects everything just as it is. Pleasant objects don't stick to the mirror nor are unpleasant objects repulsed by it. A mirror is completely objective, it reflects what is there. The enlightened mind is like this too in that it does not respond with clinging or aversion to anything. The enlightened mind has realized the insubstantial, impermanent nature of all phenomena. Therefore, mirror-like wisdom responds with complete equanimity and imperturbability to everything. Akshobhya's name means "The Imperturbable One." We tend to have so many ideas, preconceptions, assumptions, and emotional biases creating our own deluded minds that we rarely relate objectively to the situation. The fully liberated mind relates to what is really there without adding any ideas or concepts onto

the experience. The mirror-like wisdom of Akshobhya reminds us that we need to try to be objective about ourselves, about other people, and about events.

2. The wisdom of equality of Ratnasambhava

The wisdom of equality sees the same reality in all beings and has the same love and compassion equally for all beings. It does not relate to people on the basis of nationality, ethnic background, skin color, gender, etc. The wisdom of equality is based on the fact that all sentient beings — even the smallest insect — has buddha nature. Ratnasambhava is depicted with the giving mudra, the open right hand. Ratnasambhava's enlightened mind is abundant and rich, overflowing with a wealth of creativity. He therefore is depicted holding a jewel in his left hand, a symbol of the Three Jewels, which are an inexhaustible treasure of spiritual riches.

3. The discriminating wisdom of Amitabha

This wisdom represents how a realized practitioner sees all the many differences or variety of phenomena the awareness of the simultaneous sameness and differences of phenomena. Discriminating wisdom relates to the five sensory consciousnesses and the sixth mental consciousness. This wisdom knows each thing as it is and therefore is called discriminating wisdom because all experiences are clearly seen.

4. The all-accomplishing wisdom of Amoghasiddhi

Amoghasiddhi means "unobstructed success" and this wisdom acts spontaneously for the benefit of all beings. It is the wisdom of understanding which are all the methods that can be used to help beings to progress spiritually. The all-accomplishing wisdom represents a fearless outpouring of compassionate activity whenever and wherever a need arises. It is a total and immediate response to the present situation with all the tremendous energy at the disposal of an enlightened mind. Amoghasiddhi holds in this right hand a sword and sometimes a double vajra representing the union of all opposites. His left hand is in the gesture of meditation.

5. The dharmadhatu wisdom of Vairochana

Dharmadhatu is reality as it truly is and is completely perceived by enlightened beings. The dharmadhatu wisdom is the ultimate wisdom of all wisdoms. Vairochana means "completely illuminating" or the one who lights everything up. The enlightened mind experiences the universe as fully pervaded by reality. This is the enlightened mind is compared to the full blaze of glory like the sun.

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THE 42 PEACEFUL DEITIES OF THE BARDO

All of these deities reside in the heart of every person while they are alive and then appear outside of them in the Bardo of Dharmata. Each deity has a particular color, holds different implements, and represent one of the five families.[101]

Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri in Union

Name in Sanskrit	Color	Impure aspect
1. Samantabhadra	sky blue	fundamental ignorance
2. Samantabhadri	white	false sensory phenomena

101. The description of the various deities in the bardo sometimes differ slightly from their characteristics that is described in different tantric practices. Two of these sources are Gyurme Dorje's *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and Detlef Lauf's *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan Books of the Dead*.



This the main head of the 42 peaceful deities: Samantabhadra and Samantrabadhri. They appear first and we should go towards their heart.[102]

Five Male Buddhas

These represent the five purified aggregates. Each buddha touches the earth with their right hand and holds a bell in their left hand. He sits crossed-legged on a lotus petal.

102. These pictures and more pictures can be found at NamoBuddhaPub.org under Dharma Topics: The Bardo.

3. Vairochana (Buddha family)	white	ignorance
4. Akshobhya (Vajra family)	azure blue	anger
5. Ratnasambhava (Ratna family)	golden yellow	pride
6. Amitabha (Padma family)	copper red	attachment
7. Amoghasiddhi (Karma family)	turquoise green	envy

Five Female Buddhas

These represent the purity of the five elements. The union with the male buddhas is symbolically represented with a sexual embrace.

8. Akashadhatvisvari	blue	space element
9. Buddhalocana	beryl blue	earth element
10. Mamaki	light orange	water element
11. Pandaravasini	fire-crystal red	fire element
12. Samayatara	sapphire green	wind element



There are five male and female buddhas in union and they are alike except for their color and implements.

The Eight Male Bodhisattvas

These represent the purity of the eight consciousnesses. Each holds a different implement in right hand and bell at his hip with his left hand.

13. Kshitigarbha	white	visual consciousness
14. Maitreya	white	auditory consciousness
15. Samantabhadra	azure yellow	olfactory consciousness

16. Akashagarbha	golden yellow	gustatory consciousness
17. Avalokiteshvara	coral red	tactile consciousness
18. Manjushri	light orange	mental consciousness
19. Sarvanivaranaviskambhin	green	alaya consciousness
20. Vajrapani	emerald green	defiled consciousness

The Eight Female Bodhisattvas

These represent the purity of the eight sense objects.

21. Lasya	white	visual phenomena
22. Pushpa	pearl white	past conceptual thoughts
23. Mala	saffron yellow	indeterminate thoughts
24. Dhupa	golden yellow	purity of fragrance
25. Gita	marsh mallow pink	purity of sound
26. Aloka	lotus pink	future conceptual thoughts

27. Gandha	poppy green	present conceptual thoughts
28. Nrtya	marine green	purity of taste

The Four Male Gatekeepers

These represent the purity of four extreme views.

29. Trailokyavijaya	white	eternalism
30. Yamantaka	yellow	nihilism
31. Hayagriva	red	egotism
32. Amritakundalin	green	substantialism

The Four Female Gatekeepers

These represent the purity of four types of birth.

33. Ankusa	white	miraculous birth
34. Pasha	yellow	womb birth

35. Sphota	red	egg birth
36. Ghanta	green	moisture birth



There are four male and female gatekeepers protecting the mandala.

These Six Sages

These represent the purity of the six disturbing emotions.

37. Indrashakra	white	purity of pride	lute
38. Vemacitra	green	purity of envy	sword

39. Shakyamuni	yellow	purity of attachment	bowl
40. Sthirasimha	blue	purity of ignorance	scripture
41. Jvalamukha	red	purity of miserliness	casket
42. Yama Dharmaraja	black	purity of aggression	fire



There are six Sages. Each holds a different instruments and posture.

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THE 58 WRATHFUL DEITIES OF BARDO

While we are living, the 58 wrathful deities reside in the brain. These deities appear to the person in the seventh stage of dissolution and, being wrathful, they are frightening, making piercing sounds, and have rays that are so intense that they can barely be looked at.

Six Male Herukas

Each heruka or "wrathful deity" (literally "blood drinker) represents the pure aspect of transforming the six disturbing emotions. They all have 3 faces, 6 arms, 4 legs, charnel ground ornaments and stand in the union with female herukas in the hero stance.

1. Mahottara Heruka (Chemchok)	dark brown	ignorance to pure awareness
2. Buddha Heruka	dark brown	delusion to dharmakaya wisdom
3. Vajra Heruka	dark blue	aversion to mirror-like wisdom

4. Ratna Heruka	dark yellow	pride to wisdom of equality
5. Padma Heruka	dark red	attachment to discerning wisdom
6. Karma Heruka	dark green	jealousy to all-accomplishing wisdom

Six Female Herukas

Each female buddha represents a pure aspect of the six sensory objects.

7. Krodheshvari	dark blue	sensory objects
8. Buddha-Krodheshvari	red-brown	visual objects
9. Vajra-Krodheshvari	pale blue	auditory objects
10. Ratna-Krodheshvari	pale yellow	smell objects
11. Padma-Krodheshvari	pale red	gustatory objects
12. Karma-Krodheshvari	pale green	tactile objects



These are the main wrathful deities: Chemchok and Krodheshavari. They appear brilliantly. We should face them and visualize entering into their hearts. All six wrathful male deities have three faces and six arms, and four legs. They all have wings and are surrounded by fire to show that they are wrathful.

The Eight Matarah (Tib. *Mamos*)

Each matarah represents purifying one of the 8 consciousnesses. Each and the implement (however gruesome) represent purifying an organ.

13. Gauri	white	club, skull cup	visual consciousess
14. Cauri	yellow	bow and arrow	auditory consciousness
15. Pramoha	red	banner, skull cup	olfactory consciousness
16. Vetali	dark blue	vajra, skull cup	gustatory consciousness
17. Pukkasi	yellow	entrails, eating	tactile consciousness
18. Ghasmari	green	vajra, drinking	mental consciousness
19. Candali	light yellow	eating a body	eighth consciousness
20. Samsani	dark blue	eating a body	deluded consciousness



The Eight Female Matarahs who can be recognized by having a human body and carrying different implements. Shown above: Samsani. *Courtesy of Enlightenment, Kathmandu, Nepal.*

Eight Pishaci Or Hybreds (Tib. *Tramen*)

Each Pishaci represents the purity of sense objects with some being hybrids. The all have one face, 2 arms, 3 eyes, wide open mouths bearing fangs or have wings. Each wears a rosery of fresh human heads and stands on a corpse. (see Guarisco for details).

21. Simha-mukhi	brown-black	lion headed
22. Vyaghri-mukhi	red	tiger headed

23. Shrigala-mukhi	black	fox headed
24. Shvana-mukhi	blue-black	wolf headed
25. Gridhra-mukhi	white-yellow	vulture headed
26. Kan-mukhi	red-black	heron headed
27. Kaka-mukhi	black	raven headed
28. Uluka-mukhi	dark-blue	owl headed



The Eight Pisaci with different heads and have wings. Shown above: Ulukamukhi. *Courtesy of Enlightenment, Kathmandu, Nepal.*

Four Wrathful Female Gatekeepers (Tib. *Droma*)

Gatekeepers represent the closing of one of the four types of birth. They do not have a male aspect.

29. Vajra-tejasi (hook lady)	white	miraculous birth
30. Vajra-mogha (noose lady)	yellow	womb birth
31. Vajra-loka (roaring lady)	red	egg birth
32. Vajra-vetali (bell lady)	green	moisture birth



There are four female gatekeepers. Vajratejasi protects the East gate. *Courtesy of Enlightenment, Kathmandu, Nepal.*

The 28 Ishvaris (Tib. *Wangchukma*)

The 28 Ishvaris or Hybrids are all female and represent the four kinds of activity (pacification, enrichment, subjugation, and wrathful activity) plus four gatekeepers:[103]

Six Female Yoginis (Ishvaris) of the East

Each one represents an activity of pacification and belongs to the Vajra Family in the east which symbolizes activities of pacification. All six hold a vajra in the right hand. The implement held in the left hand is given.

33. Manurakshasi	brownish white	yak headed	skull cup
34. Brahmani	yellowish white	snake headed	lotus
35. Raudri	greenish white	leopard headed	trident
36. Vaishnavi	bluish white	weasel headed	wheel
37. Kaumari	reddish white	brown bear headed	lance
38. Indrani	white	black bear headed	noose

103. 12 of these can be seen on the front cover of this book

Six Female Yoginis (Ishvaris) of the South

Each represents an activity of enrichment. All are yellow and in the Ratna family. All six hold a jewel in their right hand. The implement they are holding in the left hand is given.

39. Vajra	yellow	bat headed	razor
40. Shanti	reddish yellow	crocodile head	vase
41. Amrita	reddish yellow	scorpion headed	lotus
42. Saumi	whitish yellow	hawk headed	vajra
43. Dandi	greenish yellow	fox headed	club
44. Rakshasi	dark yellow	tiger headed	skull cup

The Six Female Yoginis (Ishvaris) of the West

Each represents activities of subjugation. All deities are red and belong to the Padma family and, have a lotus in their right hand. The implement in the left hand is given below.

45. Bhakshasi	greenish-red	vulture headed	mace

46. Rati	red	horse headed	human torso
47. Rudhirmadi	pale red	garuda headed	club
48. Ekacarini Rakshasi	red	dog headed	razor
49. Manoharika	red	hoopoe headed	bow and arrow
50. Siddikari	greenish-red	deer headed	treasure vase

The Six Female Yoginis (Ishvaris) of the North

These deities belong to the karma family. Each is a shade of green [104] and all are holding a double vajra in the right hand. The implement in the left hand is given below.

51. Vayudevi	bluish green	wolf headed	insignia
52. Agnayi	reddish green	ibex headed	firebrand
53. Varahi	dark green	sow headed	noose of fangs
54. Camundi	reddish green	crow headed	child's corpse
55. Bhujana	dark green	elephant headed	adult corpse

104. Guarisco says some sources have a different color for this group of yoginis.

56. Varunani	bluish green	snake headed	noose of snakes

The Four Female Yogini Gatekeepers

Each represents the purity of four kinds of birth and their buddha families.

57. Mahakali	white	cuckoo headed	Vajra family
58. Mahachagala	yellow	goat headed	Ratna family
59. Mahakumbhakarni	red	lion headed	Padma family
60. Lambodara	dark green	snake headed	Karma family

Note: Even though, they are known as the 58 wrathful deities, they are actually 60 deities in total. In his translation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Gyurme Dorje provides additional details such as their corresponding peaceful deity, their exact location in the head, and the Tibetan name. Elio Guarisco in *The Tibetan Books of the Dead* also gives each deity's attributes and correlates these with Karma Lingpa's *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities (Zhitro)*.

GLOSSARY

Abhidharma. The Buddhist teachings are often divided into the Tripitaka: The Sutras (teachings of the Buddha), the Vinaya (teachings on conduct) and the Abhidharma (teachings classifying phenomena into types and categories).

alertness (Tib. *seshin*). The factor of the mind that is aware of what is going on in the mind. In meditation, alertness "tells us" that our thoughts have strayed off the meditation.

all-basis consciousness (Skt. *alaya*). The eighth consciousness is often called the "ground consciousness" because it organizes the other consciousnesses and is the basis for the arising of all other types of consciousness or the "storehouse consciousness" because it stores all our habitual tendencies and latent karmic imprints from the sixth consciousness and past lifetimes).

Amitabha. Head of one of the five buddha families and is known as "buddha of boundless light." He is depicted as red and is a member of the lotus family. Amitabha made a special commitment to allow unenlightened beings into his pure realm (Tib. *Dewachen*, Skt. *Sukhavati*) where they can learn the Dharma.

aperture of Brahma. A suture in the top of the skull. It is where the central channel ends and where the mind should ideally exit the body in the bardo.

bardo (Tib. *bardo*). Literally, "interval" or "between the two." Usually, it referrs to the intermediate state between the end of life and rebirth into another body. Bardo can be divided into four or six different levels.

blessings (Tib. *jinlap*). Individuals who have great devotion to the lineage are able to "tap into" or receive the blessings of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. The blessings of the lineage are always there but can only be received by persons that are receptive to them.

bodhichitta. Literally, the "mind of enlightenment." There is absolute bodhicitta which is a completely awakened mind that sees the emptiness of phenomena, and relative bodhichitta which is the aspiration to practice the six paramitas and free all beings from the suffering of samsara.

Breakthrough (Tib. *trekchö*). There are two types of Dzogchen practice: Trekchö and Tögal. To simplify, Trekchö involves mainly looking at one's own mind and is similar to Mahamudra in the Kagyu lineage.

buddha nature (Skt. *tathagatagarbha*). The original essence that is present in all sentient beings (and hence, all phenomena) which, when realized, leads to enlightenment.

chakras. Literally, "wheels." Centers of energy along the central channel at the forehead, throat, heart, solar plexus, and the tip of the sexual organ, where there is a broadening of channels.

Chemchok Heruka (Skt. *Mahottara Heruka*). The main wrathful deity in the Zhitro. His consort is Namshyalma. He has three faces and six arms that are dark blue, white and red. He holds a vajra, blood-filled skull cup in his right hand and a noose of entrails in his left hand.

Chenrezig (Skt. *Avalokiteshvara*). The deity of compassion who is also known as the patron deity of Tibet. His mantra is OM MANI PEDME HUNG.

chakra. Literally "wheel." In this context centers of energy along the central channel at the forehead, throat, heart, solar plexus, and sexual organ. See Appendix B for a description of these.

Chod. Pronounced "chö" and literally means "to cut off." This refers to a practice that is designed to cut off all ego involvement and the defilements. The mo chö (female Chod) practice was founded by the famous female saint Machig Labdrön (1031 to 1129).

clear light (Tib. *ösel*). A subtle state of mind which is the highest realization to be attained according to tantric teachings. Also called "luminosity," "ground clear light," or "luminous clarity."

commitments (Skt. *samaya*). The vows made in the Vajrayana to a guru or to do a practice properly. Samayas essentially consist of outwardly maintaining harmonious relationships with the vajra master and one's Dharma friends, and inwardly not straying from the continuity of the practice.

completion stage. In the Vajrayana there are two stages of meditation: the creation and the completion stage. In the completion stage one usually dissolves all the visualizations in the practice. In some practices, one attains bliss, clarity, and non-thought by means of manipulating the subtle channels and energies within the body.

Copper Colored Mountain The pure land of Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche).

creation stage. In the Vajrayana there are two stages of meditation: the creation and the completion stage. This is a method of tantric meditation that involves visualization of deities and their retinues and, often, saying their mantras for the purpose of realizing the purity of all phenomena.

Dharmakirti. An important seventh century Buddhist philosopher who taught at Nalanda University and developed pramana or the study of how we know what we think is correct.

dharmadhatu. The all-encompassing space not originated (without a beginning), out of which all phenomena arise. The Tibetan means "the expanse of phenomena" and it refers to the true essence of phenomena.

dharmakaya. One of the three emanations of the Buddha. It is enlightenment itself, the wisdom beyond reference point. See kayas, three.

dharmata (Tib. *chönyi*). Dharmata is often translated as "suchness" or "the true nature of things" or "things as they are." It is the nature of phenomena as they really are and how they are perceived by a completely enlightened being without having any duality, distortion, or obscuration. One can say it is "reality" as it actually is.

disturbing emotion (Skt. *klesha*). Often called "afflictions" or "poisons." These are emotions which disturb the mind and lead to negative actions. The three main disturbing emotions are attachment, aggression or anger, and ignorance or bewilderment. The five disturbing emotions are the above three plus pride and jealousy.

Dream Yoga. An advanced Vajrayana practice using the dream state to first develop lucid dreaming and then to consciously manipulate one's dreams. It is also one of the Six Dharmas of Naropa.

Dusum Khyenpa (1110-1193). The founder of the Karma Kagyu lineage, one of the four main sub-lineages of the Kagyu lineage. Dusum Khyenpa was a disciple of Gampopa.

Dzogchen. Also known as the "Great Perfection." This is one of the main practices of the Nyingma tradition and, like Mahamudra, involves directly examining the mind.

eight consciousnesses. These are the five sensory consciousnesses, the sixth mental consciousness, the seventh afflicted (klesha) consciousness, and the eighth ground (alaya) consciousness. See the further description.

eight female bodhisattvas. Also called the eight offering goddesses. These are the goddesses: of beauty, of garlands, of song, of dance, of flowers, of incense, of light, and of perfume. Or Lasya, Mala, Gita, Nirti, Pushpa, Dhupa, Aloka and Gandha. They are members of the 42 peaceful goddesses. See Appendix I.

eight male bodhisattvas. These bodhisattvas were very close to the historical Buddha: Manjushri, Vajrapani, Avalokiteshvara, Kshitigarbha, Sarvanivaranaviskambhin, Asashagarbha, Maitreya, and Samantabhadra. In the bardo they appear as part of the 42

peaceful deities representing the purity of the eight consciousnesses. See Appendix I.

eight freedoms. Eight conditions favorable to practicing Dharma. They are (1) not being born into one of the hell realms, (2) not being born as a hungry ghost, (3) not being born as an animal, (4) not being born in the god realm (which is part of samsara), (5) not being born in a country without the Buddhist Dharma, (6) not possessing wrong views such as denying that there is such a thing as karma, (7) not being born where a buddha has not appeared, and (8) not being too mentally or physically handicapped to practice the Dharma.

eighty types of thoughts. There is mind and there are mental factors. These mental factors are conceptual thoughts and feelings in the mind. They are divided into three kinds: those of anger, those of attachment, and those of ignorance.

Ejection of Consciousness. See Phowa.

empowerment. In order to do many Vajrayana practices, one should receive the empowerment from a qualified lama who gives permission to do the practice. One should also receive the practice instruction and the textual reading (Tib. *lung*).

emptiness (Skt. *shunyata*, Tib. *tong pa nyi*). In the second turning of the wheel of Dharma, the Buddha taught that external phenomena and the internal phenomena of thoughts and feelings

have no real existence and therefore are empty of inherent existence which is called emptiness.

five chakras. These are energy centers along the spinal column that resemble "wheels" (Skt. *chakra*). They are at the level of crown of the head, throat, heart, navel, and the area of the sexual organs. See Appendix B.

five elements. These five physical elements are earth, water, fire, wind, and space. These elements are both the constituents of external matter and the physical components of the body. See Appendix A for details.

five perfections of sambhogakaya realm. The perfect teacher, retinue, place, teaching, and time.

five subtle winds (Skt. *prana*, Tib. *lung*). The energy that flows through the subtle channels. The five major types of subtle winds are: (1) life-force wind, (2) upward moving wind, (3) the all-pervading wind, (4) the fire-accompanying wind, and (5) the downward clearing winds. For details see the chart.

five wisdoms. Upon reaching enlightenment, the eight consciousnesses are transformed into the five wisdoms: the mirror-like wisdom, discriminating wisdom, the wisdom of equality, the all-accomplishing wisdom, and the dharmadhatu wisdom. See Appendix H for details.

forty-two peaceful deities. The 42 peaceful deities reside in the heart. In the Vajrayana, it is believed that there are one hundred deities located in a living person, with 42 peaceful deities residing in the heart and 58 wrathful deities residing in the brain. See Appendix I for details.

Foundation vehicle (Skt. *Hinayana*). The first teachings of the Buddha which emphasized the teachings in the sutras and particularly the Four Noble Truths and emptiness of self.

four common preliminaries. These are also called the "four thoughts that turn the mind to the Dharma." They are contemplation of a precious human birth, impermanence, and the inevitability of death, karmic cause and effect, and the pervasive nature of suffering in samsara.

four immeasurables. The qualities that are necessary to help others and are needed to be achieved to attain enlightenment. These are immeasurable because ordinary persons cannot conceive of them. They are limitless loving-kindness, limitless compassion, limitless joy, and limitless equanimity.

Gampopa (1079-1153). One of the main lineage holders of the Kagyu lineage in Tibet. He was a student of Milarepa and established the first Kagyu monastery. He is also known for writing the *Ornament of Precious Liberation*.

Genden Chophel (1903-1951). Genden Chophel began his adult life as a monk and then later was known for presenting very controversial positions on many issues in Tibetan Buddhism.

Gerab Dorje. Garab Dorje was said to be immaculately conceived. His mother was a nun and was the daughter of King Indrabhuti who lived in Uddiyana. He received all the tantras and oral instructions on Dzogchen directly from Vajrasattva and Vajrapani. He reached realization of Dzogchen and transmitted the teachings to Manjushrimitra who then transmitted Dzogchen to Guru Rinpoche. The Bon religion holds that he lived before the time of the Buddha Shakyamuni.

Gelug school. One of the four main Tibetan schools of Buddhism founded by Tsongkhapa (1357-1419). This lineage is known for its Buddhist scholarship.

gandharvas. These are known in the Indian literature and are thought to be spirits that live on smells. They are also said to be celestial musicians and their music can sometimes be heard during Dharma events. In the context of the bardo, a person who is searching for a body may be referred to as being a gandharva.

Great Perfection. Another name for Dzogchen. See **Dzogchen**.

ground clear light. The ground luminosity of the natural state, inherent as the enlightened essence of all sentient beings. Also called luminous clarity, it is the "knowing" quality of the enlightened mind.

guru yoga. A practice of devotion to the guru culminating in receiving his blessing and blending indivisibly with his mind. It is also the fourth preliminary practices of Ngöndro.

heruka. A wrathful male deity. In Indian culture, herukas were spirits originally associated with cremation grounds and heruka meant "blood drinkers." In Buddhism, a heruka is a male deity in its wrathful form and can also be used to refer to Chakrasamvara and Hevajra.

hundred-syllable mantra. This mantra of Vajrasattva is known for its great power to purify negative karma, obscurations, and obstructions that one has accumulated throughout their lifetimes.

hungry ghosts (Skt. *preta*). A type of non-visible being in one of the six realms of samsara who are always suffering from hunger and thirst but are unable to obtain what they desire. This is the result of excessive greed in previous lifetimes. Hungry ghosts are depicted symbolically as having an enormous stomach and an extremely narrow throat. See Appendix C for the six realms of samsara.

ignorance (Tib. *marigpa*). One of the three "poisons" or main disturbing emotions (attachment, anger, and ignorance). This ignorance is not just understanding or knowing something like the names of the different deities. In the Buddhist context, it means strongly believing that outer phenomena are real and solid rather than their being empty.

Indra. The chief god of the desire realm who is said to reside on top of Mt. Meru.

Insight. See **Vipashyana meditation**.

Jamgon Kongtrul (1813-1899). Also known as Lodro Thaye, he was best known for being one of the main founders of the non-sectarian movement (Tib. *rime*) which preserved the various practice lineages that were on the verge of extinction. He also was a prolific writer of 90 volumes.

jealous gods (Skt. *asura*). These are a type of invisible being of the six realms of samsara who are characterized as being very argumentative and jealous of others and their accomplishments. They are depicted symbolically as chopping down the Dharma trees in the god realm. See Appendix C.

Kagyu (Tib.). One of the four major schools of Buddhism in Tibet founded by Marpa. The other three are the Nyingma, Sakya, and Gelug schools.

Kalu Rinpoche (1905-1989). He was a Kagyu teacher and scholar who began teaching in Europe and the USA in the 1970s and founded several dozen centers in several countries.

Karma Chagme (1613-1678). He studied under Nyingma and Kagyu teachers and was ordained by the Sixth Sharmapa. He also traveled in Tibet with the Ninth Karmapa. He was a terton and an author of many books including *Clarifying the Natural State*.

karmic latencies. Every event or activity that a person performed has a karmic imprint or latency (Tib. *bakchag*) which is stored in the eighth consciousness. This imprint enters the sixth consciousness later when it is stimulated by external experiences. karmic wind. See wind of **Karma**.

kayas, three. There are three emanations or literally "bodies" (Skt. *kaya*) of the Buddha: nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya and dharmakaya. The dharmakaya, also called the "truth body," is the complete enlightenment or the complete wisdom of the Buddha which is unoriginated wisdom beyond form. It manifests in the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya. The sambhogakaya, also called the "enjoyment body," manifests only to bodhisattvas. The nirmanakaya, also called the "emanation body," manifests in the world and, in this context, manifests as the Buddha Shakyamuni. Th two kayas are also called the form kayas.

Khechara realm. A celestial realm which is often connected to Vajrayogini.

layperson or householder's vows (Skt. *upasaka,* Tib *genyen*). Vows that nonordained persons can take for a period of time or for life. These are the five vows not to kill, not to lie, not to steal, not to take intoxicants, and not to engage in sexual misconduct.

Leapover (Tib. *tögal*). One of the two basic types of Dzogchen meditation. Leapover is a series of yogic practices that affect the subtle winds and channels of the body. See also Breakthrough.

life supporting wind (Skt. *prana*, Tib. *sondzin*). This is the subtle energy which gives the inanimate body the energy to be a living system.

Lucid Dreaming. This is a practice in which one learns how to be aware that one is dreaming at night and later how to transform one's dreams. This is an important meditative practice and part of the Six Dharmas of Naropa.

lucidity. See luminous clarity. luminous clarity (Tib. *salwa*). Also translated as "lucidity," "luminosity," and "clarity." In the third turning of the wheel of Dharma, it is said that all phenomena are empty or insubstantial but that this emptiness is not a complete voidness because it has the quality of knowing, which

is called luminous clarity. This quality allows all phenomena to appear. It is the knowing characteristic of the mind.

Mahamudra. Literally, "great seal" meaning that all phenomena are sealed by the primordially true nature. This form of meditation can be traced back to Saraha (10th century). In the Kagyu school it was passed down from Tilopa to Naropa to Marpa who brought this teaching to Tibet. This meditative practice emphasizes perceiving mind directly rather than through rational analysis.

mahasiddha. A practitioner who has a great deal of realization. These were particularly Vajrayana practitioners who lived in India between the eight and twelfth century and practiced tantra. The biographies of some of the most famous ones are found in Abhayadatta's *The Lives of the Eighty-four Mahasiddhas*.

Mahabharata. This is a Hindu epic poem which includes the Bhagavad Gita which is said to have originated around the fourth century BCE. It is the longest epic poem in the world and comprises over a million words.

Mahayana. Literally, the "great vehicle." These are the teachings of the second turning of the wheel of dharma which emphasize emptiness, compassion, and the bodhisattva path.

Manjushri. A meditational deity representing discriminative awareness (*prajna*) known as being the deity of knowledge and

learning. He is usually depicted as holding a sword in the right hand to cut through ignorance and the Prajnaparamita scripture in the left hand representing his mastery of emptiness.

Marpa (1012-1097). Marpa was a Tibetan businessman and householder who made three trips to India and brought back many tantric texts including the Six Dharmas of Naropa, the Guhyasamaja, and the Chakrasamvara practices. His teacher was Naropa. Marpa founded the Kagyu lineage in Tibet.

Meditation Day. Time in the bardo is not measured in our solar days but in meditation days. A meditation day is the amount of time a person can remain in samadhi multiplied by five. So, if one can stay in meditational equipoise for one hour, then one's meditation day would be five hours long, not the actual 24-hour day that we usually measure time in.

mental body. After a person leaves the body in the bardo, the mind creates an immaterial body formed on habitual tendencies from the previous life much like the body we have while dreaming. This mental body can be recognized because it glows slightly.

Milarepa (1040-1123). Milarepa was a student of Marpa who attained enlightenment in his lifetime. Milarepa practiced the Six Dharmas of Naropa extensively in caves in Tibet and Nepal and

attained enlightenment in one lifetime. His student, Gampopa, founded the Dakpo Kagyu lineage.

mind's nature. In Buddhism there are two aspects of mind that are discussed. There is the apparent mind, which is the mind we all experience with thoughts, feelings, emotions constantly churning about which are mostly based on outside experiences. Then there is the true nature of mind which is the mind that we have always had over many incarnations which is usually clouded over by the discursive mind. With meditation we are able to still discursive mind and begin to experience the true nature of mind.

mindfulness. This is being aware of what is happening in our mind. In Mahamudra, one always tries to maintain mindfulness and alertness, which is accomplished by noticing that the mind has wandered off somewhere and bringing it back.

mother and child clear light. If we have achieved advanced meditation and are able to experience the clear light of dharmata in our meditation, then when we experience it in bardo and recognize it as clear light, it is said it is like mother (the experience of clear light in meditation) meeting the child (the clear light in the bardo).

Nagarjuna. An Indian scholar in the second century who founded the Madhyamaka philosophical school which empha-

sizes the emptiness of phenomena based on the prajnaparamita literature which he obtained from the nagas.

Namshyalma. She is the feminine aspect of Chemchok, the head deity of the 58 wrathful deities.

Naropa (956-1040). A great scholar or pandita at Nalanda University who left his post to find the mahasiddha Tilopa to be his guru. After spending many years with Tilopa, he reached realization and became the guru of Marpa who brought these teachings to Tibet.

Natsok Rangdrol. See **Rangdrol, Natsok**.

Ngöndro (Tib. pronounced "nundro"). There are two preliminaries in the Vajrayana. The common preliminary (the Four Thoughts) and the special preliminaries called Ngöndro. One usually begins the Vajrayana path with Ngöndro practices which involve doing 100,000 refuge prayers and prostrations, 100,000 Vajrasattva mantras, 100,000 mandala offerings, and 100,000 guru yoga practices.

nine gates. These are the orifices in the body that the mind can escape from at death. They are the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, the mouth, the anus, and the genital opening.

nirmanakaya (Tib. *tulku*). There are three bodies or embodiments of the Buddha. The nirmanakaya or "emanation body"

manifested in our world as the Buddha Shakyamuni. See kayas, three.

Nyingma (Tib.). The oldest school of Buddhism in Tibet based on the teachings of Padmasambhava and others in the eighth and ninth centuries.

Padampa Sangye. A mahasiddha who lived in the twelfth century in India. He traveled to Tibet several times and is mostly known for having taught the practice of Pacifying (Tib. *shijey*) of the Chod practice to Machig Labdron.

peaceful and wrathful ones (Tib. *zhitro*). These are the one hundred deities that are located in the body. They leave the body at death and become part of the visions in the bardo. They are listed in Appendix I and J.

Phowa (Tib.). An advanced tantric practice concerned with the ejection of consciousness at death from the Aperture of Brahma into a favorable realm.

postmeditation. The period that follows a formal meditation session. The application of mindfulness while working, interacting with others, eating, and so on after meditation.

pratimoksha vows. The vows taken by monastics. Novice monks and nuns begin by taking 36 vows while fully ordained nuns take 364 vows and fully ordained monks take 253 vows. These numbers vary between lineages.

pure lands. Realms created by buddhas which are totally free from suffering and where Dharma can be received directly. These realms are presided over by various buddhas such as Amitabha, Avalokiteshvara, and Maitreya.

Pure Land Buddhism. A branch of Mahayana Buddhism practiced predominately in China which focuses on being able to go to the pure land of Buddha Amitabha upon death.

oral instructions (Skt. *upadesha*). Instructions which, in the early history of Mahamudra, were not written down but passed on orally from guru to student. Later many of these instructions were written down. However, the oral instructions are still important because they are on the nature of mind or the experience of Mahamudra which are often tailored to the individual student.

rainbow body (Tib. *jalu*). A great meditation master may decide to depart in a rainbow body rather than in a normal death. Traditionally, the practitioner asks just before his death to be left lone in an isolated space and for it to be opened after seven days. When this is done, his body cannot be found except for the hair and nails. Another form of rainbow body is when, at death, the corpse of the great practitioner gradually begins to shrink smaller and smaller.

Rangdrol, Natsok (born 1608). He lived in Tibet and was recognized as a reincarnation of Gotsangpa, the great master of the Drukpa Kagyu lineage. He studied extensively in both the Kagyu and Nyingma lineages and is author of *The Mirror of Mindfulness* on the four bardos.

Rangjung Dorje (1284-1339). The Third Karmapa who is known for writing a series of texts widely used in the Karma Kagyu school including some introducing the Shentong view. He wrote a number of influential books and Thrangu Rinpoche has written commentaries on several of these.

red constituent. In Tibetan medicine the white element from the father combines with the red constituent from the mother at the beginning of conception. However, the red and white element are more than the sperm and egg because these constituents are energies that continue to exist in the subtle body of the person being born.

refuge vow. In the Buddhist context, to take the refuge vow means to accept the Buddha and the Buddhist teachings as the spiritual path one wants to take.

ringsel. Round rocks about the size of s piece of rice not found in nature but are created by sacred activity. They are often found in the ashes of cremated advanced practitioners.

Rinpoche. Literally, "precious one." A Tibetan lama who has been formally recognized as being the reincarnation of a high lama who has died. They can also be called "tulku" which is Tibetan for a reincarnation.

root lama. A teacher from whom one has received the instructions and empowerments that form the core of one's practice. A practitioner of Vajrayana can have several gurus: the vajra master who confers an empowerment, a person who bestows reading transmission, or one who explains the meaning of the tantras. The ultimate root guru is the lama who gives the "pointing out instructions" so that the student recognizes the nature of their mind.

Shakya. One of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism. It was established by Drogmi Lotsawa in the eleventh century.

samadhi. A state of meditation that is non-dualistic with an absence of discrimination between self and other. It is also called "meditative absorption" or "one-pointed meditation" and is the highest form of meditation.

Samantabhadra. The primordial dharmakaya buddha who, at the very beginning, saw the separation of "I" and "other" and was not fooled by it unlike everyone else. The first syllable *samanta* means "all" and the second *bhadra* means "good." or "He who is All-Pervadingly Good." There are two different Samantabha-

dras, one is the dharmakaya emanation who has existed since the beginning of time and the other was one of the eight main bodhisattvas known to the Buddha.

sambhogakaya. There are three bodies of the Buddha. The sambhogakaya, also called the "enjoyment body," is a realm of the dharmakaya which only manifests to bodhisattvas. See the **three kayas**.

seed syllable. A Tibetan letter, or syllable, that symbolizes the essence of a deity or an element. Tantric practices often involve visualizing seed syllables which then transform into the deity or element represented. For example, HRI is the seed syllable for Chenrezig. So, one would first visualize empty space and then visualize a HRI arising from it which would transform into Chenrezig.

emptiness of self (Tib. *dag me*). In Buddhism being selfless has a different meaning that saying "that person is selfless" because they sacrificed themselves. In Buddhism this means the emptiness of a self or ego referring to the fact that "a person" is not a real, permanent entities rather just a collection of thoughts and feelings and beliefs.

Sending and Receiving practice (Tib. *tong len*). A meditation practice promulgated by Atisha in which the practitioner

takes on the negative conditions of others and gives out all that is positive.

seven branch offerings. The seven-branch practice is: (1) prostrating to the Three Jewels, (2) confessing negative actions, (3) making offerings, (4) rejoicing in the virtue of others, (5) requesting lama to turn the wheel of Dharma, (6) beseeching the lama not to pass into nirvana, and (7) dedicating the merit to the enlightenment of all sentient beings.

seven points of Vairochana. The ideal posture when meditating. They are: Straighten the upper body and the spinal column, (2) Look slightly downward into space straight across from the tip of the nose while keeping the chin and neck straight, (3) Straighten the shoulder blades even in the manner of a vulture flexing its wings, (4) Keep the lips touching gently, Let the tip of the tongue touch the upper palate, (6) Form the legs into either the half or full-lotus posture, and (7) Keep the back of the right hand flat on the left open palm with the inside of the tips of the thumbs gently touching.

seventh or klesha consciousness. The consciousness that maintains a continuous presence of "me" and "mine" in all our thinking. See the chart for details.

Shakyamuni Buddha. Often called the Gautama or historical Buddha, the Shakyamuni Buddha is the latest buddha who lived roughly between 563 and 483 BCE.

Shamatha or **Tranquility meditation**. This is basic sitting meditation in which one usually follows the breath while observing the workings of the mind and sitting in the cross-legged posture. The main purpose of Shamatha meditation is to settle or tame the mind so that it will stay where one places it.

Shambhala. A land that is described in the Kalachakra tantra which is said to rest on Mount Kailash and is surrounded by tens of thousands of people all practicing the Kalachakra teachings. It is not a typical pure land because the people in Shambhala are born of a real mother.

Shantideva (675-725). A great bodhisattva who lived in seventh and eighth century India known for his two great works on the conduct of a bodhisattva.

Shri Singha (seventh century CE). One of the early masters of Dzogchen who was a teacher of Padmasambhava.

Sixth consciousness. The mental consciousness which has the function of discursive thought. See page 28.

Six Dharmas of Naropa. Six special yogic practices that were transmitted from Naropa to Marpa and consist of the subtle heat practice, the illusory body practice, the dream yoga practice, the

luminosity practice, the ejection of consciousness practice, and the bardo practice.

six munis. Also called sages. The six nirmanakaya buddhas who oversee the six realms of samsara. They are part of the 42 peaceful deities. See Appendix I.

six paramitas or **six perfections**. The six stages a Mahayana bodhisattva must go through to reach enlightenment. They are (1) generosity, (2) morality, (3) patience, (4) courage or exertion, (5) meditation, and (6) intelligence(prajna). They are called "perfections" because they are not ordinary qualities but extremely vast or transcendental qualities to be mastered.

six realms of samsara. These are the possible types of rebirths for beings in samsara and are: the god realm in which gods have great pride, the asura realm in which the jealous gods try to maintain what they have, the human realm which is the best realm because one has the possibility of achieving enlightenment, the animal realm characterized by stupidity, the hungry ghost realm characterized by great craving, and the hell realm characterized by aggression. See Appendix C.

six recollections. These six items should be remembered when one is in the bardo. They are: (1) the Buddha, (2) the Dharma, (3) the Sangha, (4) samadhi, (5) one's yidam, and (6) generosity.

Sixteenth Karmapa (1924–1981). The previous head of the Karma Kagyu lineage who escaped Tibet during the Chinese takeover and set up the Kagyu lineage at Rumtek in Sikkim. He assembled young Kagyu and Nyingma lamas and had Thrangu Rinpoche, Khenpo Karthar, and Khenpo Tsultrim teach them so they could spread the Dharma.

spiritual friend. A virtuous friend who is usually a teacher of the Buddhist teachings to you.

stages of dissolution. The stages one goes through while dying. The first element of earth in your body dissolves into the water element of your body, then water dissolves into fire or metabolism, then fire into air, and finally air into consciousness or "space." At this point your mind leaves your body.

subtle body. This is a subtle type of body meaning it doesn't have any material substance. It is part of the regular body but as many different components and is connected by subtle channels with subtle drops moving around in it.

subtle channels (Skt. *nadi*, Tib. *tsa*). These refer to the subtle channels which are not anatomical but, rather, ones in which energies or "winds" (Sk. *prana*, Tib. *lung*) travel.

subtle drops (Skt. *bindu*, Tib. *tigle*). Small concentrations of energy that travel through the subtle channels. They are usually visualized as bright white spheres of light. At conception one

receives a white drop from the father and a red drop from the mother to begin life. These drops merge into each other at death.

Sukhavati (Tib. *dewachen*). The pure land of Amitabha.

ten assets. Positive conditions that are favorable to practice the Dharma. See Appendix B for a list of these.

ten virtuous actions. See the chart.

terma. Literally "treasure," these works were hidden by great bodhisattvas and later rediscovered. They might be actual physical texts, or they may come from "the sky" as transmissions to the terton's mind from the sambhogakaya.

terton. A great practitioner who discovers treasures (terma) which are teachings concealed by great masters of the past because practitioners at the time were not ready to understand the teaching.

three jewels. The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

three prajnas. Also called the three wisdoms. Three levels of practicing: first, hearing (or studying) the Dharma; second, contemplating its meaning; and third, meditating on the subject.

three roots. The lamas, the yidams, and the Dharma protectors.

Tilopa (928-1009). One of the eighty-four mahasiddhas, Tilopa was the founder of the Kagyu Lineage. He became the guru to Naropa and passed on many teachings, including the Six Dhar-

mas of Naropa and the teachings on Mahamudra. Naropa then transmitted these teachings to Marpa who translated and brought these teachings and practices to Tibet.

Tögyal. See **Leapover practice**.

Trekchö. See **Breakthrough practice**.

tummo. An advanced Vajrayana practice that combines bliss and emptiness. The byproduct of this practice is internal heat. It is one of the **Six Dharmas of Naropa**.

Tukdam. An extremely deep meditation practice in which upon death an advanced master remains upright in meditation for usually several days. Then afterwards the master may express his Tukdam by having his body shrink in perfect proportion or to completely vanish after about a week (called rainbow body).

vajra pride. Confidence that one can achieve realization because one possesses an enlightened essence. Normal pride is a disturbing emotion (Skt. *klesha*) because it builds up ego, whereas vajra pride is a positive trait that one cultivates in the creation stage. See creation stage.

Vajrapani. A major bodhisattva said to be lord of the mantra and a major protector of Tibetan Buddhism. One of the eight male bodhisattvas, he usually holds a vajra in his hand in the protecting mudra and is called “lord of the mantra.”

Vajrasattva (Tib. *Dorje Sempa*). The deity associated with purification and overcoming disturbing emotions. He is white; in his right hand he holds a vajra at his heart and in his left hand he holds an upside-down bell on his left thigh. The practice of Vajrasattva involves reciting his one-hundredsyllable mantra.

Vajrayana. There are three major traditions of Buddhism (Foundation, Mahayana, Vajrayana). The Vajrayana is based on the tantras and emphasizes the clarity aspect of phenomena. It is mainly practiced in Tibet.

Vajrayogini. A semi-wrathful meditational deity (Tib. *yidam*), also known as Vajravarahi, Vajrayogini is the consort of Chakrasamvara. She is the principal deity within the Karma Kagyu tradition.

Vairochana. One of the five wisdom buddhas who represents dharmadhatu wisdom. Vairochana means "illuminator" because he illuminates everything.

Vajradhara (Tib. *Dorje Chang*). The name of the dharmakaya Buddha. Many of the teachings of the Kagyu lineage came from Vajradhara.

Vidyadhara (Tib. *rigdzin*) "knowledge holder." A class of beings who are said to have magical powers such as to fly and to change shape.

Vipashyana or Insight meditation (Tib. *lhatong*). There are two different meditations common to all Buddhist traditions. The first is Shamatha or Tranquility meditation, which is observing the mind with mindfulness and awareness to make it become completely peaceful or tranquil. The second is Vipashyana which, in this context, is examining the mind's true nature and, from this, developing the wisdom of understanding the true nature of reality.

white constituent. In Tibetan medicine the white element or bindu from the father combines with the red element from the mother at conception. However, the red and white element are more than a sperm and egg because they continue in the vajra body of the individual.

wind of karma. The subtle wind that is based on our virtuous and unvirtuous actions. It is this subtle wind that propels us towards a particular rebirth. This wind begins with the right nostril and inhabits the right side of the body especially the red channel that goes down the right side of the central channel. See Appendix H.

wind of wisdom. A subtle wind with the characteristic of being stable and possessing the awareness of mind or clarity. This wind inhabits the left side of the body and begins with the left nostril. It is located more specifically in the white left subtle channel. See the chart.

yidam. A deity who embodies the qualities of buddhahood and is used as a meditational deity in Vajrayana practice. For example, Chenrezig is a yidam who represents compassion and is therefore visualized in the Chenrezig practice.

Zhitro. See **peaceful and wrathful ones**.

GLOSSARY OF TIBETAN TERMS

Pronounced	Transliteration	English
bakchag	bag chags	karmic latencies
bardo	bar do	bardo, interval
bardo thodol	bar do thos grol	liberation through hearing
Chemchok heruka	che mchog heruka	head of wrathful deities
chikhay bardo	chi kha gnad gcod kyi	bardo of dying
Chö	chod	severance practice
chönyi bardo	chos nyid bar do	bardo of dharmata
dayik	brda yig	dakini script
dag me	bdags med	emptiness of self

Pronounced	Transliteration	English
delog	‘das log	death returner
lha	lha	deities
Dewachen	bde ba can	land of bliss
dompa sum	sdom pa gsum	three vows
dondam	don dam	ultimate reality
dranpa	dran pa	mindfulness
gauri	ke’u ri	wrathful female deities
genyen vows	dge bsnyen	layperson’s vows
gongma	dgong ma	female gatekeepers
jalu	‘ja lus	rainbow body
khyapche lung	khyab byed rlung	all-pervading wind
kyene kyi bardo	rang bzhin skye ba’i	bardo of living
kundung	sku gdung	container holding a body

Pronounced	Transliteration	English
kunzop	kun rdzob	relative reality
lhenchik kyepe la	lhan cig skyes pa'i lha	personal guardian
lhen jin gyi lung	lhas byin gyi rlung	devadatta wind
Lojong	blo sbyong	Mind Training
lung	rlung	subtle wind
marigpa	ma rig pa	ignorance
mengak	man ngag	oral teachings
milam bardo	rmi lam bar do	bardo of dreaming
Namshyalma	gnam zhal ma	Chemchok's consort
nenyamne lung	me mnyam gnas rlung	fire-accompanying wind
Ngöndro	sngon 'gro	preliminary practice
norlha gyalgyu	nor lha rgyal gyu	king of wealth
ösel	od gsal	clear light

Pronounced	Transliteration	English
Phowa	‘pho ba	transference practice
rigpa	rig pa	awareness
rime	ris med	ecumenical
ringsel	ring bsrel	sacred relics
rigdzin	rig ‘dzin	knowledge holders
rolung	srog rlung	life supporting wind
rubal gyi lung	ru sbal gyi rlung	tortoise wind
salwa	gsal ba	luminous clarity
samten bardo	bsam gtan bar do	meditation bardo
sem	sems	mind
sem nyi	sems nyid	nature of mind
semjung	sems byung	mental factors
sheshin	she’s bzhin	alertness

Pronounced	Transliteration	English
shokser	shog ser	yellow scroll
shijey	zhi byed	Pacification practice
sidpa bardo	srid pa las kyi bar do	bardo of becoming
sokdzin lung	srog ʻdzin rlung	life-supporting wind
terton	gter ston	treasure finder
thursel lung	thur sel rlung	downward-clearing wind
thursel lung	thur sel rlung	downward-clearing wind
tigle	thig le	subtle drop
Tögal	thod rgal	Leapover practices
tong len	glong len	Sending and Receiving
tong pa nyi	strog pa nyid	emptiness
Tramen	phara men	hybrid (animal heads)
Trekchö	khregs chod	Breakthrough practices

Pronounced	Transliteration	English
tsa	rtsa	subtle channel
Tukdam	thugs dam	meditation after death
tulku	sprul sku	nirmanakaya
Tummo	gtum mo	Subtle Heat practice
uma	dbu ma	central channel
wangchukma	dbang phyug ma	deities with animal heads
yidam	yi dam	meditational deity
zhitro	zhi khro	peaceful and wrathful deities
zunjuk	zung 'jug	unity

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