



**Acharya Lama Kelzang Wangdi**

## **An Introduction to the Bardo Teachings**

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Before I speak about the bardo teachings, let us recite “*The Dorje Chang Lineage Prayer*” together so that you receive the blessings, have a feeling for what it means to lead a meaningful life, and experience peace at death.

“*The Dorje-‘Chang Thungma - The Short Prayer to the Mahasiddhas of the Kagyü Lineage,*” was composed by the great master Bengar Jampäl Zangpo, who meditated for 18 years on a little island in the middle of a big lake in Northeast Tibet. He wrote down his experiences from having meditated for 18 years in this prayer. When we recite it, we practice sound meditation – we just sing the prayer and relax. Afterwards, let us do a short meditation together by just sitting, not doing anything, not meditating.

### **Introduction**

Actually, we are scared of death because we have the very strong concept that a monster will come and eat us up. Therefore, we are even afraid of using the word “died” and instead say “passed away” when mentioning somebody’s death. If we think about it deeply, though, the process of dying goes on the moment we are born into this world as a baby from our mother’s womb. Suppose we want to live 100 years, we are less one day when a day has passed. Taking two days that have passed, we are less two days; and we are less a month after a month. Dying doesn’t come in a minute at the end, but it’s a very slow and long process that goes on for many years. So, usually we don’t fear death. Why, then, should we be afraid when we die? Of course, it’s normal to be afraid of death because we will lose our body that is with us all the time. We have to know how to overcome our fear and become fearless. We can work at it. We can use our fear of death, become fearless, and experience the moment we have fear as a moment of happiness. We can use

the moment that we never experienced in life and - instead of having concepts like, "Oh, death is very frightening. What will happen to me? I have no idea" - we can have a good experience, an experience of peace. If we work at it, we won't be dominated by similar concepts when we die, but can experience our death as a very precious moment.

Since everything is acceptable for them, it is said that death is a small enlightenment for great meditation masters. If we work on our fear of death, then we can also turn it into an experience of happiness, into a precious moment, into a very peaceful experience that we haven't experienced in our whole life.

Enlightenment is a state of freedom. What is freedom? It means having complete and limitless happiness. There are no limits when one experiences freedom, which is how to see enlightenment. Our happiness is limited; we were happy yesterday and are sad today. And so, we have to learn how to deal with our fear and how to transform it into fearlessness, which means experiencing freedom and happiness. Then, having worked at it and being able to transform the fear that we have into fearlessness, we can experience freedom and happiness and die relaxed - peacefully and smiling.

It's very important to work on our fear. We cannot wait until the last minute - it will be too late when we die. We have time and opportunities now to work on transforming our fear whenever we are afraid, since fear is more or less a same state of mind. In Buddhism, meditation is a way of transforming fear into fearlessness, into an experience of freedom, into an experience of happiness. It's not a theory or an idea, rather it's a matter of being present in freedom and happiness.

Buddhist teachings tell us that there is another state after death has occurred, which is called *bar-do* in Tibetan, "the intermediate state." Outer death is an intermediate state, but one goes through another bardo between one's death and next life. One is present while awake, but sleep, which is like dying, is also a bardo that one wakes up from to another life the next morning. Death is only a different way of sleeping and nobody ever ends. For example, when taking the train from Frankfurt to North Germany, one has to transfer in Koblenz, which can be compared to one lifespan. Then one has to transfer in Cologne, which can be compared to another lifespan, then Münster, then Hamburg, then Kiel - just changing trains, one after the other. Many people one didn't know came together when one boarded the train in Frankfurt. They parted and new people one didn't know came together when one boarded the train to Cologne, and so forth. Our life is also like that. We will look at this during this seminar.

This life is very important, because one can learn to die well if one lives well, and one will die peacefully if one lives one's life in happiness. Living a meaningful life and dying peacefully are like two sides of a coin, and one can decide for oneself if one wants to learn to live a worthy life so that one can die well. One needs to know how to live well if one wants to die well. So, one's present life is very important. How does one work best with one's present life? By working with meditation and thereby transforming one's fear into fearlessness and one's negative emotions into a state that is free of emotions. By working with meditation, one will have a mind that is calm and at ease and that is replete with happiness, loving kindness, and compassion.

When one is in fear or is angry, one becomes very emotional and has crazy monkey-thoughts. Therefore, one has to learn to transform one's fear and anger. It's not easy to transform one's anger or fear, but they can be transformed into good energy. For example, in order to have a good harvest, farmers use manure to fertilize the ground that they grow their crops on. In the same way, we can use our negative emotions and fear to produce good crops. We can make use of the same energy that we invest when we complain and turn it into a better moment, thus transforming negative energy into positive energy. We should live our lives like the farmer. We

can use our negative emotions and our fear, which we think is a problem, for a better purpose. People who know how to make use of factory ashes produce asphalt to build roads. Usually ashes are discarded, but somebody who knows how to make good use of it, by mixing it with a specific chemical, pays a high price to buy it. Our negative emotions are like ashes that become useful if a chemical called “meditation” is added and then they can be turned into liberation-moments. If we work with our negative emotions the moment they arise during life, then we will have practiced to become free of fear when we die and it isn’t much when it happens. Being free of fear, one is relaxed and peaceful in life and when one dies.

The important question is, how? How can we sell the ashes for a high price so that things that make us free and happy can be produced? How do we work with our negative emotions and the immense fear that we have? The problem is that we work too much trying to eliminate our fear, for example, and therefore it doesn’t work. When we have fear, we think and think and work a lot at trying to solve the problem, but it only gets worse. Some people try to get rid of their fear by drinking alcohol; some take drugs; others jump around; and some people commit suicide. It just doesn’t work that way - the situation only gets worse. For example, somebody who suffers might think that they will feel better by drinking alcohol; certainly, they might feel better for a very short while, but they become addicted and, instead of solving a problem, they create more problems. It is like that.

The best method one can resort to in order to use one’s emotions well is not to do anything. As said above: Meditation means not meditating. This means to say that one does nothing. For example, one doesn’t do anything when one is afraid and relaxes. This is a very important point, because there is a gap, i.e., space, in one’s mind if one doesn’t do anything when an emotion arises, and this gap denotes freedom.

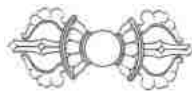
It’s easy to allow for more space, more freedom, in one’s mind by not thinking of one’s fear when it arises, but by remaining silent for one or two seconds. During this time, one’s fear will automatically subside and one will be calm and feel at ease. Of course, one’s fear will not have vanished completely, but one will experience a peaceful moment if one doesn’t do anything about one’s fear and relaxes in the gap. Therefore, meditation is the method that enables one to have the tendency to be silent by relaxing in the gap, instead of giving in to one’s disruptive emotions. One gets lost in one’s anger and fear if one perpetuates thoughts like, “Oh, my anger! This happened like this and that happened like that. Now I should do something like this or like that.” One creates more anger and fear in one’s mind as long as one doesn’t relax in the gap. One abides in the center when one allows oneself to experience and rest in the gap in one’s mind and then one knows where one wants to go. Letting one’s thoughts run wild and not knowing where to go can be compared to being lost in a thick jungle in the darkness of night, at 2 or 3 o’clock in the morning. One naturally finds one’s way out if one is relaxed by resting in one’s own center.

Meditation enables one to become like a mountain that isn’t moved by a storm, i.e., one isn’t moved by fear or one’s other disturbing emotions because one is the center – one is so solid, completely calm and serene, not lost in confusion. One’s isn’t oneself when one turns oneself into anger; one becomes fear when one allows fear to control one’s life. Meditation enables one to not feel shaken and not be shattered when one encounters situations that otherwise would cause one to tremble, because one is present. Through the practice of meditation, one isn’t shaken when one suffers, because one is like a stable mountain that isn’t rattled when a wind sweeps around its slopes. Through meditation, one practices to become as strong and steadfast as a mountain in that one learns to be steadfast and calm. Then fear and negative feelings do not overwhelm one, because one abides in the presence of one’s center. That is meditation.

It’s not easy to be calm and to feel at ease when a negative emotion arises and therefore one has lots of fear. I will explain this process and how one feels in such moments, especially while dying.

One has to know oneself in the moment and work with one's mind. One doesn't have to think of anything or anyone, not of one's family members or friends, rather one needs to concentrate on and spend time with oneself only in order to learn to be more calm and relaxed and to become like a steadfast mountain.

When one is really relaxed while experiencing the freedom that can be experienced while going through the process of dying and death, people around will think one is dying. It's very interesting. People around might cry, but if one is totally relaxed and doesn't have the feeling that one is traveling to a foreign country, then one feels that one is going home and is happy. But one has to practice so that one knows how to go home when one dies. If one has the feeling that one is going to a foreign country when one dies, then one is bewildered as to what to do and is fearful of dangers. Is it easy or difficult? If one practices during life, one feels at home wherever one is and goes. We think things will get worse when we die, but they might get better. We don't know, but things can really be more interesting than they are now after we have died.



### **The Natural Bardo of this Life**

In the Buddhist teachings, our life is called “the natural, intermediate period of this life.” If we work on the natural bardo of this life, then the bardo of death will not be difficult for us. The bardo of life offers the possibility to train ourselves so that we can use the bardo of death to train ourselves too. For example, currently I'm living in a 31-story high-riser in Cologne because I have to learn the German language at school. A fire alarm went off at about 4:30 one morning and a neighbor and I went to the reception that is open around the clock. We asked what was wrong and the receptionist told us that the fire alarm had gone off because somebody had been smoking and that there was no danger. Relieved, everyone who had gathered downstairs went back to their flats, and I went to sleep. I had a dream that I was dying and remember having told myself, “You should meditate now. Don't think of anything.” This is what I told myself while I was dreaming. I wanted to share this story with you to show that if we meditate diligently, it will come naturally and automatically, without thinking, when we are in need. For example, even when I used to take a nap during the day in the past, I sometimes had the feeling that somebody was pressing me down really hard. If one is accustomed to practicing, meditation and prayers come naturally when one has such frightful dreams, and then one's fear stops.

We are so accustomed to living up to and being controlled by our fear and anger that we can be filled with anger and can even become furious when we die, thinking, “Why me?” If we work now, we will be able to automatically work with our emotions when they arise. The more one makes the best of one's life and works at it, the more relaxed and calm one will be. One has to turn training one's mind into a habit by working as much as possible. Then one can apply the habit naturally in moments of anger or fear, without having to think about it.

In the Buddhist teachings, it is stated that one perceives fearful and peaceful different kinds of light when one dies and after death. I was very sick when I was 10 or 11 years old, and my parents thought that I was dying. In Buddhist countries, people have many butter-lamps lit for someone who is dying or has died. Later, my parents told me that I said that I was dying and requested that they have butter-lamps lit for me. I do not recall having asked them, but I remember having seen a very strong light and having felt frustrated about it – not anymore, but then. Even years later, I got really scared when this light appeared to me again because I didn't know anything about it. Sometimes I saw that the light was getting bigger and bigger, and then I got really scared. Now I don't have this problem.

Buddhist teachings tell us that light appears to our mind very strongly when we die. I think it's true because that's what we learn, but I did have a similar experience. At the time, though, I didn't know what to think because I went to a public school. Whenever I saw a Buddhist teacher, I felt happy and didn't even go to the hospital when I was sick. I went to a Lama. Once I was very sick, so my parents sent for our family Lama. I stayed with him for approximately 3 months, received a blessing every morning, and recovered completely.

I do think that something goes on when one dies. If one receives teachings on what happens, which I will explain step-by-step and slowly, then one knows what is happening when it does, one knows how to be more relaxed and calm, and one knows how to work in those moments. I had no idea when I almost died as a youngster. Now I do, so it makes a difference. I was so scared and frustrated when I almost died because the light was so disturbing. If one receives the teachings and trains everyday as much as possible, then nothing will be disturbing when one dies. One transforms whatever appears into peaceful light, like light therapy, and one isn't frustrated.

I went to a steam-bath and light in alternating colors were beamed. They had a notice informing visitors that the blue light helps relax the mind and the red light helps clear the mind. In Buddhism, we also work with the five lights, which correspond with the energies of the five Buddha families that appear to us when we die. It's similar to light-therapy and helps one feel more comfortable, more relaxed.

*Student:* "Maybe we go to a steam-bath tomorrow."

*Lama:* In light therapy, one feels more comfortable, more relaxed. Like that, if one knows that this kind of light will appear when one dies, what each light means, and which energy of a buddha is appearing, then one can experience the light that appears to one at death like light therapy and one won't be afraid and get lost. I was scared when I was a youngster, but now I have received light therapy and know. If one trains during life, then one can experience the lights that appear to one while one is dying as therapy and won't be afraid. Therapy means working on oneself so that one is more relaxed, calm, free, and happy in the present moment.

That kind of light will come when one dies. It accords with my experience and the teachings also tell us so. One can use it as a therapy instead of being scared. Before, I was really scared. Now, when I die one day, I won't be scared. I will somehow work with it as a therapy, but I'm not sure. We'll see. If you have any questions, please ask.

*Student:* "You talked about the gap that one relaxes into and in which one doesn't do anything when a negative emotion arises. What happens if we cannot find this gap?"

*Lama:* Suppose you are very angry, have much fear, and are very tense. Silencing one's mind means one just stops thinking that one is angry for a few seconds and tries not to think about one's anger or about the reason why one is angry, which is usually wrong. Usually one thinks, "It happened like that, so I should do something about it." Stopping to think is silencing one's mind and is the gap. Gap doesn't mean that one forces oneself to be silent. One stops thinking about the topic again and again and calms down.

*Same student:* "That's the point. It's rather difficult to stop it when I'm very, very angry."

*Lama:* Yes, it's very difficult. I think we have to try our best and train slowly, slowly when we are a little bit angry. It is difficult when one is very angry, so one has to train with one's small anger. Having trained with small anger, then automatically one can make space when one has bigger anger. We have to try all the time like that. It's the only solution.

*Student:* "Why do you think people who have near-death appearances of light have fear?"

*Lama:* One might experience a peaceful light, but after a few moments it might turn into a light that frightens one. That's the question. For example, one might feel good when one first eats chili. Later, one feels that one's mouth and stomach burn. One doesn't realize that it will burn

like that at first and slowly, slowly one feels pain. Likewise, one might feel peaceful and at ease when one first sees the light, but one becomes attached and clings to it. Slowly, slowly it might turn into great fear and become a painful experience because one doesn't know how to work with it.

One feels very relaxed and peaceful in the first moment after death when light appears. While relaxed and peaceful, one doesn't know that one has died. It takes time to realize that one has died, and one isn't scared as long as one doesn't know. The Buddhist teachings say that one will know slowly, slowly and that one gets scared when one realizes that one has died. Then the light that appeared will cause fear. One is relaxed as long as one doesn't know.

The Buddhist teachings also say that dying takes 3 ½ days. During that time, one has separated from one's body, sees the people one knows and usually ate with, asks them for food, but they don't respond. One talks to one's family members and friends, but they don't hear and therefore they ignore one. One sees them clearly, but they don't see one. One is bewildered and wonders, "What's happening? It's not normal." One calls to a friend, but he doesn't react, so one feels strange and notices that something is wrong. One wants to talk, drink coffee with them, but they don't react. Then one gets upset. The Buddhist teachings say that one might look into a mirror, but one doesn't see one's reflection, or that one might dangle one's feet in water, but the water doesn't splash. One comes to know that one is dead and automatically has fear. If one works now, one can transform one's fear into fearlessness or turn ashes into useful things at that time. Like that. One has to add a new chemical, and that's meditation. If one is trained, one turns the fearful experience of the moment of death into a wonderful experience. For example, there have to be waves if one wants to surf in the ocean. If one likes to surf, it's no fun if there are no waves. Meditation is the same: If one wants to train one's mind, it's fun working with all one's negative emotions, negative thoughts, anger, and fear. But, if one doesn't know how to surf and tries, one can get caught in the waves and sink. If one knows how to surf and likes it, the more waves there are, the more fun one will have. In the same way, the more fear one has, the more fun practicing.

*Student:* "When you talked about being scared when you saw the fearful light when you were young, I thought of a similar experience. When I was 5 years old, I fell down the stairs, hit my shoulder and head, and was unconscious for 2 days. I don't remember what happened during that time, but when I was sick a few weeks later, I got fever and saw myself falling and falling into a very dark room. It was a really fearful vision. I cried and ran to my mother. This vision appeared to me again 4 or 5 times. Do you think this was a kind of near-death experience, falling into nothing? How does one change this experience, like you change the light to light therapy? When I remember this, I feel the fear, although it happened many years ago."

*Lama:* I feel the light problem is similar to yours. Did you have the vision of falling after you regained consciousness again?

*Same student:* "Yes."

*Lama:* I think it's similar and it's really frustrating - for me too. After I had that experience, I felt like you do when the experience returned in my mind. If one hears and knows a method, which I will teach, then one has to train oneself. One uses the moment of frustration like surfing through waves in the ocean.

## Meditation Practices

### 1) Meditating with a support

- Using emotions, specifically anger or fear, as a support for meditation

In meditation, what is really needed is to directly cut through one's negative emotions and fear, which is the strongest emotion while dying. One needs to know how to cut off fear the moment it arises. Fear arises in an instant and, by resting in the gap, one can cut off one's fear so that it doesn't grow into further fear in a second instant. There is always a gap between a first and second instant, which one isn't aware of now. One can experience this gap if one meditates.

It's very important to really recognize and know that fear or anger have arisen in one's mind the very instant they do, otherwise it's impossible to cut them at the root. One looks at one's anger or fear directly; one doesn't think it, but one just looks at it. One's doesn't turn one's attention on something outside oneself, which is more an intellectual matter, rather one looks inwards and is aware of what arises in one's mind the very moment it does.

What should one do when one is aware that anger or fear have arisen in one's mind? One looks directly at one's anger, directly at one's fear. One doesn't even think that one is looking. One doesn't think that one needs to look for a long time – it can be a second or many seconds. If one can look for a second, it's better because then one doesn't have thoughts. A second is enough while training.

The first moment of one's practice is looking at one's emotion directly and the second moment is resting in just looking. How does one rest? Naturally, without thinking that one is resting. Resting is like coming home after a long day of construction work and just resting, without clinging to the thought that one is tired and wants to rest or is resting – one doesn't care and just rests. One isn't happy or excited that one is resting, but just rests.

So, aware that one has become afraid the very moment fear has arisen in one's mind, one looks at it directly. One doesn't think that one is afraid, rather one looks directly at it without being distracted by concepts, such as that one is looking or needs to look. There is no need to make preparations, in which case one would be involved with making preparations to look instead of actually looking. One only needs to look naturally. Do you want to try now?

Being aware that one is looking at what has taken place in the moment, without fabricating concepts, means that real meditation is coming. One has no thoughts, rather one is so present in the here and now. One doesn't think, "Oh, that's what it's like. I'm meditating," which is creating meditation and isn't natural. When fear arises in one's mind and one looks at it directly, then it disappears. When one's fear disappears, one is fearless. It's like that and one can see this for oneself. If one thinks about one's fear, it increases and becomes stronger.

In Buddhism, we refer to the state free of concepts as the experience of emptiness. In our example, it means that fear has disappeared. When fear has disappeared, fearlessness comes. The nature of fear is emptiness. If emptiness weren't the nature of fear, it couldn't disappear. The more fear disappears, the more the clear reality of one's mind shines forth. It's natural. When one's fear diminishes until it has disappeared, one becomes more calm and relaxed - the situation is clear and not foggy anymore. It's as though the sun were shining in one's mind. That's what it's like. Instead of being blocked, one feels free and at peace in the moment. One is usually so blocked, thus imprisoning oneself in fear. By looking at one's fear, it disappears, which is like walking through the gate of one's prison into the open space that is freedom from fear. That's what meditation means.

If one can rest in meditation like that, in the here and now, one can rest in meditation when one dies. It happens that people living in countries of the Himalaya Mountain Range meditate after they die. If one can maintain meditation now, like for 7 days, one can meditate for 7 days after one dies. It happens like that – no difference. Therefore, looking at one's anger or fear again and

again, as I explained above, is very important. Sometimes one makes too many preparations, though, thinking about how to sit and relax, but one doesn't get into it, and that's a problem.

Usually I explain this indirectly, but now I am explaining it directly because meditation means working directly. One doesn't have to think about it longer – longer is not important. To get into it is important and then to rest there. One can train 100 times a day, for example. It doesn't matter. One can engage in the practice whenever one wants and with whatever comes to one's mind. If one feels bored, one looks at one's boredom. If one feels very uncomfortable, one looks at one's discomfort. If one feels very nervous, one just looks at it. If one has fear, one just looks at it. Thinking that one has to look doesn't work.

When one is aware that an emotion has arisen in one's mind, one looks at it; and when one gets it, one just lets it be. And so, when one knows that the last moment of one's life has set in, one rests in that last moment and continues resting. It's the same as sleeping. If one is very relaxed the moment before one falls asleep, one sleeps until one wakes up the next morning. If one has problems falling asleep, one usually has problems all night – sometimes one has nightmares or wakes up very often.

This has been an explanation on how to meditate directly. There are many ways to meditate indirectly. I think they have to be balanced, i.e., practiced alternately.

When one wants to do form meditation, one rests one's mind on a stone, for example, that one has placed in front of oneself. One's eyes should gaze at the stone, one's mind should also be focused on the stone, and one has to know that one is looking at it. Remembering is very important, otherwise it doesn't work. One doesn't think that one is looking at the stone, but one has to remember and be aware that one is – one's mind is there. One can also practice by focusing one's attention on a statue or picture that one places in front of oneself. One looks at one spot of the statue or picture and not at the entire image. One focuses one's mind one-pointedly on the spot one is looking at.

Another method is to imagine a red sphere of light in one's heart center and to focus one's mind on it, or one can imagine a white sphere of light in one's forehead and rests one's mind on it. It's easy like that. One doesn't think and make a difference between one's mind and the white sphere of light if one decided to concentrate on it. By focusing one's mind on an object, one's mind and that object blend into one. Usually, one conceptualizes too much, and this practice is a method to overcome one's habit of fabricating thoughts and to attain non-conceptual realization, which is the purpose of meditation. So, without creating concepts, one looks, feels that one is looking, and remembers that one is looking.

*Student:* “So, maybe it would be better to always use the same object because one gets used to it.”

*Lama:* Careful there. One can use the same object, but sometimes one gets bored if one always uses the same object. So, it's better to change.

When training like that and one has a leg problem, like I have now, one can use one's pain as an object of meditation and rest and relax one's mind on it. One doesn't think that one is looking at one's pain, rather one just melts and is one with the meditation object. In the same way when dying, the experience of a peaceful moment doesn't matter, the experience of a fearful moment doesn't matter either, but one just uses one's feeling as a support for meditation. It's certainly easier and more satisfying using fear as a support for meditation and transforming it when one is afraid than to continue being afraid.

It's really hard to look at one's anger when one is angry, so it's good to make the commitment to bring one's meditation object to mind when one notices that one has become angry. Whenever one is angry, one just thinks, “I have a red light in my heart.” One can change the object of one's



meditation and think of the white sphere of light, and that's the way to work. When one is angry, it might be easier to focus one's attention on the white light. One has to see what is best for oneself. The same with fear: Instead of thinking about one's fear, one focuses one's attention on the red sphere of light in one's heart. One makes the commitment, "Whenever I experience fear, I will focus my attention on the red light." One has to turn this into a habit.

Meditation doesn't mean that one has to think in specific terms, rather it means working with the moment. The Tibetan term for meditation means "to habituate." Everyone has many habits, and we don't speak of good or bad habits in this context. The point is to make a habit of working with the moment. The definition of "bad" is whatever causes suffering. One changes those moments into non-suffering by training to look at the red light in one's heart instead of perpetuating more suffering. Meditation means relaxing, not doing anything, and not creating things one usually does. Meditation is like training to just sit and be.

Real life offers many opportunities to test whether one has trained efficiently, otherwise one won't be able to tell. Not testing would be like learning a lot and not passing the exams. One thinks one knows everything but fails in life, which means one didn't learn properly. The real tests occur in daily life. Everybody might think that one is working, but in reality one isn't. This happens. For example, some people meditate in a cave, far away from society, and things seem to be okay. But they get lost when they return to normal life and become very upset about little things. One needs to work on oneself, like surfing in the ocean every day to have fun. A surfer prefers to surf when there are lots of waves, and, similarly, a meditator likes to meditate when there are more emotions. Meditators even go out and create problems for others, because they want to test whether their practice has gone well or not. Some advanced practitioners even act crazy, because they want to see how they feel about other people's responses. Just thinking, "I'm cool" doesn't work. Great meditation masters test themselves when they bring people to throw stones at them – they really test themselves like that.

One may have meditated much, failed to integrate one's practice in one's life, and gets lost when fear arises while dying. Maybe one cannot practice when one needs to the most and, although one meditated one's entire life, one becomes upset. Therefore, meditation masters train to find out what they can do in daily life, how much they can relax, how much they can look. I think it's really important. Sometimes one only has concepts and thinks, "Meditation should be to relax and not to think. Everything should be blocked." Meditation isn't like that. One doesn't block things, rather one doesn't follow things – don't block and don't follow. I think this is very important, otherwise, when one dies, one thinks, "I wanted to die peacefully and why doesn't it work?" In that case, one only had an idea. If one opens one's heart, it works naturally. It's easy: The more one trains, the easier it will be. If one wants to become a professional boxer or football player, one has to train a lot so that one can play in the European Cup and in the World Cup and become famous like Oliver Kahn. He trained his entire life and didn't become a professional overnight. Meditation is like that too. One has to sit down on one's cushion and train.

If one is nervous while meditating, one looks at that moment and concentrates on it. Then one returns to one's daily life. One goes back and forth, from one's meditation cushion to daily obligations and back to one's cushion. It isn't easy, but one has to keep on trying. It might not seem to work right away because it takes time to become proficient. When one is so used to meditating, it's like being able to drive one's car while asleep.

*Participant:* "In India, there are signs that state, 'Sleeping while driving is strictly prohibited.'"

*Lama:* It's true. I mean driving naturally and being really skilled at it. Of course, it's better to drive while awake, otherwise it's dangerous. If one is used to it, then it's natural. In the same way, if one works with one's fear now, it works automatically and naturally when one is dying and then one doesn't have to think about it. One has to work at it now and as much as possible - again and again. That's the only way.

- Using sensory objects as a support for meditation

Let us sing the “*The Dorje Chang Lineage Prayer*” together and then sit in meditation for a short while. When we recite the prayer, we practice sound meditation – we just sing the prayer and relax.

Meditation is similar to resting during normal times. Some people feel better when they meditate – being like the easeful motion of the waves, calm and serene, not too many waves of thoughts jumping up. One can listen to music and rest one’s mind on it. Sounds are good supports for meditation. One listens and one meditates. One doesn’t need a special meditation and needn’t take time off for it. Neighbors might be really noisy, so one can apply sound meditation and then one isn’t annoyed. Instead of complaining, one takes it as an opportunity to meditate, is happy and not upset.

There’s also a meditation called “smell meditation.” One uses whatever one smells, like those that arise when one is cooking, and rests one’s mind on how one perceives the scent. One can go to a cosmetic shop or a public bathroom and practice there. There is also a meditation called “taste meditation.” One uses whatever one tastes while eating as a support for meditation. One is accustomed to eating chocolate or likes chewing gum and uses them for meditation.

*Student:* “Does one judge what one tastes?”

*Lama:* One doesn’t think that what one tastes is good or bad, but one just rests one’s mind on how one tastes the candy. In meditation, one shouldn’t judge. Sometimes one eats chocolate, candy, fruit, or cake and does meditation at the same time. That’s quite good, right? One doesn’t need anything special, but can apply them together.

*Same student:* “Good news.”

*Lama:* Yes, good news. If you really like to eat candy or cake, you put it in your mouth and meditate. Some people like to eat chocolate and it’s very good. Whatever the taste, it doesn’t matter, one uses it as a support for meditation and relaxes one’s mind. It’s more important to remember that one is eating, is hearing, is tasting, is touching, is smelling, and is resting, without thinking.

- Using pain & thoughts as a support for meditation

There is also a meditation called “pain-mediation.” It doesn’t matter what kind of pain one has. Whether one’s knees or legs hurt, one uses the pain as a support for meditation. One just feels the pain one has in one’s knees, for example, and rests one’s mind on the pain. It doesn’t work by thinking, “I have a pain.” One feels one’s pain and relaxes on it. Thinking that one has pain makes it worse. Let me tell a story: There was a man who had excruciating headaches and no doctor could help him. He traveled to Japan and looked up a Japanese meditation master, who taught him how to calm his mind when he was in pain. He continued meditating, and one day his headache disappeared completely.

The morning I was supposed to depart for Hamburg to give teachings, I had such a terrible headache and thought that I couldn’t teach that evening. The seminar was on mindfulness meditation, so I knew we would meditate a lot. I went, we meditated, and my headache vanished. It might be difficult to practice when one has big pain, so one should start practicing when one has a small pain. One can meditate on a bigger pain when one has become accustomed to practicing with a small pain. One feels the pain and rests one’s mind on it. So, one can use any kind of suffering and pain as an object of meditation.

Just like one can use one’s anger and fear, one can use any thought one has as a support for meditation. One notices a thought that has arisen in one’s mind and rests one’s mind on it.

## 2) Meditating without a support

Meditation isn't only a method by which one uses a support, but it's a practice aimed at going beyond objects that one's mind is so habituated to. One uses the gaps between two moments to calm one's mind. It doesn't matter if one doesn't focus one's mind on a specific object, one abides and rests in the here and now and meditates without a support. Abiding in the here and now is being home. It's not being neutral, rather it's the clarity of being present. Clarity is very important. While calm and at ease, one realizes and experiences that one is present. One isn't distracted by sights or sounds. Not blocking anything that arises or appears and not giving in to any distractions that would interrupt one's practice, one is open. That's important in meditation.

Sometimes Buddhists have the very bad habit of reciting quite long texts while their minds fly everywhere. It seems so funny - their body is present, but their mind isn't. That isn't real meditation; it seems to be, but it isn't. When one is reciting or when one is doing something, one should know, "I'm reciting. I'm here and am not flying around. My body is here and my mind should also be here." For example, one feels depressed and restless when one thinks about home while one's body is in a foreign country. The same thing happens while meditating: One's body is present on the meditation cushion, but one's mind is in a foreign country. That's really stressful. It makes no difference what one focuses one's attention on while meditating. The point is that one's mind should be present in the here and now. Then - being home - one's mind is relaxed and calm. Meditation is similar - it's like a holiday, in which case one is off-duty from being busy. Usually one is not on vacation, is on-duty, is worried, fearful, and makes many plans, which is very stressful. Meditation is having the feeling of taking a vacation: One is with oneself, takes a rest, relaxes, and is happy.

The bardo teachings about the natural bardo of this life offer many meditation instructions and teach that one is so very busy, is exposed to so much stress, is so tense and uneasy. Therefore, one engages in meditation practices to calm down, to relax, and to be home. If one isn't home, one will be restless, which I think is a boring life. One also needs time for oneself so that one can enjoy one's life. It's said that one will get sick if one eats the meat of animals that suffered stress. Human beings naturally become sick when stressed. So, it's very important to rest one's mind and to lead a meaningful life.

## 3) Meditating while asleep

Being stressed during the day is enough, and being stressed at night is too much. One can meditate while asleep and engage in dream-meditation practices during what is called "the intermediate state of dream," also referred to as "illusionary bardo."

Dream-meditation is practiced during the bardo of dream so that one recognizes that one is dreaming while one dreams. When one recognizes that one is dreaming while one is dreaming, then it isn't painful. If one doesn't recognize that one is dreaming while being chased by somebody, then one thinks that it is real and suffers. If one recognizes that one is dreaming while one dreams, one isn't shocked by what one would otherwise consider frightening and therefore one doesn't suffer. If one knows that one is dreaming during the 7 or 8 hours of sleep that one gets each night, then nightmares aren't shocking and frightening. One feels relieved when one knows that a nightmare is just a dream in the same way that one is relieved when one realizes that a dream was a dream when one wakes up the next morning.

Dream meditation is a deeper practice than looking at one's emotions and thoughts. Just as one becomes habituated to meditating during the day, one also needs to become accustomed to practicing dream meditation. Having realized through practice that anger, fear, and pain are a

dream, it's important to realize that dreams are illusory, too. One makes the strong wish before one falls asleep, "I will recognize my dreams as dreams." One needn't think all day that everything is a dream, but one needs to realize it perfectly so that it becomes a habit. There are many ways to meditate, but I will present an easy method.

The practice is imagining a white ball of light on a flat moon-disc in the center of one's throat, and one falls asleep like that. It might not be easy in the beginning, so one meditates a little bit like that for a few seconds or for a minute, otherwise one won't be able to fall asleep. Having become accustomed to practicing like this for a few months, one will be able to fall asleep while resting one's mind on the white ball of light on the flat moon-disc in the center of one's throat. If one manages to meditate like this in the last moment before one falls asleep, then one's entire sleep will become meditation. The last moment before falling asleep is important.

Normally, due to thinking, one's mind is more on the brain during the day. While asleep and when one doesn't dream, one's mind is in one's heart center. When one's mind rises upwards and is in the throat, then one dreams. When it rises higher, then one wakes up. Therefore, one stays focused on the ball of light in the throat while dreaming.

Also called "illusionary meditation," dream meditation is a very important practice. One can become calm if one thinks that the fear and suffering that one experiences in a dream are an illusion, which is possible by not solidifying and fixating on those experiences. One can become calm if one thinks that the anger one has while dreaming is illusory, which is possible by not taking it so seriously and not fixating on it. By not solidifying experiences that one has while dreaming, one becomes calm because one knows that they are dreams and aren't much.

#### 4) Transforming the world

If one becomes more and more used to taking pain or difficult situations as a support for meditation, then they don't bother one that much because one doesn't think that they are solid and real. Then it's easy to lose one's feeling of pain, to create free space in one's mind, and to relax naturally. If one fixates one's mind on continuously thinking that the person who caused problems is solid and real, one becomes so restless and can't experience the free space of one's mind. It's necessary to destroy one's fixations so that one can be open and free.

Buddhism speaks of an outer world and an inner world. If one works on one's inner world, one's outer world will become similar. For example, one thinks everybody is angry when one is angry and consequently one easily gets angry. That's how strong the inner world is. One sees everything as pleasant if one is delighted and feels at ease. That's how it is. Nothing really comes from the outside, but everything comes from one's inner world, which is one's mind. Sometimes we say "sacred outlook," which means that one sees the outer world the same way one sees the inner world. If one feels happy, one sees happiness in everyone and experiences everything as very pleasant. If one is tense and stressed, one sees everything as stressful. If one is angry, one sees everything in that light. Should somebody - it doesn't matter who that person is - say something, one becomes angry very fast if one is angry anyway.

If one can transform one's inner world, then the outer world one perceives will naturally be transformed - one doesn't have to think it. One has the habit of thinking, "How can I transform the outer world?" Nobody can do this. It's transformed naturally when one has transformed one's inner world. Like that, when one attains buddhahood, then, from one's own perspective, one sees everybody as a buddha; and when one suffers, one sees everybody suffering. That's how it is. For example, if one is in the middle of the ocean, one will only see ocean wherever one looks; and if one is in the mountains, for instance Mt. Kailash in Tibet, then one sees everything as mountainous - because that's where one is. Therefore, it's very important to transform one's

inner world, i.e., to transform oneself, because then one will have transformed one's outer world. If one is very happy and kind, then one feels happy about everything. It's like that. If you have any questions, please ask.

*Question:* "If one meditates what is good, is happy, and experiences that everyone is also happy, what is compassion like? How do I see my happiness when I see so much suffering on T.V.?"

*Lama:* Compassion has the aspect of seeing the suffering in the world and naturally feeling pain. It's more important to practice giving one's joy to others than to think one is taking on their pain. Even though it hurts to see them suffer, one really wishes that they are free of suffering.

*Next question:* "A few years ago I received introductory teachings on how to meditate, practiced, and noticed after a few months that I was in a strange state of mind while I meditated. I felt paralyzed, felt very heavy, and couldn't hold my mind. I was in a trance and felt like I was wandering through halls – half blind, half deaf, half paralyzed. This occurred for quite a while, so I stopped meditating. I started meditating again recently and had the same experience one time. What is this? How should I deal with this?"

*Lama:* Did it just happen once or did it happen again?

*Same student:* "It happened a few days ago, but it wasn't so fearful for me. I could let it be. I would like to know what this is."

*Lama:* Meditation can be misunderstood and sometimes it happens that it is practiced wrongly.

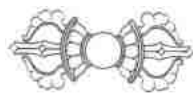
*Same student:* "But I wasn't alone and there were many people in the course. Therefore, I don't think that I received wrong instructions."

*Lama:* No, no. What I mean is that he might have given the right instructions, but different experiences arise when one practices. So, it's very important to know exactly the real meaning of meditation. One can experience that the theory doesn't coincide with one's meditation, but they should coincide. As you said, one loses a feeling for one's senses and experiences them as inactive. It's most important while meditating to be mindful and to be present. When you feel that you are becoming lame, you should pinch yourself in the arm and feel it. That's important. Feelings aren't wrong and it's important to know how they are without becoming distracted. Everything is normal, but right now it is disturbing. One is naturally hurt easily when someone says very bad things. One doesn't feel hurt if one is used to meditating. If you are hurt because someone threw a stone at you, you have the feeling that someone threw a flower at you and it doesn't hurt; you don't feel emotionally hurt. Inner transformation is needed. One doesn't take bad words as solid, understands the situation, and feels compassion. The person who is shouting and saying bad words might be having problems at home and you understand the situation. You calm down and then inner transformation is working. We also have formless meditation, which is a similar experience. When one feels that one is becoming lame, one is too active and has to think of pain.

*Next question:* "You gave good instructions on how to control and get rid of one's own anger, but what if there are people in one's nearest environment who are not content, are unhappy, and who get upset easily, scream and shout, injuring other people? Is it up to me to let them be, not to tell them to calm down or to meditate a red light in their hearts, because they would think that I'm crazy? Do I give simple advice or is it up to me to let them be and ignore the situation? It's the same with children, who have a lot of anger in their behavior. Is there anything I can do?"

*Lama:* Transformation has to do with oneself. One needs to be a little bit skillful when one wants to help others. Skillful means one knows the situation and the right method when one helps. One first needs the heart-felt feeling that one wants to help. One's motivation is very important because it's the ground for the process of helping. One needs a good heart when one wants to solve a problem. One expresses the good heart with loving kindness and compassion. This means that one needs a really open heart. Everyone has compassion a lot and it should be something like that. Yet, having a good heart isn't enough. One also has to find a skillful way. The method can be rough - it doesn't matter. Having a pure heart is the main factor, and the

method should accord with the situation. If being soft doesn't help, then one has to shout back. People have to understand and shouting with a good heart might be the way to bring about a change. Sometimes one has to be soft, depending on the situation. Some people take advantage of people who are soft and then one gets lots of problems. In that case, it's better to be direct and to shout. But one has to know. Sometimes one has to really shout in order to change the situation. One has to decide what is helpful. If one knows the situation and the person involved, one knows if one has to clarify the problem by explaining things, or if one has to say it directly, or if one has to be indirect. One has to look at the person and deal with the situation accordingly. One often has to be angry with children in order to discipline them. If one doesn't discipline them when they aren't behaving, then it doesn't work. If one is strict, then one is a good reminder for people not to do things they shouldn't. The point is using skillful methods when one wants to help others. And one never gives up. It doesn't matter if it works or not. Sometimes it works. Sometimes people find it quite good, but they don't want to accept. It's like that. It's very difficult working with others.



## The Bardo of Dying & Death

The bardo of dying and death is very painful and therefore it is called “the painful bardo of dying and death.”

In Buddhism, it is taught that one is conceived by merging with the two elements when they unite. The two elements are normally called “seeds,” one from one's father and one from one's mother. The father's seed is white and the mother's seed is red. When one's consciousness unites with the seeds of one's parents, then one has been conceived in the womb of one's mother and one's channels slowly begin to evolve in dependence upon one's karmic wind. While an embryo, one's channels develop the first week, the second week, the third week, and so on, and – nine months later - one is born as a baby.

A baby's eyes, ears, etc. are formed according to an individual's karmic energy, called “karmic wind” in Buddhism. Some people are short, some are tall, some are black, others are white, characteristics that are formed due to someone's karmic wind. In other teachings, we speak of karma and not of karmic wind. In the bardo and deeper vajrayana teachings, we speak of karmic wind, so it's a little different.

An individual's karmic wind and the water element, the fire element, and the other elements come together and develop into the channels, blood, organs, etc. of an embryo. Babies and little children predominately consist of the water element and therefore have lots of mucus and saliva, which the elderly no longer have to the same extent. One can see that much saliva drips from the little ones' mouths and not from that of older people. When they jump, children don't get hurt because their bodies are so light and they don't run out of breath when they run and play a lot. They don't get cold so easily when they play in cold weather. The forming of the channels and body takes place while developing. The process reverses when one gets old, in which case one gets heart pains, back pains, knee pains, etc. Slowly it becomes harder to drink. From day to day the thousand kinds of channels in one's body are less and less active and eventually don't function. The karmic wind that manifests in various ways slowly functions less and less when one gets old and life becomes very difficult. The elements dissolve, one into the other, when one dies.

The process of dying goes on continuously. There's the outer process, the inner process, and the secret process. Presently, dying is slowly taking place. Death denotes the end of the dissolution

process and occurs when all elements have totally dissolved. Sometimes one's mind is clear, sometimes it isn't; sometimes one remembers things, at other times one doesn't. Since one's wind-energy functions less and less the older one gets, one's memory diminishes.

As to the outer process of dying: The first channel evolved from the navel center, so one's body as an embryo developed from that point. Dissolution of one's body begins at one's navel center, too, until it has totally disintegrated at death. When one's supporting wind doesn't function anymore, the earth element has dissolved into the water element and one has lost the support of the earth element. What are the signs? There are outer, inner, and secret signs that one is dying. The outer signs that one is dying and is losing the support of the earth element are that it's very difficult for one's neck to hold one's head, it's extremely hard to stand up, one's legs cannot hold one's body, one's teeth become coated with what resembles thick rust, and it's extremely hard to lift the cup to drink tea. The inner signs that one is dying are that one is very sleepy and always feels drowsy. Furthermore, one feels so pressed down and has the feeling of falling; one tries to raise one's hands and lift one's body, but can't. One screams at people, "Help me up." These signs occur when the earth element is dissolving into the water element. If one is used to meditating, one is very present during the entire process of dying. It's very important to remain calm and relaxed, instead of being nervous and hectic, which is a big problem.

The secret signs are meditation experiences that manifest when one dies. They appear in different forms. If one has no meditation experiences, one won't recognize them. Normally we say that the light we talked about above appears as a mirage when one dies. The teachings speak about the mother clear light and the son clear light. The mind's true nature is luminous clarity, like clear glass, which is referred to as "mother clear light." When one is distracted, i.e., when the glass is dirty, then one cannot see clearly, rather one sees everything through a veil of fog and haze. The true nature of everyone's mind is luminous clarity, but one doesn't recognize it. One meditates so that one can. When one is calm and serene due to having meditated, then one's mind is very clear, which is referred to as "child luminosity."

It's possible to experience the mother clear light when one's mind is perfectly free of confusion, for example, when one sneezes. If one is fully aware and is present in the moment without conceptualizing, one can experience the mother clear light the moment one sneezes or yawns. It's possible if one really looks at the here and now, i.e., the very moment one sneezes or yawns. When one sneezes, one's mind is free of concepts because there's no time to think. So, it's easy to look at that moment and to know the real meaning of the mother clear light.

What I mean to say is that the child clear light and one's real mind meet when one dies. It's easy to recognize the mother clear light when one dies because one has separated from one's body, but one has to be strong with meditation. Since they have been longing to meet for quite a long time, when the mother and child meet, then they are said to be very joyful. Of course, when a mother and child meet they are so happy and are filled with joy. That's what happens when one dies.

One really doesn't recognize the clear light when one meditates now, though. It's easy to recognize it if one dies meditating. Since dying happens so slowly, one first perceives the mother clear light like a mirage, so it's not clear, but it gradually becomes clearer and clearer. One is joyous when one really gets the meaning, since words are not sufficient to fully understand the meaning. Now it becomes clearer, step-by-step, but it isn't fully clear – it's just a mirage. One's mind is limited as long as one is connected to one's body and becomes limitless when it separates at death. Then one experiences freedom and happiness, but only if one is used to meditating and dies meditating. Otherwise one will experience the loss of one's physical capacities as strange and, since one cannot use the signs that one is dying as supports for meditation, one becomes frustrated and depressed. Returning to the example of surfing: One is really scared of the waves if one tries to surf, but doesn't know how, and then one feels frustrated. If one knows how to surf,

one gets on one's board, surfs the waves, and has fun. Like that. Telling oneself that one is meditating doesn't work, rather one should tell oneself that one wants to use the time that one has for oneself and really concentrate and relax.

Wondering why one is dying while nobody else is and worrying whether one's family is doing well and is cared for properly make one very frustrated. It's important to not only be able to deal with the moment of one's death, but also to know, in advance, what will cause a problem and make one fearful when one dies. It's not as easy as one thinks now. One has to see and work on it, step-by-step, and that is easy. If one realizes that it will be very hard to part from one's family when one dies, then one has to work on it during life. One has to really feel in oneself whether one will be fearful, nervous, or worried about what will happen to one's family and friends and know how they will feel when one leaves them behind, and that's not a problem.

If one has no problems when other people die, then it's no problem for oneself and one doesn't worry. But if one knows that it will be a big problem to part from close friends and family members when one dies, it will be a bad problem for oneself and for them, so one should work on it now. It's impossible to work on it while one is dying – that's too late and it won't work. One has to see early enough and make preparations in advance so that one won't be frustrated when one dies. How does one do this?

One has to be aware of one's present concerns, like the thought, "I have so much money and lots of possessions," and know that - being overly concerned about them now - one will be really frustrated when one has to part from them when one dies. Therefore, one should distribute one's things before one dies and it's easy if one realizes that nothing will belong to one anyway after one has died. One won't need to think of these things if one has given them away in advance and then one's children and heirs won't argue and fight over one's possessions after one has died. One won't have the strength to distribute one's things while one is dying. It's a big problem if one clings to one's possessions and doesn't dare to give anything away while one can. One has to do it.

If one is really attached to one's body and thinks, "I really like my body," one has to learn to deal with the fear of losing it before one dies. One won't have problems if one has worked at it before it happens. That's normal. It won't be so easy to work at it if one hasn't while one could and wants to while one is dying – it will be too late and one won't be able to do much. People of the Himalaya Mountain Range who know that they will not live long are content. If they own houses and have many possessions, they give everything away on time, only keep what they need for their daily life, and are content. Then it's easy.

I think it's a big problem being concerned about one's possessions when one dies. It's a very fearful situation because one doesn't want to lose anything. But there's no way around it. One will only be in trouble if one waits too long to distribute one's things. If one could take them along after death, then there would be no problem. But one can't – one can only take one's frustration along.

One will also have to let go of the body that one used for approximately 80 or 90 years. We have meditation instructions to work on this. I see it as my biggest problem, but everybody knows what would be most difficult to lose and therefore should work on it. One might think that it's easy to let go of one's body, but hard to part from one's family, in which case one would need to slowly work on giving up one's attachment to them. If one knows that it will be very difficult to lose one's property and possessions, then one should work on that. Let me tell about one of my experiences.



I met a very rich and old man in Dortmund. He was a doctor and owned many valuable antiquities. He was on his deathbed and asked us to take some of his valuable possessions for the Kamalashila Institute in Langenfeld. I visited him again, saw that he had great difficulties dying and was really afraid of letting go. In order to have the feeling that he would help his helpers by contributing to a worthy cause, I thought it would do him good by assuring him that we would accept his generous offer and take a few things later, after his death. He felt relieved to hear this. One has to know what is most difficult to leave behind and work on it, otherwise it will be very hard. One is content if one made preparations and will not be worried and afraid when one is dying. It's normal to be happier the more one has, though.

*Student:* "The problem is that the family suffers when one dies. One isn't afraid for oneself, but feels compassion for those one leaves. What kind of advice would you have?"

*Lama:* For your family?

*Same student:* "Yes."

*Lama:* The family must know that you will die, too, because it is natural. If you find out why they would suffer and what they expect from you before you die, then it will be easy. If you don't know, you can clarify the matter and let them know that this will also happen to you.

One needn't fear death, rather one has to make preparations to be relaxed and calm so that one can die peacefully. Being prepared is important. Just thinking, "I will die. I will die" is only depressing - reality is different. For example, being prepared for one's death is like having an insurance policy for one's car. When one's car is insured, one doesn't always think, "I will get an accident. I pay insurance." That would be crazy. One feels relieved that the insurance company will pay if one has an accident and lets it be. In the same way, one is ready if one makes preparations for one's death and meditates now. It's necessary.

I spoke about the inner, outer, and secret signs that arise when the earth element dissolves into the water element in the process of dying. If one has a strange experience and is nervous, it's very important to know how to calm down and relax in that moment as much as possible. I also explained how to look directly at fear that one experiences in daily life. We saw that fear doesn't increase, but disappears if one works on it. One practices in the same way when one has strange feelings or is nervous while dying.

When one is angry or has other disturbing emotions, one has to try to practice and see how one feels when one has overcome them. It will be better to be more centered and not to be overwhelmed by fear. For example, some people have the feeling that they are being pressed or pushed down when they try to fall asleep and can't sleep as a result. I met a young woman recently who told me that she can only sleep 3 or 4 hours every night and that she is afraid of not being able to sleep every night. Sometimes it happens like that. It will be terrible if one dies in fear. Therefore, one has to try one's best to calm down and relax one's mind. I asked the young woman to visit me in Cologne so that I could suggest a specific meditation practice or recommend recitation practices that could help her. Maybe she is worried about something and is therefore afraid, so I have to speak with her. Sometimes one creates fear due to problems that one has. Fear is not the problem, but fear of fear is the problem.

One has to find out what makes one feel more secure. If one feels safe and relieved by imagining a buddha when one is afraid, one can think of a buddha. It's important not to continuously feel disturbed, rather to think of an image one trusts and that one feels one can rely on when one is troubled. If one thinks that a god offers protection from fear, then one imagines him. One feels more secure if one has the feeling of being protected, otherwise one feels lonely and lost in moments like that and then one's fear increases. It's irrelevant for the object one considers a refuge, rather feeling safe and secure depend upon one's trust and thus feeling more at home. If one trusts that one can solve a problem oneself, then one doesn't need help. Everybody is different and not all people have the same character and view, which isn't the point here.

One feels that one has no ground and is like a kite blown by the wind when one feels lost and forlorn, so it's necessary to become ground unto oneself. An intellectual knowledge of Dharma or other philosophies does not suffice, rather one needs practical, inner confidence that what one believes in offers protection. One makes things hard for oneself as long as one is insecure and thinks, "Oh, I'm not sure." When one has gained confidence in the object one believes in and is certain that it will protect one, then one is relaxed.

If one is a good meditator, then one doesn't fear anything. As mentioned, one uses one's fear in meditation practice in order to have good experiences and to attain fearlessness - just like one uses the waves to surf. I'm sure that then one has no certainty or uncertainty of being certain or uncertain. One doesn't think much because there's no time to think. One relies on one thing to make oneself more secure and to feel more protected when one dies.

### The Meditation Practice of Giving & Taking

In Buddhism, we have the meditation practice called "giving and taking." We apply it when we go through the process of dying and think, "At this time I'm going to take on the suffering that all sentient beings that are dying experience so that they don't suffer. That's my responsibility. I don't want others to suffer and want to help them." If one has such a sincere intention, then one doesn't think of one's own suffering as strongly. It's not so difficult and one suffers less if one changes one's motivation and thinks that others are more important. For example, one will have a stronger motivation, feel inspired, and it will be easier to apply for a job if one thinks of one's family. Otherwise simple things become complicating, so one's motivation is very helpful.

It's necessary to find and use a method to transform one's situation. I introduced the direct method earlier. The second method is "giving and taking," called *gtong-len* in Tibetan. It's the practice of only working for others - not for oneself. It's an easy way to surmount one's own suffering and pain.

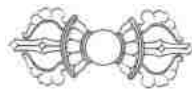
One imagines oneself and others before one. One begins the practice by first working to help oneself. One thinks that any problems or suffering that one has are a small black drop that one inhales. The black drop sinks into one's heart and is transformed by the white light that one imagines in one's heart. Feeling relaxed and at ease, one sends all the good and soothing feelings one has to the image of oneself before one when one exhales. One opens up to oneself through this practice. There are people who hate themselves and they should exercise in this way. Instead of the light in one's heart, one can imagine Noble Chenrezig and think that he is taking on all one's suffering in the form of the black drop and, due to his great compassion, transforms all one's suffering into loving kindness, compassion, and positive feelings that one gives to oneself when one exhales. Or one can imagine the syllable A, which represents transcending wisdom, in the center of one's heart. One feels that all one's suffering, that is symbolically contained in the black drop, is burned by the power of transcending wisdom. One does this for oneself.

When one is used to this practice and has helped oneself, one chooses a person one likes the most and imagines that one takes on that person's suffering when one breathes in. Their suffering sinks into one's heart, is transformed into joy and happiness, and one gives all one's loving kindness and compassion to them when one breathes out. It might be easier to give one's love, compassion, and wellbeing to others than to take on their suffering. If one has difficulties, one first engages in the aspect of practice that is easier for oneself. When one becomes used to the practice, one can engage in both aspects when one breathes in and out.

Having become accustomed to practicing in this way, one imagines two persons one likes and eventually more and more people and practices in the same way for them. When one has become proficient, one imagines one person one doesn't get along with and practices for him or her. Gradually, one imagines exchanging self for others for more and more people one doesn't get along with. Through this practice, one's mind becomes open for one's own problems as well as for those of others. One overcomes being fixated on wishful thinking and, instead, transforms problems and difficulties into beneficial energy and goodliness.

*gTong-len* is also a method of transforming one's hate and aggression, which one knows are horrible feelings. One exercises by taking on the hate and aggression that others have, mixes it with one's own hate and aggression, and transforms one's negative traits together with those of others into loving kindness and compassion. One feels very good and relaxed by having practiced like this and makes strong wishes. One doesn't keep any positive feeling one has for oneself, but shares it with others, letting them feel happy, too.

One needn't worry that one will be left standing empty-handed if one thinks one gives all one's happiness to others. One thinks that one is giving them copies that one pastes and knows that one didn't cut anything off from oneself, so there's no need to worry. For example, giving one's happiness to others is like being in charge of a main computer by which one sends out many reports and links to other users, without deleting anything in one's folders. That's what the practice of *gtong-len* is like.



## The Bardo of Dying & Death (cont.)

We discussed the process of the earth element dissolving into the element of water, of having the feeling of being pushed down, of struggling to get up, in vain, and of perceiving a mirage. We also discussed the meditation practices one can engage in during this time and, aware that fear doesn't help, one knows that one needs to be very concentrated on the practice, relaxed and calm. We will remember that, in dependence upon one's karmic wind-energy, while an embryo, one's channels evolved from the center at one's navel and developed into a fetus and then into a body. At the end of the first dissolution phase of dying, the navel center disintegrated and stopped functioning.

Individuals who have a heart attack or who experience a serious accident can still be resuscitated because they haven't gone through the entire process of dying. It's possible to be resuscitated when going through the first process, seeing the experience of being pressed down is the same feeling one has when one has trouble falling asleep. So, I think that an individual might still be alive and can wake up. We have the practice of doing *phowa* for the deceased. It would scare them terribly and would not be the right time to practice it for someone going through this stage – it would be like killing him or her, because they aren't dead yet and can still return to life.

The second phase of dying involves the disintegration of the channel in one's heart center, in which case the water element dissolves into the fire element and one's radiance-producing wind stops functioning. The outer sign that one experiences at this time is that one's mouth and tongue become very dry. While alive, one can see the tip of one's nose when one looks downwards, but can't at this time. The inner signs that one is dying are nervousness and a hazed mind. The secret sign one has while experiencing the dissolution of the water element into the fire element is seeing the luminous light in the form of misty smoke. This vision is experienced

during one's meditation, too. If one hasn't practiced, one won't recognize it during this phase of dying. I will speak about this in more detail later.

The third phase of dying involves the disintegration of the chakra in one's throat center, in which case the fire element dissolves into the wind element and one's refining wind stops functioning. The outer signs that one experiences at this time are that a cool wind leaves one's mouth and nose and one has the feeling that one's physical warmth is like a stream that flows out of one's body. Slowly one's feet and legs become cold and one loses one's feelings in them; one doesn't even feel that a needle is being stuck in one's feet or legs. One cannot see, hear, taste, smell, or have a feeling of touch anymore because one's organs have stopped functioning. The inner sign that one is dying is that one's mind rapidly jumps from being clear to being confused. Sometimes one recognizes people one knows and sometimes one doesn't and this happens extremely fast. The secret sign that the fire element is dissolving into the wind element is seeing the luminous light in the form of fireflies.

*Translator:* "Glühwürmchen in German?"

*Lama:* *Keine Ahnung.* This vision is experienced during one's meditation, too. If one hasn't practiced, one won't recognize it during this phase of dying.

The fourth phase of dying involves the secret chakra in the upper part of one's skull. This chakra doesn't disintegrate, nevertheless one's karmic wind of kalpa stops functioning. It's the phase in which the wind element dissolves into one's consciousness. One loses the last trace of a physical element and only has consciousness, which some people call "soul." But one still has the energy of one's parent's seeds that one united with when one was conceived. The outer signs that one has entered this phase of dying are that one breathes out for quite a long time, has great difficulties breathing in, and one's exhalation rattles loudly. At this point, someone who killed many animals in life will experience that these animals come dashing and seem to be attacking one. If one killed many chickens during life, for example, one now sees them rushing to peck at one – it's a very fearful experience. I saw this happen when I witnessed the death of my grandfather when I was a child and later learned about the meaning in the teachings. My grandfather seemed to have killed many ox during his life, because on his deathbed he was really yelling, "The ox are coming to eat me. Help me! Help me!" The teachings also say that somebody who did many good things in life will hear pleasant music and see someone coming to welcome them. That is a literal translation, while the real meaning is that one's habits become very vivid, i.e., one's negative and positive karma manifest clearly. For example, people who fall into a coma or who have a brain tumor only see their past and don't remember what they experienced recently. Their habits appear to them quite strongly, just like a reflection in a mirror. One's positive and negative habits become such solid images. If one was positive, had a good heart, and was calm and serene during life, then one intensively feels the same at this time. The pictures of one's character become so strong.

The secret sign that one perceives when the wind element dissolves into one's consciousness is seeing the luminous light in the form of a powerful light of a torch. If one is accustomed to this perception during one's meditation practice, then it's easy to recognize during this phase of dying.

Following, one stops breathing and one's entire body, except for one's heart center, is cold. Due to basing their conclusions on the outer process, Western medicals declare that one is dead at this point, but Buddhists base their knowledge on the inner process of dying and state that one hasn't died yet.

We described the outer dissolution of the elements. When one stops breathing and one's wind-energy has stopped functioning, then one goes through the inner process of dying. Some teachings say that, since the wind-energy has stopped functioning and therefore doesn't keep the father-seed in its position in the upper section of one's skull, it descends. When the father-seed

has reached the center of one's heart, one sees white light. At this stage, the 33 aggressive states of mind, which everyone has, end. One has no anger and therefore experiences freedom from anger and fear. Then the mother-seed, which is seated slightly below the navel, rises to the center of one's heart and one sees red light. At this stage, the 40 different kinds of desire, which everyone is said to have, end. One feels no desire and attachment and thus experiences freedom from desire. When the red and white substances from one's parents merge in one's heart, one blacks out and is dead. In that moment, the seven types of mental dullness end. One feels that one is fainting and is becoming unconscious in this moment, but one still doesn't know that one is dead. So, that's the normal way of dying.

If one is a good meditator and can keep one's mind relaxed and concentrated throughout the entire process of dying, one can directly look at what is going on. If one can really meditate in the very last moment of dying, when the white and red substances meet, then one can meditate after one has died. Some practitioners meditate for 3, 4, or 5 days after they have died. The body posture is very important. That is why some practitioners sit in the meditation posture when they die. Others prefer lying down, which makes meditating difficult. From the meditative point of view, the very last moment of dying is most important – being calm and relaxed.

The secret sign that an experienced meditator perceives and thus knows that death has taken place is that he sees the vast expanse of space, which is total freedom from confusion. The very moment of death, when one blacks out, is called "the luminous bardo of dharmata." One's vision is totally fresh and clear because one is free. A practitioner experiences the bardo of luminosity differently than somebody who isn't prepared. If you have any questions, please ask.

*Student:* "How can I assist somebody who is dying in the best way?"

*Lama:* If the person has the same or similar ideas, then one reminds him or her how to see what is happening. If they don't have similar views, one prays for them. In any case, one reminds this person to be calm and not to worry. If the situation is critical, one does *gtong-len* meditation. It's very important to make prayers. It might disturb a non-Buddhist if one says something, so one meditates and prays for them silently. It helps because they feel the energy.

## Meditation & Devotional Practices

Let me explain *phowa* briefly. *Phowa* is a Tibetan term and means "transference of consciousness." If one can be calm and present during the four stages of dying, then one lets go and has no fear. If one can meditate when one directly looks at fear the moment it arises, then one has transformed one's mind and is at peace. We call this "the ultimate way of transference." Just resting in meditation is very simple and - not needing to do anything except just to maintain the state of peace - is natural, ultimate *phowa*. It's very important and is essential *phowa*, which is just letting one's mind rest in calm and ease.

There's also the practice called "sambhogakya *phowa*." One imagines that one is a pure being, just as it is practiced in vajrayana. It has no meaning if one isn't used to it. Somebody who is used to this practice thinks that he or she is Noble Tara or Bodhisattva Chenrezig. How can this be? Because the nature of Tara and Chenrezig and one's own nature are the same. Aware of this, one doesn't doubt, is certain that one is Tara or Chenrezig, and rests in one's confidence. If one has doubts and thinks, "No, I'm not Tara. She is a pure being, and I'm very confused," then it doesn't work. Vajrayana is a deeper, more subtle and direct method of practice, but one can make many mistakes if one doesn't understand it correctly. Just imagining the deity and thinking, "Oh,

I'm really Tara" or "Oh, I'm really Chenrezig" doesn't help as long as one doesn't know the meaning.

There's also the practice called "nirmanakaya phowa," which is the general phowa that is usually taught. There are two aspects, practicing for oneself when one is dying and practicing for others when they are dying. One has to exercise for oneself during life so that one is able to practice phowa when one is dying. People are fascinated about this practice, but it's only a method that helps one feel relaxed and at peace. One needs to have received proper instructions in order to be able to practice correctly, though. More so than the method, the key point while practicing phowa is trusting and being confident that Amitabha Buddha will protect and help one while one is dying. As to the second aspect, one needs to have compassion and the strong wish to really help others when one practices phowa for them, otherwise it's just mechanical and doesn't work. One needs practical training in order to have a good heart and one has to know the meaning, which is to trust. One will never get it by knowing the method without engaging one's heart. Sometimes practitioners say, "Oh, I'm so relaxed. I've been a Buddhist all my life." That's good, but it's not enough. Training one's mind and having a pure heart are most important in all situations in life.

A Buddhist is called *nang-pa* in Tibet, which means "inwards," i.e., a Buddhist is someone who looks inwards and not outside himself or herself. One looks inwards when one is angry, works at not projecting it outwards, and tries to transform it. By practicing in this way, one doesn't hurt oneself and others. That is the Buddhist way. The Buddhist way isn't going around thinking that everything is so great. The Buddha gave very simple teachings, which everyone can apply. He taught that one shouldn't hurt oneself and others - that's the key point. There are many, many methods, and sometimes people are lost in methods. I feel that I am too. It's really funny.

Lord Buddha's teachings on how to work on oneself are very simple. There is no outer protector - everyone is their own protector. One can call the energy one works with "god energy" or "Buddha energy." It doesn't matter because that's only a way of thinking. It doesn't matter what one thinks. In reality, one has to know oneself. One can think that a god or a buddha are somewhere else, but it's easy thinking that a god or a buddha are within oneself. It means that one can work on it, instead of thinking somebody else is doing the work for one. It's the same in life. It's normal that nobody will give one anything if one doesn't work. In the same way as one has to take medicine when one is sick, one knows that nobody will put it in one's mouth. And yet, one thinks that somebody will. It's difficult. Actually it's even logical. Whether one thinks, "buddha" or "god," the kingdom is inside oneself, not outside, and that makes it easy to work with. Adherents of different religions teach that they are different as long as they turn their attention outwards, and they are different because theories and experiences are different. When disciples turn their attention inwards - no words. Religious proponents have different theories and even fight, which isn't necessary.

It's not enough to just rest one's mind in meditation when one aspires to practice Mahamudra. We need the blessings. For example, if our heart is open, then it shines just as brightly as the sun that melts the mighty glaciers of a high mountain. When our heart is open and filled with unflinching confidence and deep trust while meditating, we will receive and experience the blessings as though the melting snow of the glaciers were filling us with joy and happiness. This can't be achieved intellectually because it's an inner experience. Let me speak about it so that it's easy to understand.

Since one has doubts, which are always an intellectual matter, as to whether a spiritual path is good and helpful for oneself or not, it's important to first gain an intellectual understanding and resolve one's doubts logically. One might have an emotional understanding, but a problem is a problem as long as one doesn't resolve it. One feels that a spiritual path is right while having many questions that need to be answered so that one can progress along the path. Therefore, an

intellectual understanding is very important. But even if one knows a lot, an intellectual understanding, which is always directed outwards, is not enough to mature spiritually. One also needs to be involved emotionally so that one's heart opens, i.e., one feels touched, inspired, joyful, and peaceful. If one wants to practice properly, one has to join both aspects into a new way.

*Student:* "But I think it's individual."

*Lama:* Intellectual and emotional understanding have to be practiced together. If they are practiced individually, then it's very extreme. Emotional intelligence alone is not sufficient because one only has feelings while not understanding properly. One is ambivalent if one bases one's practice on emotional intelligence only, and in that case one will more likely change. One won't change as easily if one has intellectual understanding joined with emotional understanding.

Blessings are very important for people who have strong intellectual understanding because they help develop the emotional aspect of practice. It's very important to feel how meditation works and to be touched by stories that one hears. As it is, one first gains understanding with one's brain, whereas understanding with one's heart means that one really understands the meaning of what one understood intellectually. It makes sense. One doesn't understand with one's heart, though, but one becomes so stable and fully confident when one does. Having unflinching confidence, pure trust, and steadfastness are very important. For example, one has to be fully confident which detour to take when there is a lot of construction work on the Autobahn, otherwise one will have a problem getting where one wanted to go. One gets where one wanted to go fearlessly and easily if one is confident which road to take and if one knows how to drive. That's how it is, even when it comes to simple things. Meditation is similar.

Sometimes one's meditation doesn't go well. Trying to help oneself by mediating and meditating when difficulties arise, which are obstacles and are normal, won't do. One needs more, and devotional practices are the more. It's very important to engage in devotional practices by thinking about the qualities of a buddha and by reciting a prayer when obstacles arise so that one receives the blessings. Thinking about the qualities of the buddhas and spiritual teachers opens one's heart and then the experience of joy and happiness shine again. It might sound funny from an intellectual point of view. It is an emotional matter and doesn't have much to do with logical reasoning.

It's amazing. I know from own my experience that sometimes one wants to meditate, but one's mind is unclear, fuzzy, and hazy, just like the November weather outside. One slowly recites prayers, comes out of the haze, meditates, and feels that one's meditation is so easy and is such a joyful time. It happens and it's unbelievable. One can never get an answer how this happens. Therefore, prayers are important because they help one develop these kinds of feelings. It's one method. But it's very difficult to experience the joy of meditating or reciting mantras when one is hazy. One can also hear or read teachings. It's a different way, and everyone is free to choose what helps the most. We cannot say that one method is right for everybody because nobody is the same. My way is prayer.

Sometimes it helps to think about the life of Jetsün Milarepa, how he was inspired and meditated. If one has trouble meditating, has bad experiences and problems, and doesn't feel good, then it's helpful to know that Milarepa had the same problems. He experienced that many demons tried to interrupt his meditation. He told them, "Demons, you have no self. You cannot harm me. You don't exist outside myself, but I will destroy my insight if I cling to you. I do not cling to duality. I have no problem. Do whatever you like." They got really scared and that's how he subdued them. When I sit down to meditate, I read Milarepa's hagiography again and again. It inspires me so much that I cannot stop reading. One doesn't even have to sleep when one meditates because one is okay and can meditate for a long time. It happens like that. This is what blessings really mean.

There are meditation practices one can do before falling asleep so that one is calm and relaxed and isn't afraid when one's elements dissolve while one goes through the process of dying. All appearances are just one's mind, and one doesn't experience fear if one can work with one's mind's projections. Since it will be too late to ask questions and practice when one is dying, one exercises the following practices before falling asleep. By exercising in this way, one realizes that any appearance is only a projection of one's mind in life too, by looking at how one feels, i.e., at one's fear, when one thinks one is being crushed down before one falls asleep, which corresponds to the earth element dissolving into the water element while dying. One imagines each dissolution phase and uses one's feelings as a support for meditation by looking at how one feels and by resting in that feeling. Aware that all appearances are projections of one's own mind, one is calm and at ease and transforms the projections.

One imagines that one is high up in the sky and falls into a river or ocean, which corresponds to the water element dissolving into the fire element. One looks at how one feels and works with that. One might know that one is a good swimmer now, but, since one's body doesn't function anymore, one won't be able to swim when one experiences falling into a river or ocean when dying. Will one be afraid or relaxed? One needs to look at one's feeling directly and meditate somehow.

Furthermore, one looks at how one feels by imagining that one is stepping into the middle of a huge fire, which corresponds to the fire element dissolving into the wind element. Like before, one needs to try to rest one's mind on one's fear or on any funny experience that one might have by practicing now. When the wind element dissolves into one's consciousness, one feels like a feather being blown around by wind in open space. One wants to rest, like a bird wants to rest after having flown a long distance, but can't because there is no ground to land on. One is restless due to searching and searching for a place to land - in vain. Totally exhausted, one has no more energy and falls and falls until one's head bursts. When one practices like this, one looks at one's feelings, pacifies one's fear, and rests in calm. Following, there is the white appearance I spoke about, and one rests one's mind on that. Then there is the red appearance, and one rests one's mind on that. Can one really rest one's mind on clear light when one blacks out? One has to practice meditation in order to be able to do so.

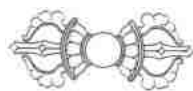
Sometimes I don't finish all exercises before falling asleep, because sleep comes so fast – it's so funny. I get the problem of deep sleep, don't have a body, only have myself. So, these are the meditation practices that are taught.

*Student:* “What can I do when I see that I'm not able to go into the fire, to fall into the ocean, or to fall on the earth?”

*Lama:* You just think it now, and you have the choice to practice. It's just a sort of training. While dying, you don't have a choice.

*Same student:* “Try and try again!”

*Lama:* Yes. You can try anytime you try to sleep – during the day or in the evening. Falling asleep is similar to dying because one's mind experiences the dissolution of one's elements.



## The Luminous Bardo of Dharmata

As mentioned in the discussion on the bardo of dying and death, the luminous bardo of dharmata sets in when the red and white seeds meet and merge and one blacks out. Some teachings include the bardo of dharmata in that of dying and death.



It's really important to read *"The Bardo Thödol"* to the deceased. This text was translated into English as "The Tibetan Book of the Dead," but it actually means "Liberation upon Hearing in the Intermediate State." It teaches in great detail that many, many deities appear to one after one has died. Some days peaceful deities appear and some days later wrathful deities appear, but they do not appear to everybody. It is taught that the deities appear to individuals who are accustomed to deity visualization practices. At that time, one has to know that the visions are not different than one's own mind, otherwise they will be very frightening. Having practiced, one recognizes the deities that one meditated during life and isn't scared, rather one is happy. No matter how fearful a deity looks, one knows that they are appearances of one's own mind and one recognizes them.

It's normal that people have different experiences, so individuals who aren't used to visualizing deities won't experience them. In any case, even if not used to deity practices, everyone experiences light, sounds, and radiance when they die. Sometimes one will perceive a peaceful light and sound and slowly a frightening light and sound will arise. I spoke about my fear of the light that I perceived when I was very young, yet it might be even more frightening as one goes through the bardos.

## Practice

When one becomes frightened by the sights, sounds, and radiance that appear during the bardo of dharmata, if possible one should remember that everything is a manifestation of one's own mind, look at one's fear, and rest in its nature. If it isn't possible to practice like this and to calm down, one uses one's fear as a support for meditation. Presently, it's the only thing one can do – and it doesn't come easily. If one has trust in and feels better by reciting mantras, or by praying, or by calling to somebody one believes in for protection, then one feels more comfortable, joyful, and safe by engaging in whichever practice one is used to. It's very important. One meditates the same way that one does when one has fear or is angry in life.

Jetsün Milarepa, the great yogi of Tibet, said that he was able to control everything because he realized that disturbances are due to ego-clinging and that every appearance is merely a projection of the mind. Therefore, it's very important to try to practice when one is afraid or very angry in daily life. Fear in life is more or less the same feeling of fear one has during the bardo of dharmata. If one thinks one is meditating, but doesn't try to deal with one's negative feelings now, though, then it will be very difficult to practice then. Great masters sometimes act crazy; they don't meditate anymore, but apply their practice. It's important to apply one's meditation practice – then things are different. Sitting in meditation is training to be able to apply the practice in every moment. Therefore, one makes preparations now by sitting and meditating, by practicing to calm down when one is afraid so that one can apply one's practice naturally in any situation – then one will be calm and relaxed.

Outer appearances will naturally and automatically be transformed and felt as nothing when one transforms oneself. For example, a vicious dog will not bite if one is calm and relaxed. If one is calm instead of nervous, a dog that is usually vicious will be peaceful and will not bite. If one is nervous, that dog is also nervous, develops much power, will jump and bite. It's very dangerous to get near a vicious dog if one isn't relaxed. When one is calm and relaxed, one doesn't fight with a dog or with others, and that is very important. In such situations, I focus my mind on a mantra and that makes me calm. One has to try when small things happen and compare the difference. It will work. One is relaxed when one has no fear. Then one can manage – one has an open heart, is clear, and has a pure mind.

*Student:* "Proud and happy."

*Lama:* Yes, natural pride is good pride.

*Question:* “If you do this meditation and watch your fear, is it better to use one method or to change? Is it better to sometimes only say mantras or to watch my feelings?”

*Lama:* Mantras are temporary; looking directly is a more reliable means. It becomes more practical the more you get into it. I was also very fearful when I was young. I couldn't leave the house alone after dark because I was so afraid. We have a strong concept of ghosts. I also could not be near a place where someone was dying because I had so much fear. I ran away from home for about 3 weeks after my grandfather died. I had too much fear. I even ran away when I saw a funeral procession. When I entered the monastery, they sent me to recite the sacred liturgy that is done for somebody who has died. It took 3 hours to recite the text and I was alone with the dead body; everybody else was asleep. I was so scared.

*Student:* “You did it and you were alone?”

*Lama:* Yes, it was my work and I had to do it, at night. I had no choice.

*Same student:* Did you look at the corpse?

*Lama:* I didn't care. I had to read the text for 3 hours. It happened like that and slowly my fear disappeared. Now I have no problem. So, it develops slowly, slowly if one works practically. Just imagining doesn't work. One slowly realizes that not only other people die, but one will die too and opens one's heart. Then it's easy to deal with death. One works with one's fear and slowly transforms it.

*Question:* “Sometimes my fear or another emotion seem to be like a little fish swimming in water. I try to catch it so that I can watch it, but it slips away.”

*Lama:* There is nothing to grab because that's the nature of fear. The more you watch, the more it disappears, which is the meaning of emptiness. Then there is nothing to watch and that's how it works. It's normal. Look at your mind. You don't see anything when you look. And when you don't see anything, just relax. The same with fear: You don't see anything when you look at your fear. When you don't see anything, just go and relax. That is the meaning. It's like trying to catch fish – you can't because there is nothing to catch, normally. Sometimes we talk a lot, so I think we need to meditate. Let's do this for a short while now.

*Student:* “You said that the outer signs and the inner signs of death are different processes. What about people or relatives who plan to donate their organs? When can one be sure that the person is definitely dead?”

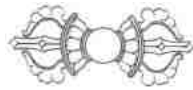
*Lama:* Yes, it's difficult because an organ can only be used a little bit before the donor is dead. It depends upon the donor. One shouldn't think of oneself if one really wants to donate one's organs, but one is very satisfied, confident, and thinks, “I'm dying anyway. I can deal with it if I can benefit somebody.” I think it's important to make a decision to be generous and that it's very good to think, “I'm okay.” High bodhisattvas only think of others; for instance, Nagarjuna offered his head. If one knows that one is ready and has decided, then I think it's very good, otherwise I don't think it's so easy. It also depends on one's personality, and one can only know for oneself. In any case, one can't decide for someone else.

*Same student:* “This means that one has to be sure that the donor agrees? Maybe it's necessary to discuss this before that person dies?”

*Lama:* Yes, I think it's very important. It isn't good if someone regrets when it is too late.

This has been a general outline of the dissolution of the elements, but sometimes it doesn't take place in this way. For example, the dissolution process can take place all at once when one dies in an accident. In any case, one's mind needs to practice to calm down as best as possible and to be free of fear.

Unless one knows the signs that death has occurred, one is still not aware that one has died and thinks one is alive. One thinks one is coming home, wants to eat, asks one's family members or friends for a coca-cola, wants to eat a pizza or drink coffee with them, but they don't respond. One is bewildered about what is going on. It is said that one looks into the mirror and doesn't see a reflection of oneself or that one walks over sand and notices that one doesn't leave footprints. One slowly comes to know that one is dead and suffers immensely. It takes 3 ½ days to fully realize that one has died. One engages in the meditation practices that one is used to all along. If one is used to practicing deity meditation, one engages in that practice, or one prays to the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Lamas, Gurus, or anybody one trusts the most for their support and protection.



## The Karmic Bardo of Becoming

We went through the teachings on the general bardo of life, sleep, dreams, death, and dharmata. Real bardo takes place all the time, though. Meditation practice is also bardo because one begins and ends a session. Anything between a beginning and an end is a bardo, an intermediate state, so there are many bardos. But the common understanding of bardo relates to the bardo after death and a new life, which is called “the karmic bardo of becoming.”

A being doesn't have a physical body, but only a mental body during the bardo of becoming. In the Tibetan culture, we make smell-offerings by coating flowers with butter for an individual who has gone through the bardo of death and is in the bardo of becoming because they are only nourished by smells and are therefore called “smell eaters.” Depending on the text, the bardo of becoming is usually said to last 49 days at the longest. Some teachings state that it lasts 3 days and other teachings say that it only lasts a short moment. In our tradition, we do many things for a deceased person – we write down their name, do meditation practices, and perform many pujas for them. It's very helpful to recite many prayers for these beings. The texts tell us that their lives can be changed by doing so much for them. It's an energetic transference based upon wishes. I had a similar experience, which I want to tell you about.

I wasn't home when my aunt died many years ago, but I dreamt about her every night for about 3 years. Later I read in the teachings that she may have been expecting me to pray for her because I was a monk. I hadn't written down her name for prayers, but then I included her name in my prayers and never dreamed of her again. I thought that what the Buddhist teachings say is exceptional, that a being in the bardo really expects something from one and is okay when their expectations are fulfilled. It's incredible. So, I think it will be very helpful if one can say prayers, practices, and makes dedications for beings in the bardo of becoming.

One also has to work for oneself now so that one can meditate and doesn't need help from others during the bardo of becoming. It's all the better if others help, but it doesn't matter if nobody does. There is no tradition like this in the West like there is in the East. Therefore, one should practice like Jetsün Milarepa, who said, “My mother won't be there to cry and my sister won't be there to cry when I die. Nobody will be around to cry when I die. I want to die alone.” One needs that attitude in the West. One has to go through the bardos by oneself, just as Milarepa said, “Let me die in the solitude of my mountain retreat with nobody around.” One doesn't expect too much of others if one is ready and prepared.

One has a mental body in the bardo of becoming, which means that one doesn't have a physical body, and is as light as a feather. One can fly wherever one wants to go and is in India just by

thinking that one wants to be there – that's how fast one can fly. But, one suffers tremendously because one can't sit down and rest. The karmic wind doesn't stop blowing one around, all over the place, so it is a difficult situation. Being blown around, one is very restless. So one has to meditate.

It's said in the teachings that one sees one's past life very clearly and remembers everything. Like persons in a coma, one only sees the past. At that time, one needs to be calm and quiet, pray whatever one likes to pray, work on oneself, and relax. Then one's perception changes - one sees one's future and becomes very scared. One feels like one is in the midst of a raging storm and rain shower and only has one wish - to find shelter. One travels and travels to find a place to rest, but fails. The Buddhist teachings say that at this point it's very important to have the strong wish to be born in a safe place, as a healthy human being, and to loving and caring parents. I think it really helps because it will happen. That's what the Buddhist teachings say and what Buddhists believe.

## Practice

Nobody can see what takes place in the bardo of becoming. Since one can't see it, one can't deny it. It's logical that one doesn't know. One needn't not believe in the bardo because one doesn't see it, but one needn't think that it doesn't occur either. Whichever logical argument one purports, one is free to decide for oneself what one wants to believe. In any case, one would be prepared if one worked on one's mind and meditated, which would be like having an insurance policy for one's car. Having one's car insured doesn't mean that one anticipates being involved in an accident, but one is ready if it happens. If there's no bardo of becoming, one is lucky, but if there is, one is ready. It's scary to fall from the sky, so knowing how to deal with situations, how to be calm, and how to go home are important. Like that. One is ready. No matter what happens, one is ready, and then it's easier.

It's important to calm down when one is very emotional, when one is angry or afraid. When practice has become a habit, one even says prayers and meditates when one thinks one is being chased in a dream. Even though one doesn't know that one is dreaming, one naturally engages in practice while dreaming when it has become a habit. Bardo of becoming is, more or less, like one's experiences in dreams. One practices in the same way, makes prayers, calms down, and relaxes.

If one is accustomed to looking at one's mind or at one's fear directly in one's meditation, then one can rest in it. The more one looks at one's fear, the more one realizes that one cannot catch it, just like one can't catch a fish. Then it disappears and one becomes fearless, which means that one's mind becomes clearer, calmer, more open, and more joyful. These are the qualities that unfold when one is fearless.

Enjoying the qualities that arise when one has transformed one's fear into fearlessness actually means that one's fear is good. Knowing how to work with one's fear renders good energy. As presented in the examples above, good fear is like manure for one's field or ashes that one can sell at the market for a useful purpose. If one is trained, one can use one's fear and negative emotions and transform them into good energy, i.e., joy, peace, and happiness. That's what meditation means. So, instead of being unhappy when one is afraid, one can be happy that one has the opportunity to gain something interesting out of one's fear. And that's the purpose of meditating. One has to try one's best every moment and as much as possible. But one shouldn't worry whether it will work or not because somehow it works. Being very happy the moment one has much fear is very good. Like that.

## Conclusion

I was very happy to share what I learned and experienced with you. Actually, the more I teach, the more I learn. One just studies and learns when one learns from others, but one learns even more when one practices and teaches others. Thank you for making it possible for me to learn more. I also want to thank SOBI, Josef, and our translator for making it possible to come together and share our experiences.

*Josef:* “Can we sing ‘*The Seven Delights*’ by the Mahasiddha Götsangpa?”

*Lama:* Do you know the melody? Yes, Götsangpa was a great master.

### “*Seven Delights*,” composed by Mahasiddha Götsangpa

“When thoughts that there is something, perceived and a perceiver,  
Lure my mind away and distract,  
I don’t close my sense gateways to meditate without them,  
But plunge straight into their essential point.  
They’re like clouds in the sky, there’s this shimmer where they fly,  
Thoughts that rise, for me sheer delight!

“When kleshas get me going and their heat has got me burning,  
I try no antidote to set them right.  
Like an alchemistic potion turning metal into gold,  
What lies in klesha’s power to bestow  
Is bliss without contagion, completely undefiled,  
Kleshas coming up, sheer delight!

“When I’m plagued by god-like forces or demonic interference,  
I do not drive them out with rites and spells.  
The thing to chase away is the egoistic thinking,  
Built up on the idea of a self.  
This will turn the ranks of maras into your own special forces,  
When obstacles arise, sheer delight!

“When samsara with its anguish has me writhing in its torments,  
Instead of wallowing in misery,  
I take the greater burden down the greater path to travel  
And let compassion set me up.  
To take upon myself the sufferings of others,  
When karmic consequences bloom, delight!

“When my body has succumbed to the attacks of painful illness,  
I do not count on medical relief,  
But take that very illness as a path and by its power  
Remove the obscurations blocking me,  
And use it to encourage the qualities worthwhile,  
When illness rears its head, sheer delight!

“When its time to leave this body, this illusionary tangle,  
Don’t cause yourself anxiety and grief.  
The thing that you should train in and clear up for yourself,  
There’s no such thing as dying to be done.

It's just clear light, the mother, and child clear light uniting,  
When mind forsakes the body, sheer delight!

“When the whole thing's just not working, everything's lined up against you,  
Don't try to find some way to change it all.  
Here the point to make your practice is reverse the way you see it,  
Don't try to make it stop or to improve.  
Adverse conditions happen, when they do it's so delightful,  
They make a little song of sheer delight!”

*Lama:* Wow, wonderful! That's very good. That's very good. You have a change when you sing.  
When things turn upside-down, you get a change by singing. When things turn upside-down,  
don't change anything, just let things be as they are.

*Josef:* “Lots of blessings.”

*Lama:* Very nice. Mahasiddha Götsangpa was the great meditation master of the Drukpa Kagyü  
Lineage.

Let us sing the “*Amitabha Prayer*,” which is the wish that all living beings who have died are born  
in the Pure Realm of Buddha Amitabha that is free of suffering and pain, and let us recite the  
dedication prayers that everyone is happy. The dedication prayers are very important because any  
wish one has will be fulfilled. For example, if one has the strong wish to travel to Tibet, some day  
one will go. Wishes are very important. One prays the “*Amitabha Prayer*” to also be born there  
after one has died and to receive teachings from Buddha Amitabha. One needn't fear that it will  
be boring. I think it will be really wonderful. Maybe coffee is served there the moment one wants  
to have a cup. Just like one knows that one's wish has come true when one is in Tibet some day,  
one will also realize that one's wish has been fulfilled when one is in Devachen one day.

## Dedication

Through this goodness may omniscience be attained  
And thereby may every enemy (mental defilement) be overcome.  
May beings be liberated from the ocean of samsara  
That is troubled by waves of birth, old age, sickness, and death.

By this virtue may I quickly attain the state of Guru Buddha and then  
Lead every being without exception to that very state!  
May precious and supreme bodhicitta that has not been generated now be so,  
And may precious bodhicitta that has already been never decline, but continuously increase!

May the life of the Glorious Lama remain steadfast and firm.  
May peace and happiness fully arise for beings as limitless in number as space is vast in its extent.  
Having accumulated merit and purified negativities,  
May I and all living beings without exception swiftly  
establish the levels and grounds of buddhahood.



With gratitude to Anne Wiengarn for having provided a very good simultaneous translation into the German language during the event. Transcribed, edited slightly & arranged by Gaby Hollmann, responsible for all mistakes. "*Seven Delights*" translated by Jim Scott, publ. by Marpa Transl. Com., Nepal, 1996, pages 96-100. Photo of Lama Kelzang courtesy of Josef Kerklau, who we also wish to thank very much for having made the recording of the instructions available. Photo of lilies taken & offered by Lena Fong. We wish to apologize for not having included all questions & answers or for having condensed a few due to the length of this article. Copyright Acharya Lama Kelzang Wangdi & Karma Sherab Ling in Münster, 2009. Blessings of peace and ease to everyone!