

Death and the Way

The tradition of death meditation to be taught here originated with Buddha Sakyamuni. It was practised by such renowned meditators as the Bodhisattva Santideva, the early Kadampa Geshe, Milarepa's disciple Gampopa, the incomparable yogi Tzong Kha Pa, the Dalai Lamas and so forth. Eventually it came down to Pabong-kha Rinpoche, one of the greatest teachers alive at the turn of this century. Pabong-kha gave it to Kyab-je Tri Jang Dorje Chang, the Junior Tutor of His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama. It was from this perfect Guru, Kyab-je Tri Jang Dorje Chang, that I heard it.

I myself trained under some twenty Gurus, each of whom was without doubt a full Buddha. However, from the viewpoint of my personal karmic disposition the kindest of them all was Kyab-je Tri Jang Dorje Chang. The excellence of this Master cannot be described. The manner in which he teaches and the subtle skills that he adopts to generate a true experience of Dharma in the disciple, are so profound that it is almost impossible for even the dullest of listeners to remain unaffected. It is indeed sad that this Fully Realized Being now assumes the form of an old man who can so rarely teach. Merely sitting in his presence gives one control over one's mind. Besides caring for his disciples spiritually, he does so physically. Many times during the course of my training I was without food day after day, my clothes but tattered rags; it was Kyab-je Tri Jang Dorje Chang who saved me.



The Dargye Gompa in Kham, Eastern Tibet.

There are many people who study and talk about Dharma, but never really practise it. Their Dharma is only words. This is because they have not spent sufficient time meditating on death. The disadvantages of not meditating on death are numberless, yet they can be summarized under the following six topics.

(A) If you do not meditate on death you will not be mindful of your Dharma practice. All of your time will be lost in mundane pursuits. One of the early Kadampa Geshe said, 'If on waking up in the morning you do not meditate on death your entire morning will be wasted. If at noon you do not meditate on death your entire afternoon will be wasted. And if in the evening you do not meditate on death your entire night will be wasted.' In this way most people waste their entire lives.

(B) Although you may practise some Dharma your practice will be largely only procrastination. There are numerous Tibetans who have told their Gurus that they will soon do retreat but, not meditating sufficiently on death, they have put it off year after year and have died before doing so.

(C) Your practice will become impure. It will become mixed with worldly ambitions, such as the *Eight Worldly Dharmas*.

Many practitioners have their eyes fixed more on becoming scholars or celebrities than on attaining spiritual realisation.

Jowo Je (Atiśa) was once asked, 'If someone wishes for the happiness which is of this life alone, what shall he gain?' Jowo Je answered, 'Just what he wishes for!' 'And what shall he gain in future lives?' the disciple asked. 'Rebirth in hell, as a ghost or as an animal,' was the reply.

It is said that in order to practise perfectly, this life must be abandoned. What does that mean? Not that one must abandon one's present lifestyle, home, possessions or position, but that one must give up the *Eight Worldly Dharmas*: wishing to experience wealth, fame, praise or happiness and to avoid poverty, notoriety, slander or discomfort. To differentiate between a true spiritual practitioner and a non-practitioner is simple. A practitioner is one who has abandoned these *Eight Worldly Dharmas*; a non-practitioner is one who is controlled by them.

Geshe Potawa once asked Lama Drom Tönpa, 'What is the line between Dharma and non-Dharma?' Lama Drom replied, 'That which contradicts the beliefs of samsaric people is Dharma; that which does not, is non-Dharma.'

(D) Your practice will lack stamina. Although you take up a practice at the first setback you will give it up.

A small thorn bush grew outside the cave of Kadampa Geshe Kara Kunjung. Every time he came or went from the cave its thorns would rip open his flesh. This thorn bush remained there until he died, for this great meditator practised with such intensity that he never wished to waste the few moments necessary to cut it down. Geshe Kara Kunjung had realized the fruit of meditation upon death.

(E) You will continue to create negative karmas. Without a continual awareness of death attachment to the things of this life persists. Friends and relatives are held as more worthy of love than are strangers and beings who bring one discomfort. This emotional imbalance gives rise to an endless string of mental distortions, which in turn results in the generation of infinite negative karmas. In this way the happiness of this life as well as of all future lives is lost.

(F) You will die in a state of regret. It is certain that death will come. If one has not lived in mindfulness of it, it will come as a surprise. At that crucial moment one will

realize that all of the materialistically orientated attitudes one has cultivated all of one's life are of no value and that one's wealth, family and power are useless. When death comes, nothing but one's spiritual realization is of value. Yet, having neglected death-awareness, one has neglected practice and now stands empty-handed, regret filling the mind. In his text *Venturing into the Deeds of a Bodhisattva (Bodhisattvacaravavata)* Santideva writes:

'When grasped by death's agents,

What value are friends,

What value are relatives?

At that moment, the only protection

Is the force of one's goodness;

But to this I have never attended.'

Kadampa Geshe Karmapa once remarked that we should fear death now while there is still time to act and that at the time of death we should be fearless. The situation is reversed with worldly beings; while strong and healthy



Geshe Namwang Dargey



they never give death a thought, yet when death comes to them they clutch at their breasts in utter terror. Most practitioners never really begin to practise. Every day they procrastinate. Then, lying on their deathbeds, they pray for just a few days more of life; but they are now between the jaws of the Lord of Death and the time for practise is only a memory. Like a piece of meat which we held in our hands but did not eat; the meat which slipped is now in the belly of a dog and cannot be brought back. Although regret is pointless, regret arises.

The advantages of meditating on death are also limitless, yet again may be summarized under six topics.

(A) Your life will become purposeful.

In the *Sutra of Buddha's Passing Away* (Mahaparinirvana Sutra), it is said: 'Of all footprints, that of the elephant is largest. Of all mindfulness meditations, that of death is supreme.'

If one properly practises death meditation, one's mind will yearn to seek a deeper understanding of life. We can see this in the biographies of the saints. Buddha himself was turned away from attraction to mundane existence by seeing first a sick man, then an old man and lastly a corpse. The yogi Milarepa was inspired to renounce black

magic and search for a more purposeful path by witnessing his magic teacher's reaction to the death of a patron.

(B) Mindfulness of death is an extremely powerful opponent to delusion.

The strongest opponent to delusion is realisation of Voidness. Death awareness is second to this alone. If one recollects death whenever attachment or aversion arises in the mind, that delusion is instantly destroyed, just as a stone is crushed by the blow of an iron hammer.

The yogis and Mahasiddhas of ancient India ate their food out of bowls made from human skulls and blew on trumpets made from human thighbones. Similarly, monks painted human skulls on the doors of their toilets. This was not done to scare people, but to maintain awareness of death. Even nowadays almost every temple hangs a painting of the Lord of Death holding the whole of conditioned existence in his mouth, beside its main entrance; not as a decoration, but to instill the thought of death in all who visit. In Tantric practice, cemeteries filled with corpses and so forth are visualized as surrounding the mystic mandala.

(C) Meditation on death is important in the beginning of every practice as it inspires one to do the practice and to do it well.

(D) Meditation on death is important in the middle of every practice as it inspires one to exert oneself both intensely and with purity.

(E) Meditation on death is important at the end of a practice as it causes one to perfect and complete that practice.

Thus, meditation on death will cause one to begin, to continue and to fulfil the practice.

Some people, soon after contacting Dharma, develop a very heavy sense of renunciation and enter into retreat. But after some months their enthusiasm wanes and they yearn to return home. Yet they feel forced to stay and complete their proposed retreat, because they fear the ridicule that they would receive were they to break their practice. They end up cursing their renunciation, which they consider as having been nothing but a source of trouble for them.

(F) You will die happily and without regrets.

By maintaining an awareness of death while alive, your life will spontaneously incline towards virtue and Dharma practice. Death will not come as a surprise and will bring neither fear nor regret.

It is said that the man who practises to the best of his ability dies in a state of bliss. The mediocre practitioner dies happily. Even the poor practitioner does not have regret or dread at the coming of death. We should aim at being at least the most inferior of these.

Milarepa declared, 'Terrified of death, I fled to the mountains. Now I have realised the ultimate nature of mind and no longer fear.' If we practise as intensely as Milarepa there is no reason why we should not attain an equal state of realisation. We have the same form and mental capacity as did Milarepa and the various methods that he applied have come down to us in an unbroken and undegenerated stream through the various lineage gurus. In a way, our opportunity for enlightenment is even greater than his, for a

number of oral transmissions not available to Milarepa are now available to us.

These, then, are the disadvantages of not meditating on death and the advantages of meditating on it.

How does one meditate on death? There are two main ways. The first is known as *Three Roots, Nine Reasons and Three Determinations*. The second is a technique wherein one visualises oneself as undergoing the process of death. The former is the method taught in the Sutras and is referred to, both in Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation (Rinpoche Tar rGyan)* and Tzong Kha Pa's *Extensive Exposition of the Stages on the Path (Lam rim Chen mo)*. The latter is a Tantric method found in every Anuttara-Yoga system in the phase of mandala meditation known as the *Taking Dharmakaya us the Path*.

Firstly, the method known as *Three Roots, Nine Reasons and Three Determinations*.

The *Three Roots* to be meditated on are:

- (I) The inevitability of death.
- (II) The uncertainty of the time of death.
- (III) That at the time of death nothing but the strength of one's spiritual realisation is of value.

The *Nine Reasons* and *Three Determinations* are divided equally between the *Three Roots* as follows:

(I) The inevitability of death.

If a lunatic attacks you with a knife you can run, defend yourself or pretend to hide. If you follow the latter course you will certainly be lost. Similarly, although death plans to attack, most people live pretending it does not exist.

It is not difficult to prove logically that any given person will die. We can just say, taking you as an example, that you will certainly die, for death is inevitable.

How can we know that it is inevitable? By meditating upon these *Three Reasons*:

(A) To date, death has come to all humans. Without mentioning ordinary beings, even the great, realized beings—the Arhats, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas—have died. So why should we expect to survive? Buddha Śakyamuni himself passed away so as to demonstrate impermanence to his disciples. Whom do you know who is even a century old? In the face of these facts, it is hard to believe that we shall be immortal:

(B) Day by day life ebbs, with no chance of increase.

A human's lifespan can be likened to a pond, the inflowing stress to which has been cut off: moment by moment its waters diminish. Or it may be compared to the case of a monk who has only one thousand rupees and no further income: if he spends ten rupees a day, he will eventually be penniless.

Acarya Santideva wrote, 'Remaining neither day nor night, life is constantly slipping away and never getting any longer. Will death not come to me?'

The length of your life has been decreasing since the moment of your conception. When a hundred sheep are taken to the slaughterhouse to be killed by evening, the killing of each sheep brings the killing of the last one closer. It is the same with lifespan: by the consuming of minutes, hours have passed; by the consuming of hours, days have passed; by the consuming of days, months have passed;

and by the consuming of months, years have passed. With the consuming of years, death rapidly approaches.

(C) Although alive, we find such a little time to practise Dharma.

Our lifespan can probably be divided as follows: twenty years are spent sleeping, twenty years working, ten years playing, five years eating, etc. Perhaps four or five years are spent practising. These are the 'parts' which constitute the composite phenomenon which is the life of the average person. As Buddha pointed out, anything composite is doomed to fall apart one day. That which is a collection of parts exists in dependence on those parts, which sooner or later must disintegrate.

If you meditate intensely upon this *first Root* and its *three Reasons*, you can, within seven days, realize the inevitability of death. From this realization will arise the first of the *three Determinations*—the Determination to practise Dharma.



(II) The uncertainty of the time of death.

This, the *second Root*, is more difficult to realize fully. Many people live with the understanding that eventually they must die, but few truly believe that they could be dead within one minute from now. To generate this awareness, meditate on the following *three Reasons*.

(A) The lifespan of humans on this planet is not fixed. Thousands of years ago, the lifespan of humans was measured in centuries. Now it is less than a hundred years. Soon it will be only a decade long.

Human lifespan is especially unstable in this degenerate phase of the aeon. You may think that you have a long time to live because you are still young. But look at the aged carrying their dead children to the cemetery. Or you may think that you will live long because you have sufficient wealth to buy good food and medicines. But look at the old beggars and at the millionaires who have died young. Or you may think that you will live a long life because you are healthy, but this also is not a sound idea, for many people die while healthy and many sick ones live on year after year.

(B) Many forces oppose life and few support it.

The evil spirits that can obstruct the life of a human number more than eighty thousand. The four hundred and twenty-four diseases hover around us like a fog. These spirits and diseases wait for us like a cat outside a rat hole. Furthermore, the four elements constituting the physical base of a being—earth, air, fire and water—are like four snakes in a single vessel, the stronger continually trying to overcome the weaker. When these elements are in harmony one enjoys health, but when they fall into discord, one's life becomes endangered.

Moreover, that which is used to sustain life can easily become a cause of death. Houses collapse, killing the inhabitants. Foods turn to poison. Medicines improperly used can bring death. The various means of transportation, intended to aid human existence, often result in human death.

In his *Precious Garland to a King* (Ratnavali), Nagarjuna wrote, 'O King, life is like a butterlamp placed in a wind-storm.' Whether the lamp is full, half-full or almost empty is of little consequence. It may be extinguished at any moment. Similarly, age does not indicate how close one is to death.

(C) The human body is extremely fragile.

We may say, 'Granted, there are many opponents to life. But I am powerful enough to endure them all.' This is wishful thinking. A human is as easily destroyed as is a soap bubble. His life-force is knocked out of him as easily as a dew-drop is knocked off the tip of a blade of grass. As is said in Nagarjuna's *Friendly Letter* (Suhrllekha), 'If the entire world will be destroyed at this aeon's end, what to say of the bodies of humans?'

Kunga Rinpoche once said, 'If you think you will first complete your worldly duties and then practise Dharma, bear in mind that today's death may come before tomorrow's practice.'

By meditating diligently on this *second Root* and its *three Reasons*, there will arise the second of the three determinations—the determination to practise Dharma immediately.

(III) At the time of death, nothing but one's spiritual realization is of value.

To become convinced of this *third Root*, meditate on the following *three Reasons*.

(A) Wealth, possessions, fame or social power are of no value.

If, at the time of your death, you have a hundred bricks of gold in your house, not a single brick will be of benefit.

A beggar must leave behind even his walking stick. Although a king may have a million subjects and a thousand queens, not one of them will be able to accompany him. As Buddha said, 'Although you may have enough food and clothing to last a hundred years, when you die you go on alone, naked and unfed.'

(B) Family, friends or relatives are of no value.

One is born alone and must die alone. When you are dying, all of your loved ones may press down on your body trying to prevent death from taking you away. But it will be of no avail. Nor will a single one of them accompany you.

The Mahasiddha Maitripa said, 'My friend, dying is like passing alone through a dangerous valley filled with robbers. Not one of your queens, sons, daughters or subjects will come with you then. Therefore, prepare yourself well.'

In his text *Venturing into the Deeds of a Bodhisattva*, Acarya Santideva wrote, 'Leaving all behind, I must depart alone. Alas, not knowing this, I committed all kinds of evil for the sake of family and friends . . . Yet who of them will help me face the Lord of Death?'



Nagarjuna

(C) Even your body will be of no value.

Though you have had your body since leaving your mother's womb, have clothed it to save it from the sufferings of heat and cold and have fed it to spare it the pangs of hunger, at death it must be abandoned. The stream of consciousness goes on alone.

By meditating intensely on this *third Root* and its *three Reasons*, there will arise the third of the *three Determinations*—the determination to practise Dharma purely, unmingled with materialistic tendencies.

Acarya Santideva wrote, 'At the time of death only goodness is of value. But to that I did not attend!'

If you know that you are moving to a country where the only valid form of currency is gold, you would be wise to convert all your old currency while you still have the opportunity. At the time of death the sole valid form of currency is spiritual realisation, so you should practise Dharma intensely and gain that currency while you have the chance.

How exactly does one conduct this *three Roots, nine Reasons and three Determinations* meditation? Sitting in a correct posture, begin by glancing the mind over the six

disadvantages of not being mindful of death and the six advantages of being mindful of it. Having spent five or ten minutes on this, glance through each of the *three Roots* with their corresponding *Reasons* and *Determinations*. Then, take the mind back to the *first Reason* of the *first Root*, and hold it there from twenty minutes to a half-hour, entering into formal meditation on that point. The first day one does formal meditation on the first of the *nine Reasons*, the second day on the *second Reason*, etc., gradually working through the entire meditation. To conclude each session, glance through the remainder of the points, dwell for a short time on the *three Determinations* and, lastly, recite a short prayer, such as the following:

'By the power of this practice
May I quickly achieve perfect Buddhahood.
And thus may each and every sentient being
Come to realize wisdom's eternal happiness.'

The second technique of meditation on death is to visualize yourself as undergoing the death process.

There is both an exoteric and an esoteric way of practising this technique. The exoteric way is to visualize yourself as lying on your bed, dying. Your parents and friends surround you, lamenting. The radiance of your countenance has faded and your nostrils droop. Your lips dry and slime begins to form on your teeth. All grace



has gone from your form and your body looks quite ugly. Your body heat drops, your breathing becomes heavy and you exhale more than you inhale. All the negative karmas created during your lifetime arise within your mind and you are filled with regret. You, look to all sides for help, but help cannot come.

The esoteric technique of meditation on the death process is much more complex. To do it in full detail requires Tantric initiation. This method is performed in all Anuttara-Yoga Tantra systems, in the phase of the practice known as *Taking Dharmakaya, Death, as the Path*. Only a limited portion of the teaching can be imparted openly. The explanations concerning the mandala, the Five Buddha Families and the Clear Light must be omitted.

The meditation deals with the dissolution of the *twenty-five coarse substances*, an important topic in Tantric practice. What are the *twenty-five coarse substances*? The five psychophysical constituents (form, feeling, recognition, volitional formations and consciousness); the four elements (earth, air, fire and water); the twelve entrances (objects of sight, smell, taste, hearing, touch and ideation, and the sensory powers enabling the perception of these objects) and the five imperfect wisdoms (Mirror-like Wisdom, Wisdom of Equality, Discriminating Wisdom, Accomplishing Wisdom and the Wisdom of Dharmadhatu). These wisdoms are called 'imperfect' because they are mentioned in reference to someone who has not attained Buddhahood.

When death comes naturally to a being, it comes as a process of gradual disintegrations. The first stage of this process is the simultaneous disintegration of the psychophysical constituent of form, the imperfect Mirror-like Wisdom, the earth element, the sensory power on which sight relies and the objects of sight. An outer sign manifests as a result of the disintegration of each of these five attributes, respectively as follows: the body withers and loses vitality; the eyes blur; one can no longer move the limbs; blinking ceases; the radiance of the body fades. These are outer signs and can therefore be witnessed by others. With the disintegration of these five attributes, the dying person experiences an inner sign, which can only be seen by himself, of a mirage-like vision filling all space.

The second stage is the disintegration of the psychophysical constituent of feeling, the imperfect Wisdom of Equality, the water element, the sensory power on which hearing relies and the objects of hearing. Again, there is an outer sign accompanying the disintegration of each of these five attributes. These signs are: one loses discrimination as to whether sensations are pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent; the lips dry, perspiration stops and blood and semen coagulate; outer sounds can no longer be heard and even the subtle humming of the ears ceases. The dying person experiences the inner sign of a smoke-like vision filling all space.

The third stage is the disintegration of the psychophysical constituent of recognition, the imperfect Discriminating Wisdom, the fire element, the sensory power on which smell relies and the objects of smell. The five outer signs that manifest are: one can no longer recognize the purpose of anything said by those who surround one; memory of even the names of parents, family, friends and so forth is lost; bodily heat lessens and the powers of digestion and food assimilation cease; exhalation is strong

and inhalation weak; the power to recognize smells fades. The dying person experiences the inner sign of a subtle flame-like vision filling space.

The fourth stage is the disintegration of the psychophysical constituent of volitional formations, the imperfect Accomplishing Wisdom, the air element, the sensory power on which taste relies and the objects of taste. The five outer signs are: all physical abilities fail; all purpose is forgotten; the major and minor energy forces of the body dissolve into the heart *cakra* (wheel); the tongue becomes blue; all powers of taste fade. The inner sign is that of a vision of light, like that given off by an oil lamp.

At this point in the process, a doctor would declare the person dead. However, as consciousness still abides in the body, this is not so.

Now, with the loss of the airs supporting it, a cell of the original sperm that came from the father at the time of conception and which had since been stored in the crown *cakra*, flows down into the central nadi and comes to the heart. Due to its passing through the knots of the *cakras*, a vision of snowy whiteness is experienced.

Then, due to the loss of the airs supporting it, a cell of the original ovum that came from the mother at the time of conception and which had since been stored in the navel *cakra*, flows into the central nadi and also comes to the heart. Due to its passing through the knots of the *cakras*, a vision of redness, like a sunset, is experienced.

The sperm and ovum now come together. A vision of darkness is experienced, as when the sky is completely overcast with thick clouds. Ordinary persons here fall into a faint. For a Tantric Yogi, this is an excellent condition for special meditation.

Eventually, the heart gives a slight tremble and consciousness passes out of the body. There is an experience of clear light, as of the coming of dawn on a dark and moonless morning. This is 'The Clear Light of Death', the appearance of which indicates that the death process is complete.

For the majority of beings, these experiences are totally uncontrolled and terrifying. Because of the preparations that he made while alive, the Tantric practitioner has mastery of them and uses them to his own advantage. Many Lamas have attained Buddhahood at the very moment of death.

Air and consciousness are the most important topics in Tantra. Both have their gross and subtle aspects. Gross air forms the body of this life; gross consciousness gives it sensory awareness. At the time of death, both of these gross qualities dissolve into their subtle aspects, which go on to Enlightenment.

The real palace of the mind is the heart. Here mind resides in the non-dissipating drop (*bindu*, thig-le), between the ovum and semen of mother and father. This is the gross non-dissipating drop. The subtle non-dissipating drop is the combination of subtle air and consciousness. The former is called non-dissipating because it endures until death, the latter because it endures until Enlightenment. Meditation on the death process involves meditation on both of these drops.

Death meditation is of paramount importance. It was Buddha's first teaching when he taught the Four Noble Truths at the Deer Park, Sarnath; and it was his final teaching for he died to impress the idea of impermanence upon

the minds of his disciples.

Buddha once said, 'Everything in the three worlds is impermanent, like autumn clouds. The birth and death of beings is like the scenes of a drama. Human life is like a flash of lightning in the sky or like the waters of a mountain stream.'

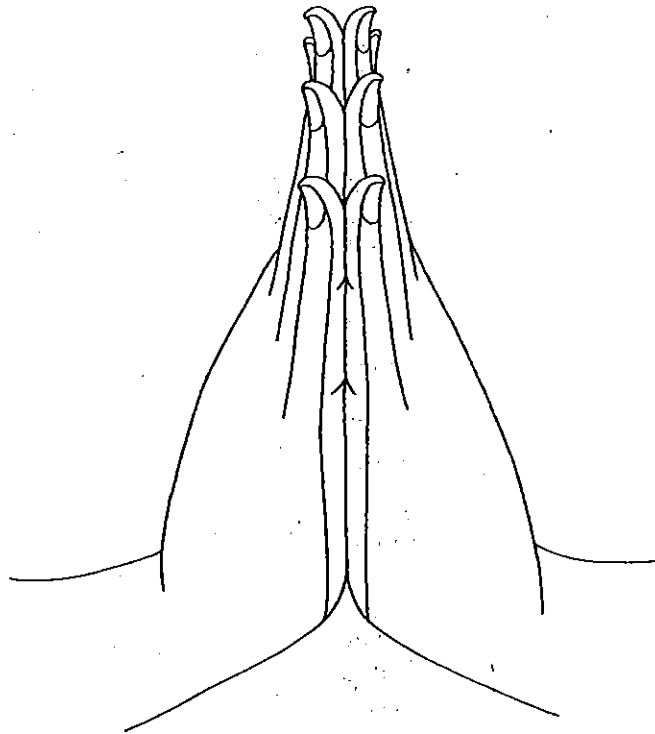
If you meditate properly on death in accordance with either of the two methods, the *three Roots, nine Reasons* and *three Determinations* or the technique of visualizing yourself as undergoing the death process, there is no doubt that you will benefit.

If a dog rushes out to bite you, there is no value in only experiencing fear; you should use the fear to propel yourself into avoiding being bitten. Similarly, there is no point in merely fearing death. Use this fear to develop the wisdom which is beyond the fangs of death.

You should try to practise Dharma, to practise it right now and to practise it purely. Dharma is the map which shows the way whereby the realisation of the conventional and ultimate modes of existence may be found. It is the food which nourishes pilgrims. It is the escort that guides you through the hazardous passes on the road to Enlightenment.

Practice has many levels, the most basic of which is the keeping of a *good heart*, a heart of love and compassion. Even if you cannot find strength or time to take up the higher meditational practices or philosophical studies, at least try to maintain a sympathetic attitude towards your fellow beings, an attitude which never harms but only helps others. If you do this negativity will slowly fall away. Then, at the time of death, you will be able to take refuge in the Three Jewels and have confidence in obtaining a good rebirth. This is the 'consciousness transference' method for the man of minimal practice.

A more ambitious practitioner tries to develop renunciation, the *Three Higher Trainings* (morality, *samadhi* and wisdom) and the *Enlightened Attitude* of wanting to attain Full Buddhahood as a means of benefiting all sentient beings. When he has gained a degree of these three qualities, he enters the ocean of Tantra in order to realize more quickly his spiritual aspirations. For only with Tantric practice is it possible to attain Full Buddhahood in as short a period as two or three years. Nonetheless, although it is possible to attain Full Enlightenment so quickly, not all practitioners do so. Therefore, the various techniques of con-



consciousness transference for the man of high motivation were taught.

Consciousness transference, (*po-wa*), literally means 'migration'. This is because the last thought a being has when dying is the force which determines his next rebirth. Many people live virtuously but, by having a negative thought while dying, fall to a lower realm. On the other hand, there are instances of people living evil lives but, by having a positive thought while dying, gain a higher rebirth. The Yoga of Consciousness Transference takes advantage of this phenomenon.

The exclusively Mahayana techniques of consciousness transference may be divided into two categories: those taught in the Sutras and those in the Tantras.

The Sutra method is known as the *Five Powers Application*. It has this name due to the fact that when you know death is approaching, you apply the *Power of Intention*, the *Power of the White Seed*, the *Power of Familiarity*, the *Power of Destruction*, and the *Power of Prayer*.

The Power of Intention: Generate the firm intention not to let the mind become separated during death, *bardo* or rebirth, from the aspiration to attain Full Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings.

The Power of the White Seed: Try to rid the mind of all forms of physical attachment. In order to effect this give away all wealth, property and possessions.

The Power of Destruction: Try to destroy the stains of any negative karmas collected during your lifetime. This is done by applying the four opponent forces: regret, resolve to avoid recreating such negative karmas; taking refuge in the Three Jewels and generating Bodhicitta; and, lastly, purifying the root of the stains by means of meditation upon emptiness, Vajrasattva, etc. If you have any Tantric initiations, invite your Lama and request him to reiniciate you, or if this is not possible, perform the self-initiation ritual.

The Power of Familiarity: As intensely as possible, generate Bodhicitta.

The Power of Prayer: Here, 'prayer' refers to the aspiration of an actual Mahayanist, that all of the suffering, obscurations and tribulations of others may ripen onto oneself, and that one may never be separated from the Mahayana attitude of wanting to achieve Full Enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.

One day when Geshe Potawa was sitting on his throne giving a discourse, he suddenly said, 'May I always be a protector for those who are helpless and a guide to those in confusion.' Then he died.

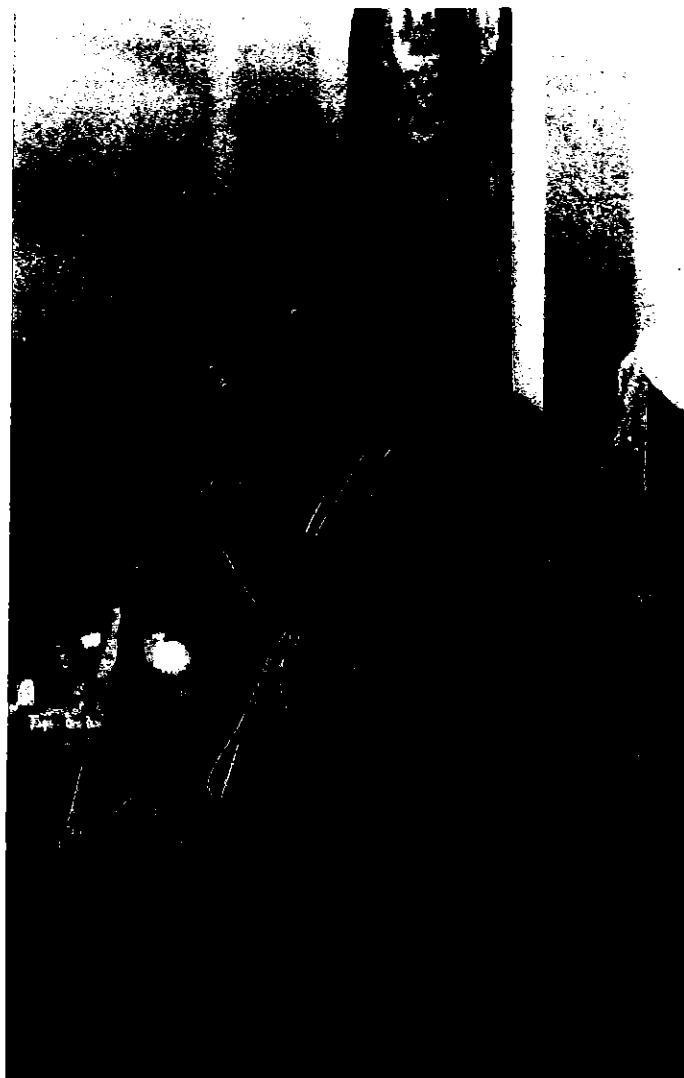
When nearing death, Geshe Chakawa told his disciples that he had long been praying to take rebirth in the lowest hell in order to be able to benefit the beings there, but that he had recently received a dream indicating that he would be reborn in a Pure Land. He requested his disciples to make many offerings to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas that this might be avoided and his prayer fulfilled.

The application of these *Five Powers* at the time of death guarantees a rebirth with conditions suitable for continued practice of the Mahayana path.

If you have a Tantric initiation, you should try to practise the Tantric method of consciousness transference. There are many variations of this method, depending on

what Tantric system you have been initiated into and where you wish to be reborn. One of the most popular of the Tantric methods of transference is that found in the *Vajrayogini Tantra*. It is said that an initiation into *Vajrayogini practice* is like a ticket to the Land of the *Dakinis*.

Consciousness transference as taught in the Tantras is called the *forceful method* because even an extremely deluded person who has performed the most negative actions can take rebirth in a Pure Land by means of it. Its practice during one's life in order to prepare for death is called the *forceful practice* because merely by saying the syllable '*Phat*' one's consciousness is thrown out of the body and by saying the syllable '*Hic*' it is brought back. The sign of accomplishment of this practice is that a blister breaks out on the crown of one's head, emitting a few drops of blood and pus.



Geshe Ngawang Dargay