



# Longchen Nyingtik Phowa

Teachings by

Orgyen Tobgyal Rinpoche



# Longchen Nyingtik Phowa

Teachings by  
Orgyen Tobgyal Rinpoche

Translated by Gyurme Avertin

Edited by Philip Philippou



## Editor's Note

### An Appeal

THESE TEACHINGS were presented over several days during a retreat led by Orgyen Tobgyal Rinpoche at the [Sukhavati care centre](#)<sup>1</sup> in Germany. Orgyen Tobgyal Rinpoche spoke directly in Tibetan and was translated into English, on the spot, by his interpreter, Gyurme Avertin. This original translation has been subsequently checked and corrected, and references made during the teachings further corroborated. Supplementary texts and commentaries also referred to have been added as appendices.

This booklet is being made freely available to Dharma practitioners who wish to learn more about phowa practice.

As a gesture of appreciation to the translator, transcribers, editor and layout designer, who spent many, many hours compiling this booklet, you are warmly invited to make a donation to:

The [ALL-OTR](#)<sup>2</sup> web site and its continued efforts to make Orgyen Tobgyal Rinpoche's freely available,

or

The newly founded [SUKHAVATI HOSPICE](#)<sup>3</sup> which offers compassionate care to terminally ill people, based on the vision of these teachings.

Thank you!

---

1 [sukhavati.eu](#)

2 You can use the donation button in [all-otr.org](#)

3 [spenden.twingle.de/sukhavati-pflege/hospiz/tw62a98cd33ddac/page](#)



# Contents

Preface	5
1. Buddha Amitābha and the Pure Land of Sukhāvātī	7
2. How to Practice Phowa	25
3. How to Practice for Someone who has Just Died	49
4. Phowa Made Easy	69
5. Phowa in a Nutshell	95
6. Questions about Phowa Practice	109
Appendices	127
I. Transference: Enlightenment without Meditation from The Heart-Essence of the Vast Expanse	129
II. Transferring the Consciousness of the Dead	133
III. A Short and Clear Arrangement of the Phowa Practice from the Longchen Nyingtik Cycle of Dzogpachenpo	139
IV. Aspiration for Birth in the Pure Realm of Sukhavati	153
V. Brief Sukhāvātī Aspiration	169
VI. The Thirty-five Buddhas of Confession	171
VII. The Secret Crown Seed Tantra that is the Only Child of All Buddhas	173
VIII. Special Dharanis	175





## Preface

IN THE SUMMER of 2018, Orgyen Tobgyal Rinpoche was invited to visit the Sukhavati spiritual care centre in Berlin, Germany, to present teachings on phowa (transference) and other practices from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition aimed at helping people who are dying or recently deceased.

During the first three days of his visit, Orgyen Tobgyal Rinpoche presented extensive teachings on the practice of phowa according to the Longchen Nyingtik tradition, drawing upon the root terma text itself as well as supporting texts by Jigme Lingpa and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo. With his consummate knowledge of the Buddhist Vajrayana teachings, Orgyen Tobgyal Rinpoche gave detailed, step-by-step guidance on the practice of phowa, resulting in a complete and thorough instruction for aspiring practitioners.

These teachings were lent added poignancy considering where they took place and the audience who attended. Sukhavati is a pioneering project to provide far reaching spiritual support, based on the Buddhist teachings, to people who are seriously ill or dying. Many of the audience were drawn from spiritual care backgrounds and end-of-life care, and therefore these teachings were of far more than mere academic interest.

It is hoped that the publication of this manual will support these and other practitioners in their practice of phowa, a practice that can be of such inestimable benefit to people who have just died.

The manual is dedicated towards each and every being finding true liberation and ultimate peace in the glorious realm of Sukhāvātī.



# 1. Buddha Amitābha and the Pure Land of Sukhāvati

FIRSTLY, I'D LIKE to offer you all my greetings by saying, Tashi Delek, according to our custom in Tibet.

I've been here to Sukhāvati once before, just after you bought the land, to perform a consecration ritual. And now on this occasion, I've been invited to return to talk to you about phowa and a few other related topics.

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, firstly you receive teachings from a qualified master and then you put them into practice, with the intention of freeing yourself from the cycle of birth and death that is our conditioned existence. That's the proper way to follow the path of dharma.

According to the tradition of India and Tibet, when a teaching is given, the teacher is seated on a high throne as a mark of respect. Actually it should be a throne that is mounted on lions, if you follow the tradition exactly. The students sit lower on the floor, offer prostrations and fold their hands together to show their respect. Both the teacher who gives the teaching and the students who receive it should call to mind the proper motivation. This is explained in great detail in the Buddhist teachings—the appropriate motivation that you should cultivate, how you can avoid negative frames of mind, and the proper conduct that you need to follow. This tradition goes back thousands of years.

Today, however, I'm not going to follow this tradition. Nowadays, when someone expounds the Dharma we call that a 'teaching'. The word 'teaching' in English has a connotation of study, rather like the study you do at school. Basically, the teacher explains something

to you that you didn't know before, so that you can acquire that knowledge. These days, we don't particularly follow those old customs where the teacher sits on a high throne and the students prostrate before him, sitting with their hands folded at their heart while they receive the teaching. I'll sit on the throne just for today, since you've already placed it here for me, but from tomorrow I won't do that.

Even though, normally, it's quite important that you have the thought in your mind, "I'm receiving a teaching from a lama", I'm asking you here not to think like that. Instead, I want you to simply think, "I'm here to gain some knowledge and learn about things that I didn't know before." That's all.

When you receive a teaching, your intention should be to put it into practice, to apply it single-mindedly. Furthermore, your motivation for doing this should be based on the wish to liberate all sentient beings who pervade the expanse of space from the ocean-like suffering of saṃsāra. If you truly hold that attitude in your heart and mind, it is said to generate an infinite amount of merit—both for the teacher who expounds the teaching and the student who listens. This merit should in turn be dedicated towards the enlightenment of all sentient beings. These are the 'three noble principles': good in the beginning, good in the middle and good in the end.

The topic that we will be discussing today is not so easy to explain or understand, but let's continue.

Normally when you study something, if you find the information to be useful, you will retain it and use it later. If it's not useful, you'll simply forget about it. That's the kind of attitude I want you to have here today.

You should know that we lamas will never force you to do anything. You receive teachings in order to learn about something and to then apply it in practice. You're completely free to choose whether you want to do this or not, it's your choice. You're all adults here in this room, so each one of you needs to think personally

whether or not you want to follow this teaching. Please don't come to me afterwards saying that I forced you to be here, that I misled you, or anything like that! It's your decision to be here.

Now let's begin with the actual topic of today, which is phowa. Phowa is a Tibetan word which means 'transference'; transference from one place to another. When you say, for example, that you're moving house from one location to another the same word (phowa) is used in Tibetan. The phowa that we are speaking of here, however, refers to the transference of our consciousness from the realm of saṃsāra (conditioned existence), which is likened to an ocean of suffering, to a 'pure field' where we only experience well-being and bliss. We transfer our mind from an impure field, somewhere in saṃsāra, to a pure field that brings us much closer to enlightenment, a place where we can follow the path to the omniscient state of liberation.

So we transfer ourselves from the condition in which we find ourselves now, to somewhere else. That 'somewhere else' needs to be clearly identified. For example, if you want to travel somewhere, you need to know where your destination is, otherwise you'll never reach there. In this case, since we are explaining the practice according to the tradition of Longchen Nyingtik, the place that we are aiming for, that we wish to transfer ourselves to, is the pure land of Buddha Amitābha, which is called 'Sukhāvātī'.

Who first spoke about the protector Amitābha and his pure land? Who discovered it? And where is it? I'm a hundred per cent sure you will ask questions like this! In all likelihood, a Tibetan, Chinese or Japanese person would never ask such questions, but you—almost certainly, you will. So let's clarify these points.

The person who first spoke about this pure land is known as, 'The One who Dispels the Darkness of Sentient Beings'—the completely enlightened Buddha Śākyamuni, the fourth Buddha of our era. The word 'buddha' in Tibetan is 'sangye' which comprises two syllables which mean 'purified' and 'fully blossomed'. A fuller explanation

of the term is: ‘purified of the veil of obscurations so that all the qualities of wisdom fully blossom’. This is what we call a buddha. To put it simply, a buddha is someone who knows everything and has reached their full potential.

When we come to speak about the different practices for the moment of death, such as phowa and purification, we need to go a little more deeply into what we mean by a buddha. In particular, we need to look into the explanations found in the Nyingma tradition which describes the buddha as being endowed with the three *kāyas*. These three *kāyas* are the *dharmakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya* and *nirmāṇakāya*. We don’t need to go into the history or background of these three *kāyas* but some explanation is needed.

The *dharmakāya* pervades all sentient beings, which is why it can be of benefit to them. If it didn’t, it would have no power or ability to be of any help. The problem is, we just don’t see it. Next there’s the *saṃbhogakāya* which is like the unfolding of the *dharmakāya*, in a more manifest form. These two buddha manifestations, however, still need to come to the level of sentient beings in order to be of actual benefit to them. Therefore we have the *nirmāṇakāya* manifestations, which are the ones that can benefit sentient beings.

When we refer to the Buddha Śākyamuni, we speak of him as a *nirmāṇakāya* manifestation who has the power to help human beings. The *nirmāṇakāya* Buddha Śākyamuni is spoken of in different ways according to the different levels of Buddhist teaching. To put it simply, when we speak of the Buddha Śākyamuni, we are referring to the one who reached full enlightenment at the Vajra Seat in Bodhgayā, and who turned the wheel of dharma at Vārāṇasī. I’m sure you all know about the life story of the Buddha.

## The Amitābha Sūtra

IN GENERAL, BUDDHAS benefit beings through their ‘twelve deeds’. According to the perception of sentient beings, these twelve deeds encompass the entirety of the Buddha’s life and actions. The Buddha himself has never been deluded, as he said, “Even though I have never been born, yet I appear in the perception of sentient beings”.<sup>1</sup>

Amongst all the different activities of the Buddha, the one that is of greatest benefit to sentient beings is the ‘inexhaustible wheel of enlightened speech’, i.e. giving teachings. This is described as ‘turning the wheel of the dharma’ and we speak sometimes of the three yānas or vehicles, or nine yānas, and so on. What we will focus on here today is the sūtra level of teachings and within that category, the sūtras of the Mahayāna vehicle. Specifically, we will be looking into the *Amitābha Sūtra* which was taught by the Bhagavān Buddha Śākyamuni.<sup>2</sup>

In this Sūtra we find the following verse. Firstly, the Buddha addresses himself to Ānanda who stood at the head of a vast assembly of monks who had gathered for the teaching:

Ānanda, every sentient being who repeatedly brings to mind the appearance of this thus-gone one, cultivates countless roots of virtue, fully dedicates them towards the attainment of enlightenment by giving rise to bodhicitta, and prays to be reborn in that world, will see the thus-gone one, the foe-destroyer, the completely enlightened

---

1 Quote from the *Diamond Cutter Sutra*.

2 This sūtra is known as *The Array of Amitābha*, or ‘longer’ Sukhāvatī sūtra. The shorter one is called *The Display of the Pure Land of Sukhāvatī* and has been translated by 84000 (see <https://read.84000.co/translation/UT22084-051-003.html>). There are three sūtras that discuss the pure realm of Amitābha (Sukhāvatī). The Kangyur includes Tibetan translations of the two texts just mentioned. The third, *The Amitāyus Meditation Sūtra*, is only extant in Chinese. All three have been translated into English from Chinese: see Inagaki, Hsiao, trans. *The Three Pure Land Sūtras*. Revised Second Edition. Vol. 12. BDK English Tripiṭaka. Berkeley, Ca.: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2003. [https://www.bdk.or.jp/document/dgtl-dl/dBET\\_ThreePureLandSūtras\\_2003.pdf](https://www.bdk.or.jp/document/dgtl-dl/dBET_ThreePureLandSūtras_2003.pdf)

buddha Amitābha, surrounded by many assemblies of monks, appear in front of them when the time of death gets close; as their minds are filled with sincere faith during death and transference upon meeting the bhagavān Amitābha, they will be reborn in Sukhāvātī, ‘the realm of bliss’.

These are the words spoken by the Buddha himself and as Buddhists, we regard anything that he says as being utterly true and flawless. This is how we relate to the Buddha’s teachings, we don’t consider there’s the slightest trace of fault or error in anything that he said. Of course, if you don’t have that kind of faith in the Buddha’s words, there’s nothing I can do! It’s quite possible you might doubt what he said, since these days there seem to be many people who don’t trust what the Buddha taught.

It is said of all the teachings that the Bhagavān Buddha Śākyamuni gave, the *Amitābha Sūtra* and the *Sūtra on the Array of the Tathāgata Akṣobhya* are of greatest benefit to sentient beings. The sūtra that presents the names of Amitābha, the pure field of Sukhāvātī that he manifests, and his mantra, and the sūtra that presents the pure fields that Akṣobhya manifests, the benefits of hearing his name, and his mantra, are said to be of greatest benefit to people living in this current age.

To put it simply, the Bhagavān Buddha Śākyamuni taught the Amitābha Sūtra since he knew it would be of great benefit to those beings fortunate enough to hear it.

The teaching was given whilst the Buddha was staying at a place called Śrāvastī. In this teaching, he explained that far beyond the western horizon, slightly elevated above, beyond countless buddha fields, lay the pure realm of Buddha Amitābha, known as Sukhāvātī.

In this buddha field, there’s not the slightest trace of any kind of impurity. Right now, we live in the buddha field of Buddha Śākyamuni where both pure and impure appearances exist. In Sukhāvātī, the Pure Land of Great Bliss, there’s no impurity whatsoever, everything



that appears is utterly pure. If you want to know what pure and impure appearances are, a lot of explanation would be needed—but I don't think there's any point to go into that now. I heard that many years ago, when a lama was giving a teaching about Sukhāvātī here in Germany, he stated that there were no women in Amitābha's pure land. The translator, who was a nun, instead of translating what he said, turned on the lama and asked him angrily, "Why are you saying this?". She then started to argue with him.

There's a lot to explain and understand about the purity of this buddha field. If you want an idea of what Buddha Amitābha's pure realm is actually like, you should read the *Aspiration for Birth in the Pure Realm of Sukhāvātī* composed by Karma Chakmé.<sup>3</sup> The buddha field is described in great length and detail there. To give you just some examples, it is said that when you walk in Sukhāvātī, the ground is exceptionally soft and rises to support your feet with each new step that you take. The land is full of jewel mountains and wish-fulfilling trees, and the sound of the dharma can constantly be heard. Even though there are no women to be found, there are hosts of beautiful goddesses constantly making offerings there. This is how the buddha field is described.

The buddha of this pure realm is Amitābha. Why did Amitābha choose to stay in this particular buddha field and to take care of it? The reason is that while he was still a bodhisattva, before he became a fully-enlightened buddha, he made forty-eight great vows, which are explained in *The Array of Amitābha Sūtra*.<sup>4</sup> Amongst them was the repeated, magnanimous wish to manifest this pure realm in order to free all sentient beings from their suffering. Once he became enlightened, he then took care of this buddha field. The buddha field arose as a direct result of all the merit he had accumulated over countless kalpas while accomplishing those forty-eight great vows.

---

3 See Appendix IV

4 See Inagaki, Hsiao, trans. *The Three Pure Land Sūtras*, pages 12-18.

Amitābha has remained in Sukhāvātī ever since, for a length of time equivalent to fifteen days of the Buddha's life. According to how we measure time, the Buddha appeared in our world 2,500 years ago, but the equivalent span of time in Sukhāvātī measures just fifteen days. This is the explanation that I heard from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche.

Amongst all those forty-eight great vows, the most important was the one in which Amitābha prayed that whoever hears his name at the moment of death, and supplicates him with a pure heart and mind, would immediately be reborn in the pure land of Sukhāvātī. He made the firm pledge, "If, when I attain buddhahood, sentient beings who think of me, who cultivate roots of virtue, and who sincerely dedicate their merit towards rebirth in my pure land, should not have their wish fulfilled, may I not attain that perfect enlightenment." The result of that aspiration, which he made whilst still a bodhisattva, is that whoever hears his name and prays to him with pure faith and longing at the moment of death, will be reborn in the pure realm of Sukhāvātī. This is all due to the power of his prayer and the vast way in which he generated bodhicitta.

From our limited human perspective, perhaps even greater still was the aspiration that he made that simply by hearing his name whispered into its ears, even an animal would be reborn in Sukhāvātī when it died. They would go directly to Sukhāvātī, without taking any other rebirth along the way. I can distinctly remember times when we were driving through the countryside with Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, he would suddenly shout out, "Gonpo Öpame!" (Protector Amitābha!) whenever we passed by an animal in the fields, such as a cow.

If you want to know more about these forty-eight vows, you should look into the commentary written by Lama Mipham Rinpoche.<sup>5</sup> You will find more explanation there.

---

5 To our knowledge, this text has yet to be translated, however *The Amitāyus Meditation Sūtra* referred to earlier, which has been translated from Chinese into English, can be consulted.

The next question you'll probably ask is, "Does Amitābha live all alone in the buddha field of Sukhāvātī?" The answer is no, he does not. He has two main companions, who remain by his side—Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi—but there are millions upon millions of other bodhisattvas who also gather around him.

You might well ask, "If there are no women in Sukhāvātī, how is it possible to be reborn there?" The answer is that when you are reborn in Sukhāvātī, you are miraculously born in the heart of a lotus flower. This is an important point to clarify, right? This is one of the special qualities of this buddha field. Just to think about this buddhafield brings immense benefit.

## **The Four Causes that Lead to Rebirth in Sukhāvātī**

THE *ARRAY OF Amitābha Sūtra* is quite extensive but the few lines you have been given here summarize its essence. They mention four causes which can lead to rebirth in the pure land of Sukhāvātī.

### **The Support**

The first cause is what we call 'the support', the field of accumulation, which here means Buddha Amitābha and the pure land of Sukhāvātī. You need to make the following wish: "When I die, may I immediately be reborn in Sukhāvātī without taking any other rebirth along the way." Then you need to contemplate Amitābha's pure land in the manner that I just described. Somewhere towards the west, lies the pure land of Sukhāvātī where Buddha Amitābha resides. He is ruby red in colour and sits beneath a fully-blossoming bodhi tree. On his left and right hand side are the bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi, and a vast throng of fully ordained monks and bodhisattvas surround him. You need to hold this picture in your mind and have full confidence that this is how it really is, in actuality. It says in the text that you need to visualise

them very clearly—as Karma Chakmé wrote, “wearing the three dharma robes, they fill the realm in yellow<sup>6</sup> and bear the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of a buddha”.

According to the lamas of old, the way you would train in this visualization is by placing an image of Sukhāvātī near to your pillow so that when you go to sleep at night, you can easily recall Amitābha and his pure land, and keep that in your mind. But also during the day, as many times as you can, you should try to remember and picture the pure land of Sukhāvātī, until you go to sleep.

In the prayer to the pure land of Sukhāvātī composed by Jigme Lingpa, he says that the Buddha told Ānanda that if he rose to his feet and stood above the sugar cane, facing the west, and offered flowers, incense and water, whilst thinking of the pure land of the protector Amitābha, he would be reborn there through the power of his aspiration.<sup>7</sup>

This is the first of the four causes.

### Accumulation of Merit and Purification of Negativity

The second cause is the accumulation of merit and purification of negativity. A concise way to accomplish this is through the ‘seven branch offering’. All the different methods of accumulating merit and purifying negativity are included within this practice, in a complete way.

I’m sure you know about the seven branch offering.

- The first branch is *prostration*. Most Tibetans, at least in the past, would sleep with their head pointing towards the west. They’d ask “Which direction is west?” and would lie down so that their head faced that way. They’d also offer prostrations while facing

---

6 op.cit., page 99.

7 To our knowledge, no English translation of this prayer has yet been made.

the west at least three times a day, thinking this was where Amitābha and his pure land lay. Most of them would also recite the *Short Amitābha Mōnlam* from the terma of Tertön Mingyur Dorje<sup>8</sup> while they did this. There are a lot of elderly people in this room today and perhaps some of you are not able to offer prostrations, in which case you can simply think of Amitābha and the pure land of Sukhāvātī and that will be sufficient.

It is said that there is greater merit  
In hearing of Amitābha's name and Sukhāvātī  
And joining one's palms with faith...<sup>9</sup>

It is said that merely bringing your hands together at your heart whilst you think of Amitābha and the pure land of Sukhāvātī brings inconceivable merit.

— The second branch is making *offerings*. These are the traditional offerings of drinking water, cleansing water, flowers, incense, light, scented water, food and music. This is easy to do—you can make actual offerings or simply imagine them. When Jowo Jé Palden Atisha went to Tibet he said that a simple offering of water was all that one needed in order to accumulate merit. But nowadays even water is becoming scarce! After water comes the offering of flowers. It doesn't matter what kind of flower it is, or whether someone actually accepts it or not, it is an offering to anyone who sees it. The Karmapa remarked that the Tibetan custom of plucking flowers from the ground to use as offerings to the buddhas wasn't the best approach. He said that just to see the flower and to offer it mentally was enough, you don't actually have to pull it from the earth, and it's better that you don't. If

---

8 See Appendix V

9 Karma Chakmé's *Aspiration for Birth in the Realm of Sukhāvātī*, Appendix IV

you think about it, he makes a really good point. If you don't uproot the flower, it will remain there longer. Better still, says the Karmapa, is to plant flowers—that's an even greater way to accumulate merit. Of course, it's not just about planting a flower, you have to think of it as an offering in order to accumulate merit.

Then comes the offering of incense which contains all kinds of fragrances and perfumes. After that is the offering of light. Traditionally we offer a butter lamp but it needn't be restricted just to that—anything that produces light can be offered, such as the sun, the moon, electric lights... any kind of light. When Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö went to Calcutta he wrote a poem in which he marvelled at how there was a constant offering of light, day and night, throughout the city.<sup>10</sup> These are equally worthy offerings. The point is that the light eliminates darkness; it doesn't matter what kind of light it is.

Then we make an offering of food and it's best here to offer the food that you eat. That's followed by the offering of music which can be the sounds of nature or any kind of music that we human beings compose. Even the sound of clapping your hands or shouting can be considered as an offering of music. Once Patrul Rinpoche and Nyoshul Lungtok were staying together in the wilderness. They wanted to practice tsok every tenth and twenty-fifth day but only had one dāmaru between them to play the ritual music. They didn't even have a vajra and bell. So Patrul Rinpoche told Nyoshul Lungtok just to bang two stones together, as a replacement for the bell, and that would suffice.

As you can see, it's very easy to make these offerings but you need to dedicate them mentally—the crucial point is to consider that you are offering them to the deities. In the context of this practice,

---

10 For a translation of this poem, see: <https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/jamyang-khyentse-chokyi-lodro/praise-kolkata>

we should think that we are making our offerings to the Tathāgata Amitābha and his retinue.

— The third branch is *confession* which is to purify your negativity. This is based on what are known as the ‘four powers’ or ‘four strengths’.<sup>11</sup>

— After that comes *rejoicing*. I’ll tell you a story here. Once, a Chinese lady came to see me and said that because of a problem with her legs, she was unable to do so much as one prostration, let alone the 100,000 sometimes required. She asked me, “What can I do?” So I suggested that she sponsor someone else to do the prostrations for her, in her name; the act of sponsoring the prostrations would connect her to the merit of the practice. But she said that she didn’t have any money, so that wouldn’t work either. She asked me again, “What can I do?” So I said, as a last resort, that she should go to Bodhgaya and rejoice at the hundreds of people who were offering prostrations there each day to the seat of Buddha’s enlightenment. She should rejoice in the millions of prostrations that they were accumulating. But she doubted that advice and asked me, “Would that really work?” So I insisted and said yes, according to the Buddha, whose words are undecieving, it most definitely would.

Rejoicing is very easy, isn’t it? You don’t need to make any great effort, do you? You just need to think of it in your mind. You just need to rejoice.

— Then comes the branch of *requesting to the turn the wheel of the dharma* and here you need to remember and keep in mind that dharma teachings are the greatest possible source of benefit for sentient beings.

---

<sup>11</sup>See Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, page 265-267.

—The next is *requesting the buddhas to remain*: you pray that the buddhas do not pass into parinirvāṇa, but remain here amongst us.

—The final branch is *dedication*.

In order to accumulate merit and purify obscurations we have many different kinds of practice in our tradition, such as the seven branch offering that I have just explained, but also the maṇḍala offering and various other types of meditation.

Let's recap a little. The first cause to be reborn in Sukhāvātī is contemplation of 'the support', in other words, calling to mind the pure land of Buddha Amitābha. The second cause is accumulating merit and purifying obscurations. The more merit you accumulate, the more obscurations you purify.

### Generating Bodhicitta

The third cause is generating bodhicitta, the precious mind of enlightenment. It's very important that the first two causes are held by this third cause, bodhicitta. If you can truly keep this motivation in your mind, there won't be any mistake in what you do, and you will realize your goal. If, on the other hand, you only think of yourself when you pray to Amitābha, saying "May I (alone) be reborn in the pure land of Sukhāvātī", we cannot say this is incorrect, but it's a limited kind of motivation. Whereas if you pray thinking, "May I and all sentient beings, infinite in number, be reborn all together in the pure land of Sukhāvātī", that motivation is far vaster and will go a lot further. It's purely a matter of how you think, the kind of motivation that you have.

Concerning bodhicitta, there are two types: bodhicitta in aspiration and bodhicitta in action. Both need to be present when you accumulate merit, pray to be reborn in Sukhāvātī, and so on.

In summary, to be reborn in Sukhāvātī, we need to have faith in Amitābha and to contemplate his pure land, holding a clear picture



of it in our minds. We also need to accumulate merit and purify our obscurations by reciting the seven branch offering. But even more importantly, we need to arouse bodhicitta in our hearts and minds.

### **Dedication and Aspiration**

The fourth cause is dedication and aspiration. Aspiration prayers are very important since every single quality of the Buddha—the thirty-two major marks, eighty minor marks, eighteen unshared qualities, and so on—arose solely as a result of aspiration. This topic already came up when I spoke about Amitābha’s incredible ability to bring anyone who hears his name directly to the pure field of Sukhāvātī. This power and ability, and all the others that he possesses, arose as a direct consequence of the forty-eight vows that he made.

In the same way, our teacher, the Bhagavān Buddha Śākyamuni, acquired the inconceivable qualities of a fully enlightened Buddha as a result of having made innumerable prayers of aspiration during his many lifetimes. The foremost power that all the buddhas and bodhisattvas rely upon in order to benefit sentient beings is that of aspiration.

If you make aspiration prayers in the presence of a representation of the buddha’s body, speech or mind, it is said to greatly increase their power and to speed up their accomplishment. The purity of your prayer is also important. What does purity mean here? To put it very simply, when you think only of yourself and your own benefit, that’s impurity. If you think of others and generate the intention to truly be of benefit to them, that’s what we call pure.

These four causes were mentioned by the Buddha in the first few lines of the quote you have been given from the *Array of Amitābha Sūtra*:

Ānanda, every sentient being who repeatedly brings to mind the appearance of this thus-gone one, cultivates countless roots of virtue,

fully dedicates them towards the attainment of enlightenment by giving rise to bodhicitta, and prays to be reborn in that world...

These statements are true, they're not some sort of tall story that's been made up just to make you feel better. They are the undeceiving words of the Buddha, which if you're a Buddhist, you can rely upon completely. That's why I shared this quote with you today—to be on the safe side! I extracted the quote from the Kangyur, the collected words of the Buddha that have been translated into Tibetan. If you don't trust these words, then it means you're not a Buddhist, in which case, I've nothing more to say to you!

What benefit does all this have? To put it simply, it's so that we can leave this impure world that we now live in, to be reborn in a pure land. What we call the 'impure world' is basically the three realms of *saṃsāra*, the nature of which is likened to an ocean of suffering. But when we start talking about the ocean of suffering in the three realms of *saṃsāra*, people don't seem to like it very much and become depressed. I've already received some such complaints before. People have come to me and said, "I've quite enough problems already in my life and when I went to listen to Kalu Rinpoche, all he did was talk about the endless suffering of *saṃsāra*. It nearly drove me crazy. I felt like committing suicide!" Somebody came to me some years ago to tell me that and I thought probably he was telling the truth. I think it's right in a way—if you only dwell upon suffering, that's how you'll end up. But although in the teachings we firstly talk about the suffering of *saṃsāra*, we then go on to talk about the way we can free ourselves from that suffering. If you don't know the methods to free yourself from suffering, and only dwell upon the suffering itself, then for sure you'll feel like that.

Therefore, suffering is a topic to avoid. Chagdud Tulku also told me this. He said people in the West have so many problems already, they're so unwell, if you start talking to them about suffering when they come to you, they'll end up crazy. That's not the way. Of

course, there are many people in Europe and America who are quite well and content with their lives, but they tend not to be the ones who come to see us! We only get to see the people with problems. The teachings firstly talk about the shortcomings of saṃsāra, but then about the benefits of liberation. What we should talk about therefore is the benefits of liberation. That's the advice I received from Chagdud Tulku when I saw him in America some years ago, when I accompanied Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche to the enthronement of Surmang Trungpa Rinpoche. This is what he said to me then and I have checked it and found it to be true.

Having said all that, you should at least have some understanding about the suffering of saṃsāra, otherwise why would you seek liberation? There's a minimum that you need to know and be aware of.

It's the same with phowa, in which you transfer your consciousness from the three impure realms of saṃsāric existence to a pure buddha field. If you like saṃsāra and are having a good time there, why would you want to leave? If we're honest with ourselves, many of us do have that kind of attachment to saṃsāra.

Within the phowa teachings, there are clear instructions on how you should orient your mind at the moment of death. You are told to abandon all attachment and grasping onto saṃsāra, so that "not even the thin skin of a tiny sesame seed of attachment remains". You should abandon even the slightest attachment that you have to your family and friends, home and possessions, wealth and so on. You need to abandon *all* grasping. The greatest obstacle to your successful transference is your attachment. If you have a really nice house and feel very comfortable there, you don't want to leave it, right? Why would you? Or if you're living in a country that you feel really happy in, you're not going to think about moving abroad, are you? This is an important point that you need to think about.

Later, I will speak about the practice of phowa, but before that, you need to ask yourself whether this is something that you really want or need? Please reflect on this.

If you want to leave this impure world and transfer yourself to a pure buddha field, then the first thing you need to know is that this is not possible while you're still alive—it can only be done at the moment of death. But if you don't train in this practice now while you're still alive, it's not going to be easy for you to do all of a sudden once you die. Many of you here travel to America and know that before you go there, you need to apply for a visa first. You apply for a visa, then you can go. In a similar way, before you go to Sukhāvātī, you need to prepare yourself by training in the practice of phowa, while you're still alive. When you die, at the very moment of death, is when you need to apply this practice, and it will be easier for you to do if you have trained beforehand. Then you'll be able to do it. So bear this in mind.

## 2. How to Practice Phowa

### History of the Phowa Teachings in Tibet

BEFORE WE TALK about the actual practice itself, we need to look at the history of the phowa teachings, from the Tibetan perspective. There are two main traditions in Tibetan Buddhism: the Nyingma (Ancient school) and Sarma (New school). Whilst phowa is practiced in some of the Sarma schools, not all Gelugpas consider it to be an authentic Buddhist practice. I'm not too familiar with their teachings and therefore cannot say this for certain, I just know that one quite famous Gelugpa master called Pabongka disputed whether phowa was a truly authentic Buddhist practice. He said this because phowa is usually presented as a 'swift and direct path to enlightenment', even for people who have committed negative actions—this, he said, is impossible.

The Sakyapas practice phowa, based on Vajrayoginī. However the Sarma school that practices phowa the most is the Kagyüpa. Their tradition originates with Marpa Lotsāwa who brought the phowa teachings from India to Tibet based on the instructions that he received from Nāropa. Phowa is one of the 'Six Yogas of Nāropa' that are now widely practiced in the Kagyü tradition. The foundation of these teachings is the tantric root text, *Whispered Vajra Words*.

The six yogas are the practices of tummo (inner heat), illusory body, clear light, dream state, phowa (transference), and the bardos (intermediate states). By practicing these six yogas, a practitioner can reach the ultimate state of mahāmudrā (also called the supreme siddhi or enlightenment) within a single lifetime. Firstly you practice

inner heat, then you progress onto the practices of illusory body and clear light. These practices are skilful means that require ‘effort’ or reference point, and prepare the practitioner for the ‘effortless’ practice of Mahāmudrā, which is beyond doing and doer. To evaluate your progress on the path, dream yoga is then practiced. Finally, in case you were unable to accomplish all of those practices before you die, and fall short of reaching the supreme siddhi of mahāmudrā liberation, the practices of phowa and the bardos provide an opportunity for you to attain buddhahood either at the moment of death or in the intermediate states.

These six teachings are known as the ‘Six Yogas of Nāropa’ and were transmitted from Nāropa to Marpa, from Marpa to Milarepa, and so on in an unbroken one-to-one lineage for thirteen generations. They are propagated today by some of the main sub-schools of the Kagyü tradition such as the Drikung, Taklung, Kamtsang and Drukpa. A few other minor Kagyü sub schools still exist in Tibet that also follow these teachings and are very small in size, some no bigger than a single monastery.

Marpa transmitted the phowa teachings to his four main disciples. Based on the pith instructions that he received from Marpa, Milarepa later wrote several texts on the practice of the upper gateways through Khecharī. As a result, the Kagyüpa lineage of phowa teachings spread widely in Tibet and has been practiced now for several generations.

There are many different types of phowa practice including a rare one known as, ‘the profound practice for transference of one’s consciousness into another body’. Once, Milarepa had a vivid dream in which a *ḍākinī* appeared to him, urging him to request Marpa for the transmission of this special practice. Milarepa approached Marpa soon afterwards and made the request. Marpa said that whilst he had heard of the practice and had received the transmission of it many years ago in India, he would need to check whether he had any teachings on it. With the help of Milarepa, Marpa searched for many

days through all the ancient texts that he had brought back with him from India, but couldn't find any reference to it. He decided, therefore, to return to India once more to request transmission and instruction in the practice from his teacher, Nāropa.

As soon as he re-joined his teacher in India, Marpa made the request. Nāropa was very surprised and replied, "Why are you asking me about transference into another body? Is it your own idea, did you receive a prophecy, or did someone else tell you about it?" Marpa then explained that it was one of his students, Töpa Ga (Milarepa), who had wanted to receive instruction in the practice, after a *ḍākinī* had visited him in a dream. Joining his hands together at his heart, Nāropa then recited this now famous prayer:

Across the dark lands to the north,  
Like the sun shining on the snow,  
Is the one called Töpa Ga,  
I pay homage and prostrate to him.

According to legend, Nāropa then faced towards Tibet and bowed down with his hands folded together at his heart; as he did so, all the rocks and trees on the Pulahari mountain where he lived bent that same way too.

Nāropa did then transmit this teaching to Marpa but for whatever reason, the practice never really became firmly established in Tibet.

The lamas say that teachings on phowa can also be found in the *sūtras*, for example, the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*. These teachings were transmitted by masters such as Padampa Sangye and Machik Labdrön, who practiced phowa based on *chö*.

In the Nyingma tradition the phowa teachings are mostly found in the *termas* and not so much in the *kama* lineage. The source of these *terma* teachings is Guru Rinpoche, the second buddha, who was invited to Tibet by the Dharma-King Trisong Detsen, in order to turn the wheel of the inconceivably profound and vast teachings.

Guru Rinpoche attained the highest level of realization, the wisdom body of great transference. His powers were inconceivable—he could turn a kalpa into a second, and a second into a kalpa. When he turned the wheel of dharma, the number of teachings that he gave, and the way in which he gave them, are impossible for minds like ours to fathom.

The main students of Guru Rinpoche, those who had merged their minds with his wisdom mind, later appeared as the one hundred great tertöns in order to benefit sentient beings of future times. There's not a single one of those tertöns who did not reveal some form of phowa practice amongst their revelations. These teachings are propagated by the tertön and within them, the 'six lineages' and 'nine lineages'<sup>12</sup> are perfectly complete, making them a tremendous source of blessings.

This is a brief presentation of how the phowa teachings came to Tibet and the different lineages that subsequently emerged. Lamas always stress the importance of knowing the history of a particular teaching. Why? Because if you know where a teaching comes from, you will have more faith and trust in it, and your diligence and wish to practice it will become stronger.

## Why We Need to Practice Phowa

Let's now look at why we need to practice phowa. Generally speaking, the Sarmapas believe that the basis upon which we can achieve enlightenment is the *view*. According to the Gelugpas, enlightenment

---

12 Termas are not simply texts or objects that have been hidden in a cache until someone finds them, but come to present-day disciples through six types of transmission which, as Rinpoche says, makes them very special: 1) mind direct, 2) symbolic and 3) aural transmissions which are common to kama and terma; then, 4) aspirational empowerment, 5) prophetic authorisation and 6) entrustment to dakinis. The nine transmissions add 7) words of yellow scrolls, 8) the blessing of compassion and 9) liberation upon tasting samaya substances. They are unique to the Nyingma school. Tulku Thondup explains the six lineages in *Hidden Teachings of Tibet*, Wisdom Publications, 1999, pages 63-66.



can only be achieved through a perfect understanding of the genuine view of Madhyamika. The great charioteer and founder of the Gelugpa school, Je Tsongkhapa, gave special instructions on this path. He arrived at a perfect realization of the view after Mañjuśrī appeared to him in a vision during one of his meditation sessions; from that moment onwards, he was able to benefit sentient beings on a vast scale through his dharma teachings and activities.

The ultimate point of the Sakyapa's Lamdré (the path with the result) is the indivisibility of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. In the Kagyüpa tradition, the highest teaching is Mahāmudrā (the great seal), while for the Nyingmapas, it is Dzogpachenpo (the great perfection). The ultimate view of Dzogpachenpo has two aspects—trekchö, the practice of primordial purity, and tögal, the practice of spontaneous presence.

If you arrive at a genuine realization of the view through any one of these approaches, you will have reached buddhahood and there's no need for you to practice phowa. But if that's not the case, then you definitely need to. What's more, if you want to help someone who's not a Buddhist, who hasn't heard a single word of the Buddha's teaching, this practice can really be of benefit to them. It will also benefit Buddhist practitioners who pass away before they've had a chance to complete their path.

Through the practice of phowa, we can purify all of our negativity and reach the state of liberation instantaneously. Milarepa used the following example to explain how this works: imagine there's a valley from which many rivers flow—if you block all the rivers except one, the water will have no choice but to flow through that one channel. The same principle applies to the samādhi of phowa—if you fully direct your consciousness into the central channel and from there eject it into a pure buddha field, you will be liberated, transference will happen.

There are many stories about phowa. Once Milarepa was traveling through the countryside with a group of cotton-clad yogis and they

decided to break their journey by resting in a small village along their way. As they were arriving, a man from that village had just tried to slaughter a sheep by stabbing it in the heart, but because he had lost one of his hands, he failed to kill it in one strike. The wounded sheep staggered towards the yogis bleeding profusely and collapsed at Milarepa's feet, where it promptly passed away. Milarepa was so moved by the sheep's suffering, he immediately practised phowa and sent its consciousness directly to the pure buddha field of Abhirati.<sup>13</sup> He also felt tremendous compassion for the man who had just killed the sheep and set about instructing him in the path of dharma. Later this man was to become a genuine yogi.

In short, phowa is an extremely beneficial way to help people who are unable to exhaust all their karma during their lifetime. It is a very powerful and immediate way to help them.

Whenever someone died in Tibet, regardless of whether or not they were a dharma practitioner, a lama would always be summoned to practice phowa for them. Everyone would feel deeply reassured if a lama was able to perform phowa; they firmly believed this was the best possible way to take care of the dead person. The people in Golok have tremendous faith in Dodrupchen Rinpoche—if he is able to practice phowa for someone, they haven't the slightest doubt this person will be reborn in a pure buddha field. We once had a monk called Lama Khorlo who stayed at our monastery, who came from the Golok region. He told us that where he lived, people believed that if Dodrupchen Rinpoche practiced phowa for someone, they would immediately be reborn in the pure land of Khechari.<sup>14</sup> They had not the slightest doubt about this. They said it was like being

---

13 Abhirati, the buddha field of 'true joy', is the eastern pure realm of Buddha Akṣobhya.

14 Khechari (Kachöma in Tibetan) is a form of Vajrayogini popular in both the Kagyü and Sakya schools. Through her practice, the practitioner can travel to her pure land in this life, or in the bardos: a rain of sindūra and flowers fall, Khechari appears, gives her hand to the practitioner, and takes them to her paradise. Most of the great masters of the Sakyapa tradition such as Tsarchen Losal Gyatso and his spiritual sons followed Khechari to her pure land.

granted a visa, once you get the visa, you can go there immediately, without any difficulty.

The following story appears in the biography of Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje. Once Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje was traveling through Tibet on his horse when he passed by two young boys who were herding cattle in a field. When the two boys saw Do Khyentse pass by, one of them said to the other, “Hey, that’s a really powerful lama who just rode by. People say that if he practices phowa for you, you’ll immediately be reborn in a pure land, without a shadow of doubt. Shall we check him out?” One of the boys lay down on the ground and pretended to be dead, while his friend covered him with a blanket. The friend then ran after Do Khyentse and shouted to him: “It’s terrible, you’ve got to come quickly, my friend has just died! Can you come? Can you do phowa for him?” Without even bothering to dismount from his horse, Do Khyentse let out a loud and forceful ‘Pha!’ and continued to ride on. The boy then ran back to his friend and shook him saying, “It’s okay, you can get up now. He’s just left.” But his friend didn’t move and his body was cold—his consciousness had left his body, the phowa had worked. The boy rushed back to Do Khyentse and confessed that they’d just been playing, that his friend hadn’t really been dead. He pleaded, “Can you bring him back?” But Do Khyentse shook his head and said, “I’m sorry, I can’t help you there. I don’t know how to bring a person back from a pure buddha field to the lower realms. I’ve never received any teachings like that!”

## **Root Terma of the Longchen Nyingtik Phowa**

I have been requested to teach you the practice of phowa according to the terma lineage of Longchen Nyingtik. I think you’re all familiar with the Longchen Nyingtik teachings, so I don’t need to say more about them now.

In general, the terma teachings say that the root of all blessings is the lama, the root of all accomplishment is the yidam, and the root of all activities is the ḍākinī. In short, the three roots. Of these three roots, phowa is mainly connected to the practice of ḍākinī. That is why before you begin the practice of phowa, the deity that you are instructed to visualise yourself as is that of a ḍākinī.

The text has been translated for you so please follow it closely as I explain the practice to you. It begins with the title:

Transference: Enlightenment without Meditation from the  
Longchen Nyingtik (The Heart-Essence of the Vast Expanse)<sup>15</sup>

There's a lot that can be said about the Longchen Nyingtik cycle of teachings but in short they contain practices without elaboration (the completion phase practices of trekchö and tögal) as well as numerous types of generation phase practice that need to be accomplished.

It is clearly stated that by practicing phowa, you can reach the state of enlightenment within just seven days. And should you be unable to practice phowa yourself, an accomplished lama can practice it for you and succeed in transferring your consciousness to a pure land. This is why phowa is described as a practice that brings 'enlightenment without meditation'.

It's actually not so easy to reach full buddhahood! The sūtras say that we need to purify our obscurations and accumulate oceans of merit for three countless aeons before we can attain enlightenment. According to the Secret Mantrayāna, we can reach the 'unified state of Vajradhara', the ultimate fruition, in eight or sixteen lifetimes. Whereas the utmost profound teachings of Dzogpachenpo tell us that we can reach liberation within this very life, in the bardo of

---

15 We have used here the translation made by Adam Pearcey (2018), with revisions by Gyurme Avertin (2021), which is available on the Lotsawa House web site.

the moment of death, or at least in the bardo of dharmatā—there's no talk of a next life in those teachings. In the pith instructions of the Clear Light Great Perfection teachings related to *tögal*, it is even said that a supreme practitioner can attain liberation from the defiled aggregates within just three years, a mediocre practitioner in six years, and a lower capacity practitioner in nine years. This is how long it takes to reach buddhahood, according to those different approaches.

Different explanations are given as to why phowa is referred to as 'enlightenment without meditation' and I myself don't know which one of them is correct. Some lamas say that when you practice phowa, your consciousness is instantly transferred to the 'ground of liberation', the dharmakāya, where you attain complete enlightenment. Others say that your consciousness is transferred to a pure buddha field from which you cannot fall back into one of the lower realms—instead you slowly progress through all the different stages of the path, like climbing the steps of a ladder, until you reach the state of full enlightenment. Ultimately it's the same, you also reach buddhahood this way. These two explanations are given and some lamas even say that both are true.

If a powerful master practices phowa for you whilst he/she remains in the state of the dharmakāya, your consciousness will be transferred there too, and you will be liberated. In the Yeshe Lama text it says that if you rest in the meditation of 'the vision of rigpa reaching its full maturity' and direct your wisdom mind from that state, you will have the power to liberate a few thousand beings.

When Penor Rinpoche offered the realization of his meditation practice to Nyoshul Khenpo, he said that whilst he was not able to benefit every single sentient being in existence, if someone died whom he had a connection to, he was able to liberate them into the primordial ground by resting in meditation and directing his mind from that state. They wouldn't have to wander in *saṃsāra* any longer. Those were his actual words.

Even if your realization is not quite at that level, you can at least ensure that somebody will take a higher rebirth in their next life by practicing phowa for them. You can prevent that person from taking rebirth in one of the lower realms. After he had practiced phowa for someone, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo once said that even though he was not able to send them to a pure buddha field, they had at least taken rebirth as a monk in Tsang, and this would be a step in the right direction on their path to enlightenment.

In the practice text of the Longchen Nyingtik phowa, it says:

*Homage to the expanse of the view!*

Here, the ‘expanse of the view’ refers to the buddha dharmakāya.

This is followed by:

*The path of the clear light Great Perfection  
Is the natural freedom of the dharmakāya, beyond objective.  
Someone who captures this stronghold  
Is beyond that which is transferred and the act of transference.*

If you follow the clear light path of Great Perfection, you have the possibility to attain liberation in the dharmakāya, the ultimate state that is free of any reference or focus; all thoughts and concepts will be liberated and you will no longer need to wander in saṃsāra. If you can seize this stronghold, your realization will be beyond any need for transference. All of you here are students of a Dzogchen master so I’m wondering whether I really need to teach you phowa—you’re probably well beyond that! You only need to stare at the sun, with your mouth gaping open...

Once the Fifth Dzogchen Rinpoche, Thubten Chökyi Dorje, was visiting Golok and was invited to the home of a family whose father had just died. The son thought that his father must have had incredible merit since he passed away just as Dzogchen Rinpoche arrived in their town. He offered Dzogchen Rinpoche half of all the cattle and other animals that he owned and requested him to make sure that his father would not be reborn in a lower realm. Dzogchen Rinpoche nodded and said to the son, “Don’t worry, I’ll take care of it.” The monk who was attending Dzogchen Rinpoche was very impressed with the large offering the son had made and thought that at the very least, Dzogchen Rinpoche should do some formal practice for the father. But Dzogchen Rinpoche didn’t appear to do any practice at all—he just sat down, drank some tea, ate the meat and other delicacies offered to him, and chatted with the people who had gathered there. After a while, he rose to his feet and announced, “It’s time for me to leave”. The monk, however, couldn’t believe that Dzogchen Rinpoche would leave without doing any practice, so he went to check on the father. He looked closely at the corpse and sure enough, could clearly see that hairs were falling out from the crown of its head, a definite sign that phowa had been effected. If, like Dzogchen Rinpoche, you know how to direct your mind through the power of your meditation, you don’t need to practice formally. But that’s not the case for most of us, is it?

The text continues:

*Yet for those who prefer elaborate means of attaining nirvāṇa,  
The ‘Transference: Enlightenment without Meditation’ is taught.*

The first instruction is to practice the preliminaries (refuge and bodhicitta), which are the foundation of all Buddhist practice.

The preliminaries, refuge and bodhicitta are done in the general way.

Here we are following the text exactly as it appears in the terma. Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo wrote an arrangement for the practice which includes all the other prayers that need to be inserted in order to practice the phowa more fully.<sup>16</sup> In this arrangement, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo recommends that we recite the refuge and bodhicitta prayers from the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro, or alternatively, the common refuge formula, “In the Buddha, the dharma...”<sup>17</sup>

The text continues:

*Whether practising for yourself or for another,  
It is crucial to incorporate the four immeasurables.*

Next, whether we are practicing for ourselves or for others, we are told to meditate on the four immeasurables so that our practice is held by a selfless motivation. That’s easy, right? You just need to wish that all sentient beings enjoy happiness and the causes of happiness, are free from suffering and the causes of suffering, and so on.

These are the preliminaries that we need to accomplish before beginning the actual practice itself.

The main section begins with:

For the main practice, visualise yourself as Vajrayoginī,  
According to the outer practice of Guru Yoga

---

16 See Chapter 4 and Appendix III.

17 In the Buddha, the dharma and the supreme assembly  
I take refuge until I attain enlightenment.  
Through the merit of practicing generosity and so on,  
May I attain buddhahood for the benefit of all beings.



There are two traditions of outer guru yoga practice in the Longchen Nyingtik. In one tradition, Vajrayoginī holds a ḍāmaru in her right hand and a curved blade in her left hand, while in the other, Vajrayoginī holds a curved blade in her right hand and a kapāla in her left hand. You can choose either one. In one tradition she appears as Yeshe Tsogyal, in the other as Vajrayoginī.

In Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo's arrangement of the practice, there's a note which tells us to visualize Vajrayoginī holding a curved blade in her right hand and a kapāla in her left hand. We are also told to visualize her body as being completely empty inside. In the past, the lamas would say, "like an inflated bladder", but nowadays they prefer to say, "like an empty bottle". Vajrayoginī is red in colour and emanates tremendous rays of light in all directions. She wears all the ornaments as described in the ngöndro practice. At the centre of her body is the central channel standing upright like a pillar, as wide as a hollow reed arrow. You need to visualize this very clearly.

*In the middle of her body runs the central channel  
As thick as a hollow reed arrow,*

The tube is called the 'central channel' since it runs directly through the centre of our body. There's a lot that can be said about this channel, but here what you need to know is that it is straight and narrow. It is what we call a 'wisdom channel', not to be confused with the gross physical channels of our body.

The text continues:

*Empty and clear like a tube of light.  
Its upper end is open at the brahma-aperture,  
And its lower end touches the navel centre.*

The channel is open at the top (the crown of the head) and closed at the bottom (the navel centre).

*Upon the notch at the heart-centre,*

The notch mentioned here corresponds to our heart cakra. Firstly, you visualize yourself as the *ḍākinī*, *Vajrayoginī*. Then you visualize that a hollow tube of light runs through the centre of your body, from your navel to the crown of your head. After that, you visualize a notch or cakra in the tube, at the level of your heart.

*In the centre of a light green sphere of inner air (lung)  
Awareness clearly appears as a red syllable Hṛīḥ.*

The green sphere of inner air is very light, so light that it slightly quivers, like a bubble. In the middle of the sphere, your mind (or awareness) appears as a brilliant red syllable *Hṛīḥ*. The brilliance of this syllable is like a lamp that fully illuminates a darkened room—at least that's the example the lamas used to give, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche later compared it to switching on an electric light.

According to Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, it would be perfectly acceptable for Tibetans to visualize the *Hṛīḥ* syllable in Tibetan script rather than in Sanskrit. General tantric theory maintains that local conditions—the place and culture into which we are born—have a strong bearing on the way that the syllables form within our body. Hence, if you are an Indian practitioner, you should visualize the syllables in Indian script, since that is your native language. This point has been considerably debated between the different Tibetan Buddhist schools. Some schools insist that the syllables should be visualized in their original Sanskrit form, since this is the sacred language of India. Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, however, maintained that it was entirely consistent with the *Secret Essence Tantra* teachings for Tibetans to visualise the syllables in their own language. The Secret Essence

teachings explain in great detail how the clouds of syllables form within the cakras and channels of the maṇḍala of the vajra body. For Tibetans, the way that these syllables take shape is influenced by their culture and language. By the same reasoning, therefore, I think all of you here should visualize the syllable in your own western language.

The Hṛīḥ syllable is red in colour and should be visualized clearly and distinctly. It doesn't need to be particularly large—about the size of the upper segment of your thumb is usually advised. Your consciousness, the combination of your wind energy and awareness, is gathered into and manifests as the Hṛīḥ syllable. Since the Nyingtik teachings are intended for Dzogchen practitioners such as yourselves, the term awareness (*rigpa*) is used here to denote consciousness. You need to focus your mind single-pointedly on the Hṛīḥ syllable, which is the manifestation of your *rigpa* or awareness, the embodiment of all your wind-energy, thoughts and consciousnesses.

The visualization needs to be built up step by step. Firstly, visualize yourself as the *ḍākinī* Vajrayoginī whose body is made of light and is empty inside. Then concentrate on the central channel that runs from under your navel, where it is closed, to the crown of your head (the aperture of brahma), where it is open. Once this has been stabilised, focus on the green sphere of light at your heart, which is the manifestation of your wind energy, and the red syllable Hṛīḥ. Your visualization needs to be stable, as explained in the generation phase (*kyerim*) teachings. Of course, you won't be able to master the visualization straight away, just like that. It's not that easy. But if you practice over and over again, you will soon get used to it and eventually it will become clear.

It's easy to listen to instructions like this, isn't it? But it's much more difficult to apply them. Why? Because when you try to concentrate on the visualization, all kinds of thoughts will pop up in your mind and distract you. If you persist in the training, however, if you practice the visualization over and over again, you will eventually be able to master it.

Once you've stabilised the visualization, meditate as follows:

*A forearm's length above the crown of one's head  
Appears the Buddha Amitābha, 'Limitless Light',  
Complete with all the major and minor marks.*

At this point you need to visualize the pure realm where you will transfer your consciousness to. I explained this to you yesterday, very clearly.

I can't remember what all the major and minor marks of a buddha are, but you can look them up in the texts if you are interested. According to the special pith instructions passed on by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, the crucial point here is to perceive everything as being utterly perfect and complete, free of any defects. If you cannot visualize every detail of Buddha Amitābha clearly, simply consider that he appears to you in dazzling splendour and magnificence.

Having visualized the pure land, you then need to pray to Buddha Amitābha with fervent devotion. To develop such devotion, the texts advise us to reflect on Buddha Amitābha's many great qualities—for example, how he manifested the pure realm of Sukhāvātī as a result of the aspirations that he made to free all beings from suffering.

We admire all sorts of qualities in people, but what sets Buddha Amitābha apart, his supreme quality, is the way in which he only thinks of benefitting others. If you reflect properly on his qualities, you cannot help but feel devotion towards him. Even when someone helps us in a mundane way, like lending us money or taking care of us when we're sick, we feel huge appreciation towards them. Everyone admires Mother Theresa, for example, because of the way in which she has helped the poor and the sick. Her contribution has been wonderful, of course, but does not compare to the way in which Buddha Amitābha has benefitted beings. If you really reflect properly on these points, your devotion towards Buddha Amitābha will naturally develop.

It is said that unless you have some knowledge and understanding of the Buddha's teachings, it is impossible for you to have genuine faith and devotion towards him. Devotion doesn't come out of thin air, just like that. It is also said that the qualities of the Buddha are inconceivable, which means it is very difficult to communicate them in words. It's really not easy, therefore, for people like you and me to comprehend them fully. If you understand the Buddha's qualities even just a little, your devotion and respect will naturally grow. When you think that someone has great qualities and appreciate deeply what they have accomplished, that is what we call devotion.

The text tells us not to rush our prayer, but to generate fervent devotion:

*Pray with fervent devotion.*

The prayer that we need to say here comes later in the practice text. It is very important that you reflect on the meaning of the prayer, line by line, whilst you recite it since the whole point of reciting prayers is to actualize their meaning.

The text continues:

*Not allowing the mind to wander elsewhere,  
And with single-pointed aspiration.*

If you simply mouth the words of the prayer while your mind wanders off, lost in distraction, it will be of little benefit. You need to dwell on the meaning of the prayer as you recite it—that's the whole point of reciting prayers. There are probably many terms in the prayer that you are not familiar with—if you don't know their meaning, how can you actualize them? It simply doesn't work to recite the prayer mindlessly, with your thoughts running wild. You

need to focus your mind on what you're saying, and to bring alive its meaning.

The most important point in Vajrayāna practice in general, and especially in phowa practice, is to invoke the power and compassion of the lama. The sole reason for this is to help you in your practice. From the point of view of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, it doesn't make the slightest bit of difference to them whether you pray to them or not—it makes a difference to *you*, to your mind. When you invoke the compassion of the lama, it changes the state of your mind, and that is why prayer is so important.

If you concentrate your mind single-pointedly, without distraction, and pray to the lama and the buddhas and bodhisattvas from deep within, you will experience signs in your practice. You can develop goosebumps, tears might suddenly well up in your eyes—when the mind is inspired, you can see for yourself the effect it has on your body.

If, on the other hand, you don't concentrate on arousing devotion whilst you recite the prayer,<sup>18</sup> there will be no benefit whatsoever. It will be a total waste of time. The teachings say that it is far better to recite a prayer once with full concentration of mind, than to recite the prayer a hundred thousand times, in a state of distraction. I'm making an effort to explain this to you very clearly since I hope that some of you here might actually apply yourself diligently and wholeheartedly to this practice.

---

18 At this point in the practice, lamas often insert different supplication prayers. Adhering closely to the terma text itself, Orgyen Tobgyal Rinpoche refers here to the prayer that Jigme Lingpa himself added at the end of the terma (see below, "Then, the form of Amitabha...")

Next comes the actual practice of phowa:

*Recite 'Hrīḥ Hrīḥ' from the upper palate,  
Recite them five times together,  
While holding upper body tight and focusing on the head.  
Awareness is in the form of a red syllable Hrīḥ,  
Lifted like paper carried on the wind,  
Rising ever higher and higher.  
With a loud 'Phaṭ!' it shoots up like an arrow  
And dissolves into Amitābha's heart.*

The text says to recite the syllable Hrīḥ from the upper palate of your mouth, not from the lips. The sound is produced by the tongue moving against the upper palate. You recite Hrīḥ five times, corresponding to the five buddha wisdoms, and repeat this cycle many times over. As you recite Hrīḥ, you should focus on the visualization that I explained to you earlier. You should also keep your back straight and your head erect, as instructed in the text.

As you recite Hrīḥ, your consciousness ascends the central channel like a piece of paper carried on the wind. You need to focus on this visualization very clearly. There is no definite point in the upper part of your central channel that the Hrīḥ syllable should reach, but once your mind is clearly focused on the visualization, you should utter a loud forceful 'Phaṭ!' to eject it. The point of shouting 'Phaṭ!' is to make a clear and definite cut—through its power the Hrīḥ syllable shoots up like an arrow and dissolves into Amitābha's heart. Your consciousness, visualized as the Hrīḥ syllable, dissolves into Buddha Amitābha and becomes one with him, 'one taste'.

*Through training like this repeatedly,*

We need to practice this visualization over and over again and to do that, you will need to bring your consciousness back into your

body. Ideally, you repeat this cycle one hundred times every practice session—basically, you should train in the practice as much as you can.

*Signs of proficiency will arise: the brahma-aperture will tremble;  
The head will ache; a drop of serum, shining like dew, will  
appear;  
And it will be possible to slowly insert a grass stalk.*

If you train consistently in this way, signs of proficiency in the practice will appear: the crown of your head can become a little swollen, drops of white fluid might seep out from your fontanelle, or you develop headaches—it might even be possible for you to insert a blade of grass through your fontanelle. These are all signs that you have trained well in the practice. I have seen them many, many times and they really do happen, just as the text describes.

The text then says:

Then, the form of Amitābha  
Melts into light and dissolves into me.  
Through that, I too become Amitāyus,  
Perfect in the very instant of recollection.

*Recite the amaraṇi mantra one hundred times.  
Dedicate the virtue and make prayers of aspiration.  
This will not damage your life.  
In fact, due to the truth of interdependence, it will pacify  
obstacles to life.*

Since you are all Dzogchen practitioners here and don't really need to practice phowa, you don't need to get worked up and have a lot of discursive thoughts about whether or not the practice will shorten



your life-span. There are some people, however, who firmly believe that phowa practice shortens your life and for this reason, a practice of long life is included in the text. This is to assuage any fear you might have that phowa practice will limit your life-span.

Amitābha and Amitāyus are fundamentally the same. We began the phowa practice by thinking of and visualizing Amitābha; when we reach this stage of the practice, we visualize that Amitābha dissolves into light and instantly transforms into Amitāyus, who appears in the form of a saṃbhogakāya deity. His two hands rest in the mudrā of meditation and support a long life vase. He wears all the ornaments of a peaceful deity. With this visualization clearly established in your mind, you then recite the mantra ‘oṃ amāraṇi jīvantiye svāhā’ one hundred times. This is the short version, the essence, of the dhāraṇī of Amitāyus (‘oṃ namo bhagavate...’) which has the power to lengthen your life and prevent untimely death.

After reciting the mantra, you conclude by dedicating the merit of your practice for the benefit of all sentient beings. You can say, for example, “May all sentient beings be free from the suffering of the lower realms, may they enjoy the liberation of the higher realms, etc.”

Some people believe that if you practice phowa, it will shorten your life-span, but—as it says in the text—due to the truth of interdependence, if you practice in this way it will only cause your life to flourish.

*This secret mantra path is superior in its methods,*

The Secret Mantrayāna teachings are exceptional in many ways, making them far greater than other teachings. They are said to be rich in skilful means and enable you to reach your goal swiftly and easily. Concretely, this means they offer many different methods for attaining enlightenment which you can choose from. And because they offer many different methods, you can achieve the desired result

with little effort or toil. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche used the following example: suppose you want to go to India—you can choose to go by horseback, which will certainly get you there, or you can decide to fly by plane, which will be much faster and easier. The choice is yours. The Vajrayāna teachings which take the fruition as the path enable a practitioner to reach enlightenment swiftly and without too much difficulty.

*So guard the crucial points of Transference: Buddhahood without  
Meditation  
As dearer than your own heart or eyes!  
Samaya!*

The text concludes by telling us to value these key points of the phowa instruction as being more precious than our own heart or eyes.

There are many explanations as to why ‘samaya’ appears at the end, but basically it means that the text should only be shared with those who have the right attitude towards these teachings; it should be concealed from those who have wrong views.

Next comes the prayer that I mentioned earlier, that you should recite when you invoke Amitābha, before training with Hriḥ and Phaṭ:

Emaho!  
In the self-appearing realm, the ultimate Akaniṣṭha,  
Is an expanse of interweaving rainbow light of intense  
devotion.  
Here, the embodiment of all objects of refuge, one’s own root  
guru,  
In an extraordinary form and with a radiant body,  
Abides as the essence of Buddha Amitābha.

With intense devotion, we pray:  
 Inspire us to accomplish the path of transference!  
 Inspire us to reach the realm of Akaniṣṭha!  
 May we capture the domain of dharmakāya expanse!

Phaṭ! (Nirmāṇakāya) Phaṭ! (Sambhogakāya) Phaṭ!  
 (Dharmakāya) Phaṭ! (Unchanging Vajrakāya) Phaṭ!  
 (Abhisambodhikāya)

This completes the terma text of phowa practice from the Longchen Nyingtik.

How do you apply this? You have to practice! If you don't practice yourself, how can you expect to be able to practice for others? And you should practice now, while you're still alive, then it will be easier for you to apply at the moment of death. It's not a difficult practice to do, there's barely anything to recite. There's a prayer that comes at the end, followed by five times Phaṭ, but that's about all. That isn't difficult, is it? This is an extremely powerful practice that can bring very great benefit.

If you were to ask someone whether they wanted to transfer their consciousness to a pure realm right now, they'd probably say no. Even if that person was a 100 years old, they'd probably still say no. Somehow, we all want to remain here, in this life, for as long as we can. Why? Because we have so much attachment. If we were to look deeply into the three realms of saṃsāra, we would see that every moment that we spend here only results in our accumulating huge amounts of negative karma, which will be the cause for our rebirth in the lower realms. Who accumulates this negativity? Our mind—but we are not aware of it. And when death strikes, it's too late, there's nothing we can do. Even if you summoned a great army to protect you, you wouldn't be able to avoid your death. Even if you called a thousand doctors to take care of you, they wouldn't be able to prevent you from dying. However wealthy you might be, it will

be of no use when you die. You will cling onto your life when death comes, even though there's nothing for you to hold onto. Young children are probably attached to their parents, adults cling to their children even more. We have all kind of attachments... so many. But they are all absolutely useless.

Phowa offers us some hope, there's a path that we can follow. There's nothing else that can really help us when we die. That's why if you train in the phowa practice now, there will be hope for you at the moment of death. And it's not an empty hope—this practice really works. Therefore train in the practice now. It's not difficult, it's not as if you have to study lots of texts and learn a whole new set of skills. You just need to go over what I've explained to you today and try to actualize it. Go through all the different steps of the practice, from the beginning to the end. Try to perfect the different visualizations, and recite the *Hriḥ* and *Phaṭ* at the right time. Once you get used to the practice, it will be easier for you. Then we will be able to insert a blade of grass through the crown of your head, or see some fluid ooze out of your fontanelle. These teachings are extremely powerful and carry great blessings—signs like this can appear quite quickly, you don't need to be particularly diligent.

If you don't go over these instructions, if you don't try to put them into practice, they'll be of no use to you. Some of you are writing down every word that I say—if you're making notes to go over later on, that's fine, but if they just end up on your bookshelf, never to be read, it's a total waste of time. This is what we call 'practice becoming lost in the scriptures.'

So, start tonight. Practice this evening and tomorrow morning. We can clarify anything that comes up for you tomorrow. You don't have to ask questions, of course. Just if you need to. If you think this practice isn't useful for you, don't worry—you can go to bed early tonight and have a long lie in tomorrow. You're free to do whatever you like, no one is going to scold you for not practicing.

### 3. How to Practice for Someone who has Just Died

YESTERDAY, I EXPLAINED how to practice phowa according to the original terma text from the Longchen Nyingtik cycle: “Enlightenment Without Meditation”. There is also a text written by Jigme Lingpa that I shall refer to today which explains how to guide and practice phowa for someone who has just died.<sup>19</sup>

Whenever we talk about death, it immediately provokes a lot of fear and anxiety in us, even though it is something that we will all have to face. Jigme Lingpa begins his text by saying that whoever is born, will one day die—there is absolutely no doubt about this. It is extremely important that we are aware of what is happening when we are about to die. If we are a dharma practitioner, we can rest in the nature of mind, and even if we don’t know how to do that, we can at least supplicate the lama and make aspiration prayers.

I have a friend in India who was sick a few years ago and I asked him, “What will you do if you die?” He replied, “Well, there’s not much I can do. I will pray and make some positive aspirations.” I thought this was quite an amazing answer. Even if we’re not very good at saying prayers, at least this is something we can all try to do when we are about to die.

It is equally important for people who are not dharma practitioners to be aware that they are dying—it will certainly benefit them. This is why Jigme Lingpa begins his text by telling the person that they are dying.

---

19 See Appendix II

Phowa should be practiced when the outer breath has ceased but the inner breath is still flowing, before the different stages of the mind's dissolution have reached their conclusion. When the outer breath ceases, our mind becomes very clear—even clearer than normal—since all our undercurrent thoughts momentarily cease, as the small channels in our body become blocked. There is still, however, a movement of air and consciousness in the main channels of our body, such as the central channel. This is the time that phowa should be effected.

There is a difference in how you practice phowa for someone who is still alive compared to someone who has just died. If you don't know this difference, there's a danger that you might cut short a person's life, if they are still living.

Before you begin the phowa practice, you need to summon the dead person by calling out his or her name. You don't need to shout the name, but it does need to be audible. The dead person's consciousness will still feel connected to their name, so they will pay attention when you call it. Imagine there's a crowd of a thousand people—if you call out the name of just one person in that crowd, they will immediately hear you; their mind will focus on wherever the sound came from. It's exactly like that.

So you need to say the dead person's name—in some phowa practices, you do this three times. In this text, Jigme Lingpa doesn't give a precise number, so you can say it once, three times, or as many times as you wish.

When you call the dead person's name, they will pay attention and listen to what you have to say. Firstly, you need to tell them that they have in fact died and what they are experiencing now is what we call death:

[Name of the deceased], having experienced impermanence  
you are now dead.

You repeat this to them three times.

If the deceased person was a practitioner, their mind will immediately turn to the practice. This is because practitioners, while they were alive, reflected a great deal on impermanence and death. They came to realize that apart from practice, there's nothing else that can really be of benefit to you at the moment of death. Since they reflected so much about this, their mind will naturally turn to practice when death arrives.

There are several different kinds of practice that we can turn to at the moment of death. If the person who just died was a Dzogchen practitioner, they would rest in the state of primordial purity. But if they have never practiced during their lifetime, they will have nothing to turn to. When we die, we will only practice and rest in the state of meditation if we practiced this while we were alive. That moment will then be like space merging with space; we will then be liberated. As Jetsun Milarepa said, "There's no such thing as death, death is buddhahood". Even if you're not able to practice Dzogchen in this way, there are many other practices that you can train in while you are alive which can then be applied at the moment of death.

Having repeated this message to the dead person three times, you then tell them that they are not the only ones to experience death. This is important for them to hear, particularly if they haven't practiced much during their life:

You are not the only person to have experienced what we call 'death'; it is the path every one of the five kinds of sentient being (gods, humans, animals, pretas, and hell beings) must follow.

Death comes to every single sentient being of every type—whether gods, humans, animals, and so on.

Once birth has taken place, life or living can only end in death—such is the nature of things.

As soon as a sentient being is born, their life can only end in death. Such is the nature of things, this cannot be changed. The point of saying this to the dead person is to alleviate their suffering. If you have a problem and are the only one to experience it, you will get worked up and agitated. If you tell the dead person, however, that everyone without exception will experience exactly the same thing, it will make it easier for them to accept.

There is not a single sentient being in this world—from the rich and powerful universal monarch to the starving beggar unable even to feed himself—who can free themselves from life and death, so don't despair.

The next point needs to be explained a little more elaborately:

Be aware that nothing you are attached to—your family, your friends, your house, your wealth, your possessions and so on—can go with you. Understand that your time with them is now over. As it is said:

When his time has come, even a king has to die,  
And neither his friends nor his wealth can follow him.  
So for us—wherever we stay, wherever we go—  
Karma follows us like a shadow.<sup>20</sup>

Now that you are personally experiencing the ripening of the truth of suffering described in this verse, which is the very nature of things, the danger is that your attachment to your relatives, wealth

---

20 *Rājāvavādaka Sūtra*



and possessions will lead you to a lower realm. This is why, in the *Sūtra Requested by the Girl called Precious*,<sup>21</sup> the Buddha said:

In that moment, your father, mother, relatives,  
 Friends or people you are close to, cannot afford you any  
 protection.  
 Sons, daughters are no refuge.  
 Only those endowed with great qualities can protect you,  
 Which no worldly protector can give you.

I have made this point to you several times before—the greater your attachment, the greater the obstacle this will be to your reaching buddhahood. It will also make it more difficult for the phowa practice to be successful. Attachment is the greatest cause for our continued cycling in saṃsāra.

Someone who doesn't have too many attachments will be much more relaxed when they die. Great changes do not cause them too much suffering, so death will be somewhat easier for them.

Some people are very attached to their wealth and possessions. If you give them a hundred euros, it only increases their attachment and they end up accumulating even more negative karma. A monk or nun can just as equally be attached to their possessions. The attachment that saṅgha members have to the offerings they receive is known as 'the obscuration related to the possessions of the saṅgha' and is said to accumulate great negativity. A practitioner who isn't too attached to the offerings they receive will accumulate far less of this obscuration. Here, the size of the offering doesn't really matter, the problem is how strongly we are attached to it—this is the root cause of the negative karma that we accumulate.

---

21 *Putriratnaparipriccha Sūtra, bu mo rin chen gyis zhus pa'i mdo.*

There are a lot of spirits in our world that only have a mental body and the reason they still roam around is because of their attachment, which creates a lot of fear. In *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* examples are given of the different types of rebirth that result from different types of attachment. For example, if you are attached to money and keep piling up your wealth, it will result in a lower rebirth.

There was an old lady who died recently in Bylakuppe, South India. One of her relatives who lived in Kham went to see Khenpo Achö to ask what had become of her after she had died. Khenpo Achö rested in meditation for a while and then told the relative, “There’s something under her bed that she is very attached to. Unless you get rid of it and accumulate a lot of merit on her behalf, things will be quite difficult for her.” Nobody knew that she had some money tucked away, they couldn’t imagine she had anything of value. So the relative, who had great faith in Khenpo Achö, traveled all the way from Kham to South India to investigate further. When he went to the old lady’s room he saw the old bed on which she had slept, but couldn’t find anything underneath it. Still, he was convinced that Khenpo Achö must have seen something, so he started to dig into the earth under the bed. Sure enough, after a while, he discovered a bag that had been buried there—it contained 700,000 rupees. This is what can happen to you if you are too attached to something; attachment is the biggest obstacle on our path to enlightenment.

Before we begin the phowa practice, therefore, we need to tell the dead person to let go of all their attachments. A powerful master may have the ability to send a consciousness to a pure buddha field, but if the person they are practicing for still has strong attachments, it can block that possibility. This is an extremely important point.

You should therefore rejoice at being able to experience death and transference at a time when the teachings of the Buddha exist in this world.

This tells us why we should let go of our attachments. Right now, we are attached to our father, our mother, our possessions, our money, and so on—when we die, we will need to give all of them up. But that’s not going to be easy. It will be very difficult for us to abandon them, our attachment will still be strong. So it is important to inspire joy and enthusiasm in the dying person. Hence Jigme Lingpa’s next point, which is to remind the dead person of their immense good fortune to pass away during a time when the teachings of the Buddha are still present in the world. This, he says, is the cause for great rejoicing. We should dwell on this fact, rather than our suffering of loss.

During this fortunate time, just to hear the names of the bhagavān buddhas—no matter who recites them—is very powerful. If a dead person with a joyful mind really trusts in the Buddha, hearing the names of the buddhas during the process of transference will liberate them from a lower rebirth and they will instead be reborn as a human or a god. As the Buddha said in *The Hundred Deeds*:<sup>22</sup>

“O monks, if a bird descends from the sky and lands in front of me, will it see me?”, he asked. “O Noble Bhagavān, it will see you”, they replied. “O monks, if the bird comes to like me, it will not leave but will stay and follow me. So if you have appreciation for me in mind at the moment of death and transference, you will have a rebirth much better than being reborn here in Rājagṛha in the family of rich merchants, and will become a monk who follows my teachings. In only seven years after having taken ordination, you will overcome all negative emotions and become a foe destroyer, an arhat.”

---

22 The sutra called, *Karmasataka* (*las brgya pa*). Toh 340.

The Buddha cites one hundred such accounts in this sūtra—a few of them are mentioned in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

Just one moment of faith in the Buddha brings about these benefits. As you are born in a world where the teachings of the Victorious One are present, you have heard the name of the Buddha, and you also have the good fortune to be able to appreciate his teachings. So, sincerely arouse an even greater faith in our teacher, the Tathāgata, take refuge in the dharma, his perfect teachings and aspire to respect the saṅgha of bodhisattvas. Buddha promised that all fear in the bardos and all the causes of lower rebirth will be completely eliminated the moment anyone remembers his name and words, and abides by the view.

Do not forget to rely on the protector Amitābha and the bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi, or their buddha-field called Sukhāvātī. Since you are now free of your physical body of flesh and blood, go straight to this supreme buddha field. Think of and meditate on the lama for whom you have devotion. Remember your yidam and the view. Meditate on the Mahayāna's bodhicitta in aspiration and action.

Having created auspicious circumstances by following these key instructions, apply the instructions on transference that lead to the attainment of enlightenment without meditation. Since you are reincarnating lifetime after lifetime, meditate on a white syllable A in your heart. As I repeat A, bring into your experience what I have just said. Consider that A (*in some particular cases you can also change it to Hriḥ*) goes straight to the buddha-field of Sukhāvātī, like an arrow shot by a strong man.

A is emptiness, the supreme syllable. “A is the supreme syllable [...] Arising from within, it is without arising.”<sup>23</sup> It is the unborn source of everything and since it is unborn, it cannot die. When there is neither birth nor death, that’s emptiness, right?

It says in the text that you can replace the syllable A with Hriḥ. Whether you recite A or Hriḥ, “Consider that the syllable goes straight to the buddha-field of Sukhāvātī, like an arrow shot by a strong man.” What is it that you transfer to Sukhāvātī? It is the syllable Hriḥ which is the embodiment of the mind and wind energy of the dead person.

*Say this to inspire the dead person and actualize it yourself.*

The main person who needs to actualise these instructions is *you*, the one who is practicing phowa for the dying person.

*Then, repeat the same number of A as the number of years the person lived, in a gentle tone of voice.*

You should repeat A the same number of times as the dead person’s age. If the dying person is 100 years old, for example, you need to repeat A one hundred times.

To send the dead person to a higher rebirth, pull the hair on the crown of their head and repeat A twenty-one times.

You may have seen a lama pulling the hair at the crown of the head of a dead person, just before they begin the phowa practice. While some lamas do follow this instruction, others are reluctant to because they are afraid of touching a corpse. Jigme Lingpa instructs us to pull the hair at the crown of the dead person’s head before we repeat the

---

<sup>23</sup> From *Chanting the Names of Mañjushri*, verses 28-29.

A twenty-one times, since this can help bring about a higher rebirth. Some lamas also pull the corpse's hair after they've completed the phowa practice, to check whether the transference was successful.

For worldly beings such as ourselves, the path that we follow is extremely important. For example, if we are driving and take the wrong road, we will fail to reach our destination. In order for us to take a higher rebirth, the route that we need to follow is upwards, through the aperture of brahma. The pathway downwards, through the feet, secret place, etc, only results in lower rebirths. This is a crucial point.

Once the great mahāsiddha of the Kagyüpa tradition, Götsampa, wondered whether it made any difference if the dead person's consciousness was ejected upwards or downwards through the body. Since he was a highly realized master, he decided to check this for himself and sent his consciousness out through his feet to see what would happen. What he experienced afterwards was the manifestation of the hell realms, both hot and cold. When he ejected his consciousness through the aperture of brahma on the crown of his head, however, he experienced the higher realms. He later wrote in his instruction manual that based on his own experience, he could see that this was an extremely important point.

The point about attachment is also very important and needs to be re-stated. Because of the attachments that we have, it is important that the people close to the dead person—the husband/wife, children, relatives, etc—do not stand near the feet of the corpse, but behind the head. If they stand near the top of the head, it will encourage the consciousness to move upwards. Some people will also pull the dead person's hair (at the aperture of brahma) when they do this. In any case, the important point here is that the aperture of brahma is the doorway to a higher rebirth.

In some phowa practices, you meditate on closing the apertures of the body that lead to a lower rebirth, leaving only the aperture of brahma open, however this does not feature in the Longchen

Nyingtik practice. There are nine such apertures in the body—you block eight and leave one open. This is another crucial point. This closing of the eight apertures and leaving one open appears in the phowa practice found in the treasure revelations of Chokgyur Lingpa. Chokgyur Lingpa himself particularly emphasised the importance of this point.

Jigme Lingpa then states the source from which he extracted these pith instructions. He does this to show that he didn't just make them up, they are not his own invention. The instructions are extracted from the *Tantra of the Union of Sun and Moon*, which is one of the seventeen Dzogchen tantras taught by the Buddha Samantabhadra. These Seventeen Tantras of the Great Secret, as they are known, are the highest teachings in the Nyingma tradition.

Whenever a learned master gives pith instructions, they will always quote the source from which they are derived. If you don't do this, as happens a lot nowadays, people end up saying whatever pops up in their mind, and then afterwards calling that a teaching. If you asked a question to Nyoshul Khenpo, even a minor one, he would always quote extensively from the Seventeen Tantras to validate his answers, especially from the *Reverberation of Sound Tantra* which is the root of all the others. This is an extremely important point. Longchen Rabjam would always teach in this way.

*The Tantra of the Union of the Sun and the Moon says:*

*If, having applied the syllable A  
To the breath and the number of years the person lived,  
They do not die at that very moment,  
Gather the consciousness of the air from the brahma aperture  
Into the middle of the body  
Focusing on the syllable A.*

*And,*

*If the dying person is still breathing as you do this practice,  
By applying the letter to the breath  
Their consciousness will be transferred from this world –  
Of this there is no doubt.*

This is what Jigme Lingpa just explained in the text.

*Associating the unborn syllable A with the expelled air once  
the process of dissolution has begun to manifest, is an extremely  
profound instruction.*

In the meditation manual called *Yeshe Lama*, in the instructions “for those of middling capacity who will be liberated in the bardo of dharmatā”, it explains that at the moment of the bardo of death, one should repeat A when all movement has ceased at the level of the throat. When Khandro Tsering Chödrön passed away, both Sogyal Rinpoche and I were present with her. I told Sogyal Rinpoche to stand behind Khandro’s head and I said “A A” twenty-one times. The first time I did this, Khandro gave a slight nod of her head. I repeated it a second time, even more strongly, and she shook her head again as if to say, “Okay, I’ve got it.” Then I did it a third time, and she didn’t move, she had passed away and was resting in meditation.

More explanation follows:

*Emphasize merging the mind of the person you practice for with  
the wisdom of space-like expanse, using the skilful means of great  
compassion. Alternatively, you could practise more elaborately  
at this point by doing one of the many phowa as it appears  
elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> In any case, block the entrance to the lower realms  
with the names of the buddhas, and with the mantras, dhāraṇīs*

---

24 For example, the Longchen Nyingtik phowa.



*and special aspirations made by the buddhas. Bear in mind that it is difficult to guide those who are completely unfamiliar with spiritual practice through kyerim, and to introduce them to appearance, increase and attainment, and so on, because it is very hard to communicate with those who are in the blank state of ālaya.*

This is quite difficult to understand. What it means is that whoever practices phowa for the dead person, must have a mind filled with great compassion. They need to hold the dead person in the embrace of this great compassion. As you know, compassion alone is not enough—they must also meditate on the space-like wisdom which is the view of emptiness. For a Dzogchen practitioner, this is the dharmakāya buddha that has been introduced to them by their lama, and which they have familiarised themselves with through meditation practice. If someone practices phowa in this way, motivated by compassion while abiding in the view of emptiness, that will be enough. As they practice and merge their mind with the space-like expanse of wisdom, the dead person will be liberated. There's absolutely no doubt about this. The text says, 'emphasize' indicating that this is the best approach. However, Jigme Lingpa adds that "alternatively, you could practise more elaborately at this point by doing one of the many phowa as appear elsewhere."

Some people say that when we die, phowa practice is all that is needed, we don't need anything else in order to reach liberation. Others say that in the case of a great practitioner, all they need to do is remain in meditation and that is enough. It's not necessary in their case to recite the names of the buddhas (for example, the confession practice of *The Three Heaps*), nor to recite any mantras, such as the hundred-syllable mantra. What Jigme Lingpa says here is that all such statements are false. However realized you might be, what harm can there be in reciting the names of the buddhas, or in reciting mantras? What's the problem with that? There are many

people nowadays who make all kinds of statements like this but they don't know what they're talking about and are largely ignorant of the scriptures and the tantra teachings.

Jigme Lingpa also clarifies that it is very difficult to introduce someone to the three phases<sup>25</sup> that arise at the moment of death if they have never received any dharma teachings and haven't practiced kyerim and so forth. These three phases relate to the experiences that we go through within the bardos. Jigme Lingpa says that it is very difficult to introduce someone to those states if they have no experience of practice, because there's no basis upon which to communicate with them. Instead, we should practice phowa for them. Some people say there's no point even to do that, but here Jigme Lingpa states clearly that we can practice phowa for someone who has no experience of dharma practice.

Some time ago, I practised phowa for a Chinese Buddhist teacher who had passed away in Taiwan. As I was about to begin the phowa practice, some of his students came to me and said, "You don't really need to practice phowa for him—Tulku Urgyen said he was a yogi who had reached the highest level of Dzogchen where everything appears as space. Are you sure you really need to do this?" In spite of what they said, I practiced phowa for him several times. When I checked his body afterwards, I could see a small lump on the crown of his head, as well as blood seeping from of his nostrils. So I said to his students, "Well, what do you think, was the phowa necessary or not?" There was a doctor there who was a student of that teacher. He said that the teacher had cancer and that the phowa practice was probably needed to help him with that. People say all kinds of things these days!

What Jigme Lingpa says here is that whether or not the deceased person was a dharma practitioner, you need to practice phowa for them.

---

25 The phases of appearance, spreading and attainment.

Finally,

*This text was written by Rangjung Dorje, in the presence of Losal.*

Jigme Lingpa ends the text by saying that it was written by Rangjung Dorje (one of his dharma names) “in the presence of Losal”, who was probably the person who requested the advice.

## Clarifications

**Q. Is the notch in the central channel a widening of the channel or an indentation? I ask because the Hriḥ syllable is supposed to rest on top of it.**

A. It's like the knots that you find on a stick of bamboo. It prevents the bindu from falling any further down the channel. Above the notch is the green sphere of light and on top of that is the Hriḥ syllable. It is said that the bindu is like the horse and the Hriḥ syllable like the rider.

**Q. Can you clarify how you produce the sound of the Hriḥ syllable, about the movement of the tongue against the palate? And how does the syllable get from there to the central channel?**

A. The text simply instructs you to recite the Hriḥ syllable from the upper palate of your mouth. There is no visualisation involved. The point of reciting Hriḥ is to help you focus on the syllable that is in the central channel at the level of your heart. It is this Hriḥ that you need to visualize and focus on.

**Q. How am I to relate to Sukhāvātī if there are no women there?**

A. Don't ask me, you need to ask Amitābha! Actually it's Buddha Śākyamuni who said this. Since there are no women in Sukhāvātī,

there can be no birth—in Sukhāvatī, there is no birth from the womb. There are four types of birth that are said to exist: birth from the womb, birth from heat and moisture, miraculous birth, and birth from an egg. We consider the best type to be miraculous birth. We say, for example, that Guru Rinpoche was miraculously born from a lotus. Likewise in Sukhāvatī, there is only miraculous birth, the best kind. Even though it is said that there are no women in Sukhāvatī, there are countless offering goddesses there. It is also said that all the flowers, trees, birds and so on, produce the sound of the dharma. No one has any aversion to the sounds they hear in Sukhāvatī, everything is pleasing to the ear—otherwise it would not be a pure realm. Sukhāvatī has many other qualities like this.

When we speak about the pure buddha fields, our limited conceptual minds cannot grasp how they really are, they are beyond what we can conceive. Sukhāvatī was probably described in this way so as to fit what the people of those times could understand and accommodate in their minds, just to give them an indication of what it is really like. Its real nature is beyond what we can see or conceive. But in order to help those people, to give them some idea, Sukhāvatī was explained in terms that fit their thinking and perception, according to the times in which they lived.

**Q. It is said that when you practice phowa you should hold the upper part of your body tight. Could you explain why this is important?**

A. You need to sit straight, not to slouch. The head needs to be slightly raised also. The point is that if the body is straight, the channels will be straight; if the channels are straight, the inner winds will be straight; and if the inner winds are straight, the mind will be clear.

**Q. Do we need to be physically present with the person who has just died to practice phowa, or can we do it from distance?**

A. Yes, it works even if you are not next to the person. The father of someone I know in Taiwan passed away recently and I was requested to practice phowa for him. I was in Sikkim at the time, in one of the caves of Guru Rinpoche called Khandro Sangpuk. It was nighttime in Sikkim and I was connected to the father's son by telephone. After I finished the phowa practice, I asked the son to check his father's body to see if there were any signs, and he confirmed that there were. I have practiced phowa like this many times in the past and it seems to work.

**Q. How do we close the eight apertures of the body?**

A. This instruction does not appear in the Longchen Nyingtik phowa. I've received teachings on the Longchen Nyingtik phowa from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche many times, and he never mentioned anything about blocking the eight doors. The instructions that he gave are the same as I shared with you yesterday. I also received the Chokling Tersar from him and in this practice you do block the apertures. Firstly, you need to visualize a blazing Hriḥ syllable in the central channel. Then you say Hūm and visualize that it emanates many other Hūms, red in colour, that descend down to your feet, blocking the aperture that leads to the lower realms. You keep repeating Hūm and visualize that further Hūm syllables stream out to close the doors of the secret place, the navel, the ears, the nostrils and the eyes. Finally, an infinite number of tiny Hūm syllables manifest and close all the pores of your skin, leaving only the aperture of brahma open. Phowa can be practiced in many different ways, depending on the specific tradition that you follow. Another difference in the Chokling Tersar Phowa is that you transfer your consciousness to the pure realm of Yangdak, instead of Amitābha.

**Q. Where should we visualize A when we recite it?**

A. You should visualize A in the heart. The text says that you can meditate on either Hṛīḥ or A, it's the same. In the *Tantra of the Union of the Sun and Moon*, the syllable A is mentioned. In the Longchen Nyingtik practice, however, the syllable Hṛīḥ is used as it is the seed syllable of Protector Amitābha. Since we meditate a great deal on Guru Rinpoche, we end up visualizing the Hṛīḥ syllable all the time. Guru Rinpoche is a deity of the magnetizing, lotus family, an emanation of Protector Amitābha. In the text of Jigme Lingpa, it says that it makes no difference whether you meditate on A or Hṛīḥ.

**Q. I'm not so clear about the visualization of Amitābha and his pure land, so I feel a bit insecure to eject the Hṛīḥ syllable since it will be like sending it into space. Would it be better that I wait until I am clearer in the visualization before I do this?**

A. This question shows that you are not used to this kind of meditation. If you train yourself in the practice as I explained to you yesterday, you will be able to master the visualization after some time. You need to meditate on all the different steps, one by one. Firstly, visualize yourself as Vajrayoginī. Then meditate on the central channel, and so forth. Once this visualization has been stabilized, meditate on the Hṛīḥ syllable. You don't actually send the Hṛīḥ syllable into empty space, you send it into the pure land of Amitābha—I spent the whole first day only speaking about that! Firstly, you need to establish where you are going to transfer your consciousness to. Then you send your consciousness, in the form of the Hṛīḥ syllable, into the heart of Amitābha. The pure field of Sukhāvātī was manifested from the heart of Buddha Amitābha; if you arrive in the heart of Amitābha, you are of course in Sukhāvātī.

**Q. I didn't understand how I should practice for someone who isn't dead yet?**

A. You practice phowa for someone who has just died. Someone who is still alive, should *train* in the practice of phowa. This has already been explained to you yesterday. The benefit of training in the practice, while you are still alive, is so that you will be ready to apply it when you die. If someone dies, you should practice in the way that I have just explained to you, sending their consciousness into the heart of Amitābha. Once the consciousness is there, it doesn't come back. When we practiced phowa yesterday, we brought our consciousness back into our body, and then did long life practice by reciting the mantra of Amitāyus.

Before you practice phowa for someone, you need to determine whether they have actually died. You can do this by checking the channels in the neck, whether there is still a pulse there. When there is no more warmth in the body, it means the consciousness has left. The time to practice phowa is when the outer breath has ceased (which you can check by feeling if there is still a pulse in the neck), but while there is still warmth at the heart. In the teachings it says that the outer breathing has ceased but the inner air is still present. At that moment, the dead person still has gross sensations but the smaller ones have ceased. The doctors can observe this, but it's difficult for us to. When lamas pass away and remain in meditation (tukdam), their breathing stops but their body remains warm. There was warmth at the heart of Khandro for three days after she passed away.





## 4. Phowa Made Easy

IN THE NYINGMA tradition, when we give empowerments or explain the termas we always start by presenting the root terma text first. We then present how to practice that terma more fully by incorporating other practices and rituals within it.

Our focus on this occasion is the practice of phowa from the Longchen Nyingtik tradition. We began yesterday with the root terma and continued this morning with Jigme Lingpa's instructions on how to practice phowa for someone who has just died. We will now look at Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo's arrangement of the phowa practice which makes it easy for us to follow. It includes of course Jigme Lingpa's terma and shows how to practice phowa in different contexts, such as for someone who has just died or within a ritual for the deceased. Whilst staying true to the original intent of the terma, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo arranged all the different prayers that we need to recite, in their correct order, so that it is easy for us to follow.

The text begins with the title:

A Short and Clear Arrangement of the Phowa Practice from the  
Longchen Nyingtik Cycle of Dzogpachenpo

The text then says:

Namaḥ śrī gurave

This means, I prostrate to the lama.

*This arrangement of phowa practice from the Longchen Nyungtik cycle of Dzogpachenpo is for those who wish to elaborate a little on the usual arrangement.*

“For those who wish to elaborate a little” implies that if you don’t want to practice elaborately, you can still practice just the terma text alone. But if you wish to practice more elaborately, you can, which is of course better.

### **The Preliminaries to Purify the Mind**

*Say, from the arrangement of the practice given to us by Jigme Lingpa, the Greatly Precious Omniscient One:*

Since you are reincarnating lifetime after lifetime...

The arrangement mentioned here is the text that I explained to you in the previous session.

*Then continue with:*

...to purify your mindstream, begin by thinking of all sources of refuge, the ocean of the deities of the three jewels indivisible from your lama, who appear vividly in the space in front of you. With that in mind, take refuge and generate the supreme mind of enlightenment and so on, as I follow the words of the prayers and, without getting distracted, concentrate on actualizing their meaning.

*Actualize the meaning of these words and follow the relevant preliminary prayers of bodhicitta and so on, whether long or short.*

Here, the text says that you need to take refuge, generate bodhicitta and make the seven branch offering, using whichever practice text you wish, whether long or short. As mentioned earlier, you also need to generate strong compassion for the person who has just died and for whom you are practicing.

*Recite the names of the Buddha...*

Our own teacher, Buddha Śākyamuni, is one of the thousand buddhas to have appeared. He is known by various names, for example *The Sūtra of the Three Heaps* (also known as *The Bodhisattva's Confession of Downfalls*) lists thirty-five names of the Buddha that are said to be extremely sacred and powerful.<sup>26</sup>

Buddha himself said in the *Sūtra of the Great Liberation* or *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, that any sentient being who hears “Bhagavān, Tathāgata, arhat, complete and perfect buddha, glorious conqueror Ratnaśikhin, to you I pay homage!”, will be reborn in a pure buddha field after they die. There is a story of the Buddha from the time he was still a bodhisattva, training on the path, and was living as the son of a merchant. One day, the Buddha went with his disciples to visit a pond and saw that there were five hundred fish living there who were in danger of dying as the waters were rapidly drying up. The Buddha repeated the name of the Buddha Ratnaśikhin seven times and as a result, after they died, all the fish were immediately reborn in a pure buddha field. Likewise too, when you hear the name of the Buddha Amitābha, you will instantly be reborn in the pure land of Sukhāvatī. To hear the name of our teacher, Buddha Śākyamuni, the Arhat, is enough to close the door to rebirth in the lower realms. This is why you need to say the names of the Buddha.

---

26 See Appendix VI

... *and read the* Tantra of the Only Son of the Dharma...

You also need to read the *Tantra of the Only Son of the Dharma*,<sup>27</sup> which is the essence and root of all six million four hundred thousand sections of the Great Perfection teachings. I saw this sūtra at Lerab Ling, near the door of the temple, which the nuns had printed in gold ink on blue paper. It is an incredibly sacred scripture.

Recite [...] specific dhāraṇīs [...] and so on, as appropriate.

It is also highly beneficial to recite the dhāraṇīs that are associated with each of the buddhas. There are many such special dhāraṇīs. Some of the most important taught by the Buddha Śākyamuni are:<sup>28</sup>

- The dhāraṇī of Akṣobhya.
- The dhāraṇī of Vairocana, known as ‘kunrig’ (‘embodying all families’).
- The hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva. According to the *Undeified Confession Tantra*, the king of all dhāraṇīs and mantras is the hundred-syllable mantra, which is the essence of the glorious Vajrasattva himself. Vajrasattva pledged that whoever recites this mantra 108 times without distraction, in a single session, will purify and eliminate all the negativity, obscurations, breakages, downfalls, defilements and so on, that they have ever accumulated.
- You should also recite the essence of the hundred syllable mantra: om vajra sattva ah.
- The maṇi mantra, the heart essence of Avalokiteśvara.
- The dhāraṇī that is the essence of Khorwa Dongdruk.

---

27 See Appendix VII for an abbreviated version of this tantra.

28 See Appendix VIII for an easy-to-recite transliteration of these dhāraṇīs.

- The dhāraṇī of Buddha Śākyamuni. It was through the support of this dhāraṇī that Buddha Śākyamuni was able to attain supreme enlightenment and that Avalokiteśvara was able to become the supreme of all bodhisattvas.

Any sentient being that hears these dhāraṇīs at the moment of their death will be protected from the fear of the lower realms and will accumulate the causes for a higher rebirth. Therefore we should recite these special dhāraṇīs.

It's very easy to recite these dhāraṇīs and mantras and if you think of the incredible benefit that they bring, you will appreciate just how precious they are. They are easy to recite, very powerful, and something that all of us can do. Perhaps, however, as westerners you might find them a little daunting.

It is very important that whoever recites these dhāraṇīs is motivated by compassion and understands what is meant by the statement, “the dharmaṭā nature of phenomena is primordially pure while phenomena are undeceiving interdependence.”

The benefit of reciting the dhāraṇīs of the buddhas is explained at great length in the teachings. Why is it that they have so much power? Because they have been blessed by the buddhas, because of the special aspirations that the bodhisattvas made, and because of the inherent power of secret mantras, vidyā mantras and dhāraṇī mantras.

### **The Actual Practice of Phowa**

Having purified my mind by practising in this way the common stages of the path, I will now follow the clear arrangement of the powerful practice of phowa. I will not let my mind be distracted and visualize as follows.

Here you need to focus your mind on the practice and follow the different visualizations as described in the text. It is crucial that you actualize the practice in your meditation. Begin by saying the following mantra to apply the seal of emptiness:

om maha shunyata jnana benza sobhava emako hang

This mantra is in Sanskrit and its meaning is given in the text:

All dualistic appearances that involve the duality of subject and object—in other words all phenomena—become emptiness free of reference.

All dualistic phenomena are based on a subject that grasps and an object that is grasped onto. When you make a distinction between subject and object, this gives birth to clinging and dualistic perceptions.

Whenever we practice kyerim, we firstly need to apply the seal of emptiness. Unless you apply the seal of emptiness, there can be no kyerim practice. For example, if you want to pour water into a glass, the glass needs to be empty—if it's already full, you won't be able to do it.

The deity that we meditate on here is Vajrayoginī, which I spoke about yesterday.

From the natural state of emptiness, your body instantly appears in the form of the mother of all the Victorious Ones, Vajrayoginī, red in colour with one face, two hands. She holds a curved knife in her right hand and a skull-cup filled with blood in the left. On her left shoulder, she holds the male deity, the heruka, in the form of a khaṭvāṅga. She is adorned with silk, jewel and bone ornaments. Her right leg is slightly

bent and her left extended in dancing posture. She stands on a lotus, sun and corpse. Visualise her body clearly and empty like an inflated bladder.

Her central channel is as thick as a hollow reed arrow; it is empty and clear, like a tube of light. The top opens like a skylight at her brahma-aperture; the bottom, which is closed, is four fingers below the navel. At her heart a bamboo notch appears to interrupt the channel, on which the inner wind appears in the form of a light green sphere the size of a pea that moves a little. It is clearly marked with a red syllable *Hriḥ* that is as bright as a blazing oil lamp; the essence of the *Hriḥ* is awareness. I visualize this clearly.

A forearm's length above the crown of my head, appears the great, ultimate *Akaniṣṭha* of *dharmadhātu*. In an expanse of vajra chains of awareness, rainbow light and bindus, on a lotus and moon seat, sits the embodiment of all refuges, the *Bhagavān* Protector Infinite Light, *Amitābha*, indivisible from our kind root teacher. He is red in colour with one face and two hands in the *mudrā* of meditation, and he holds a begging bowl filled with the nectar of immortality. He wears the three saffron-coloured dharma robes. The supreme resplendence of his major and minor marks shines brightly. His two legs are crossed in the full vajra posture. To his right is the *bodhisattva* Lord *Avalokiteśvara* and on his left is the *bodhisattva* *Vajrapāṇi* and so on. He is surrounded by buddhas and *bodhisattvas* and an infinite number of victorious deities of the Three Roots. The great guide to the path to liberation is vividly present right in front of me.

I pray to the lama and recite *Hriḥ* five times.

I pray one-pointedly, with fervent devotion to the lama sitting on top of my head, without allowing my mind to wander. As a result, the sphere in my heart that is marked with the seed syllable and is in nature my mind and wind energy, ascends through the central channel like paper blown by the wind. As I shout Phaṭ, I eject the sphere, which shoots straight up like an arrow. The sphere dissolves into the heart of the lama above my head. My mind becomes indivisible with the wisdom mind of my master, and I rest in meditative equipoise in the basic space beyond ordinary mind, free from conceptual elaboration.

*Pray with one-pointed devotion to the lord of the maṇḍala, then say the prayer that begins, “Emaho! In the self-appearing realm, the ultimate Akaniṣṭha...”. down to “May we capture the domain of dharmakāya expanse! Hriḥ Hriḥ Hriḥ Hriḥ Hriḥ” Say the Hriḥs with your tongue on your palate.*

Say, Phaṭ! Phaṭ! Phaṭ! Phaṭ! Phaṭ! Phaṭ! Saying that transfers the consciousness to the expanse of great bliss indivisible from the five wisdoms and the five kāyas of the Protector Amitābha.

Train yourself to do this visualization and get used to it; repeat it until the signs of stability and confidence in the practice arise.

Then rest in meditative equipoise within emptiness, free from the elaborations of the three spheres of subject, object and action.

When you arise from that meditation, bring to mind great compassion in post-meditation as you dedicate and make aspiration prayers as elaborately as you can.



This concludes the arrangement for practicing phowa.

### **Phowa as part of the Ritual for Guiding the Dead**

*At the time of guiding the dead person...*

Phowa is generally practiced for someone who has just died, at the moment their outer breath has ceased but their inner breath is still present. If that is not possible, however, there is still a possibility to practice for them later on, through the ritual for guiding the deceased. The way this is done is to write down the name of the dead person on a piece of paper and to summon their consciousness to this physical support—transference can then be practised for them.

Whenever someone dies and their relatives or friends make an offering to a lama to practice for them, the lama will immediately write down the name of the dead person on a piece of paper, so they can perform this ritual. As well as a piece of paper or card, you can also use a photo of the deceased person, or even their bones, as a support for the practice.

The purpose of the ritual is to prevent the person from falling into the lower realms and to guide them to a higher rebirth. This type of practice is found in many of the Sarma tantras and in all the Nyingma tantras connected to the peaceful and wrathful deities. The ritual is quite elaborate—there is a particular point where you reveal the path to the dead person and this is the moment when phowa is practiced. This is this section that Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo now refers to in his text, which he indicates by writing, “At the time of guiding the dead person”.

This kind of instruction is only really useful to practitioners who know how to perform the ritual, but since it is written down here, I need to share the transmission with you.

*...say,*

“O, [*Name of the deceased*], you have now died. But you are not the only person to have experienced what we call ‘death’...” *until*, “Meditate on Mahayāna’s bodhicitta in aspiration and action”, *as in the Longchen Nyingtik phowa text.*

Firstly, you need to read Jigme Lingpa’s text up until, “Meditate on Mahayāna’s bodhicitta in aspiration and action.”

Having created the right circumstances by actualizing these points, O Bhagavān [*say the name of the buddha you’ve been practising*],

Here you should say the name of the buddha that you have been meditating on, be it Cakrasaṃvara, the glorious bhagavān Akṣobhya, the bhagavān Khorwa Dongtruk, or the bhagavān deities of the maṇḍala of the peaceful and wrathful deities. You request them to open the great maṇḍala:

...it is now time to open the great maṇḍala so that I may grant the empowerment for guiding the dead and show the path to liberation through this profound ritual.

Your consciousness can remain in your corpse or in the name-card, either of which will provide it with a support.

Prostrate with your body and take refuge verbally as you reject all thoughts and concepts of attachment, aversion and ignorance. Pray one-pointedly and with heartfelt devotion to the lama, who is indivisible from all the deities of the maṇḍala.

The consciousness of someone who has just died cannot stay in one place for more than an instant, they are like a feather carried on the wind. If there is something to support them, however, they will be able to remain there for a while—hence a name card, or a piece a paper with the deceased person's name written on it, is used in the ritual as a physical support for the consciousness to rest upon. Through the lama's compassion and the yidam's power, the consciousness is drawn to the name card by means of deity, mudrā and samādhi. The mantra 'dza hung bam ho' binds the consciousness to the physical support so that it can remain there. We then give dharma instruction, confer empowerment, offer nourishment through sur practice, and show the path to liberation through phowa. These are the different stages of the ritual for guiding the deceased.

*Then, offer prostration, take refuge, grant the empowerment and so on, according to whichever text you are following.*

You need to follow the different sections of the practice exactly as they are laid out in the text that you are using, i.e. prostration, cleansing, empowerment and so on.

*If you don't do the phowa in connection with the ritual for guiding the dead, do the practice from the generation of the support visualization up until giving food. Then, say...*

This is not so easy, if you don't know how to do the ritual for guiding the dead.

After negativities have been purified and the empowerments granted, you will now instantly be sent to the great, pure buddha field, on the swift path of the profound yoga of transference. So do not let your mind wander as you actualize this visualisation.

*Recite, om maha shunyata jnana benza sobhava emako hang and the rest of the prayer as above.*

This concludes the ritual for guiding the deceased.

### **Guiding a Living Person through the Phowa Visualization**

*The stages of phowa visualisation can also be given to the living.  
In that case say,...*

There is a well established tradition in Tibet, especially in Kham, of guiding someone through the different stages of phowa while they are still alive. The instructions need to be slightly changed in this case. Here the lama guides someone through the practice of phowa, while they are still alive, so that they will have some idea of what to do when they die. The instruction is given as follows.

Cultivate the supreme aspiration to be of benefit to all sentient beings in number as vast as space. Listen to the holy dharma, which is the doorway to the path of the great beings and which gathers immeasurable merit. As Nāgārjuna said in the *Garland of Jewels*,

Sentient beings have an infinite number of dispositions,  
And there are as many ways to benefit them.

Keep all sentient beings in mind as you listen to this teaching.  
What is it about? As the great master Śāntideva said,

So hard to find the ease and wealth  
Whereby the aims of beings may be gained.  
If now I fail to turn it to my profit,  
How could such a chance be mine again?

The value of having obtained such an excellent support endowed with freedom cannot even be compared to a precious wish-fulfilling jewel falling into your hand; the jewel would represent a mere hundredth or a thousandth of the value of this life. Therefore, when we have such an opportunity, we must fully devote ourselves to using all available methods in order to attain liberation and omniscience.

The perfectly enlightened buddhas whose skilful means and compassion are immeasurable, adapt to every disposition and do not exclude even one sentient being. Thus, they teach the inconceivable nectar of the sacred dharma according to the disposition, capacity, mind and habitual tendencies of beings to be trained. The most excellent of all these teachings is the supreme and unsurpassable path of Vajrayāna, and the instructions on the practice of transference it contains. As the *Four Vajra Seats Tantra* says,

As every fault that stains us  
Is purified by the practice of transference, we are liberated.  
Utterly unstained by negative actions,  
We will reach the supreme shore beyond saṃsāra.

The Great Vajradhara who Pervades All Victorious Ones repeatedly praised the power of this swift path of transference that allows us to attain Buddhahood without meditation. As a way of caring for you, I will now offer the profound instructions for easily attaining the level of Khecharī based on this path of transference.

These teachings on transference contain an infinite number of practical instructions that can be essentialized as five kinds of transference: the best is the *dharmakāya* transference free of reference; the middling is the *sambhogakāya* transference of union; the lesser is the *nirmāṇakāya* transference of training;

there is also the transference for one's own benefit by means of the three metaphors; and the transference of the hook of compassion to benefit others.

Here, I will present the *nirmāṇakāya* transference of training. To practice its instructions, you must follow a threefold structure: preliminaries, main part and conclusion.

### 1. Preliminaries

Begin with the preliminaries to purify your mind stream. Consider that the lama indivisible from all sources of refuge, appears in the space in front of you, vividly present, along with the infinite deities of the Three Jewels. Place yourself and every single sentient being before them.

Think, “from now until we realize the heart of enlightenment, whatever we do, take care of us.” Take refuge with complete trust.

Think, “I will reach the precious level of complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings by practising the deep yoga of the profound path of transference.”

As you bring to mind these thoughts, repeat the words of refuge and generate bodhicitta:

In the three jewels, and their essence, the sugatas, in the three roots,

In the channels, inner air and bindus, and their nature, the bodhicitta,

In the maṇḍala of essence, nature and compassion,  
I take refuge, until enlightenment is fully realized.

Ho!

Mesmerized by the sheer variety of perceptions, which are like the illusory reflections of the moon in water,

Beings wander endlessly astray in saṃsāra's vicious cycle.

In order that they may find comfort and ease in the luminosity and all-pervading space of the true nature of their minds,

I generate the immeasurable love, compassion, joy and equanimity of the awakened mind, the heart of bodhicitta.

*Recite these two prayers of refuge and bodhicitta three times each. If you want to elaborate,*

Generate the field of merit and offer the seven branches that bring together the key points of the accumulations, purification of negativity, and the increase of merit and wisdom already accumulated, by repeating the words of the following prayer:

Ho! Like bubbles bubbling out of water,

The deities manifest from the basic space of wisdom;

As many times as there are atoms in the universe,

I multiply my body and offer you prostrations.

With both real offerings and those created in the mind through the power of samādhi,

I offer the entire universe in one vast 'gesture of offering'.

All the harmful actions of my body, speech and mind,

I confess and purify in the luminosity of dharmakāya.

Whether they be relative or absolute,

I rejoice in all positive, virtuous actions.

According to the receptivity and needs of different beings,

I implore you to turn the wheel of dharma of the three yānas.

Till saṃsāra is completely empty, and all beings liberated,

Do not pass into nirvāṇa, but remain here among us, I pray.

All the merit and positive actions of past, present and future,  
I dedicate so that all beings may attain supreme  
enlightenment.  
*(three times)*

## 2. Main Part

Once you have purified your mindstream with these ordinary preliminary practices, enter the main part of the practice of the swift and profound path by applying the key points of the body, by sitting cross-legged with your back straight; the speech, by following the natural flow of the breath; and the mind, by not letting your mind wander but keeping it focused on this visualisation.

*Say,*

Om maha shunyata jnana vajra svabhava atma koh hang.

*Then,*

Actualize: all impure appearances, such as your aggregates, elements and sense sources, are beyond reference and have become emptiness. From the natural state of emptiness, this place appears as the pure and infinite Akaniṣṭha, the great city of the vajra queen Khecharī. Instantly at its centre, your physical body appears in the form of the mother of the Victorious Ones, Vajrayoginī...*add the rest of the visualization. Say the prayer and cultivate the visualization as necessary.*

## 3. Conclusion

At the end,



Once you have completed the main part, practise the concluding sections. Meditate on the lama on top of your head, indivisible from Amitābha. The sphere of your wind and mind marked with the letter Hriḥ descends from Amitābha's heart into your heart and comes to rest on a lotus seat. Focus on this visualization for a while.

Then, the deities in the retinue above your head dissolve into the main deity. The main deity dissolves into a red light that appears in the form of nectar and descends into you, filling you completely. Instantly, you become the Bhagavān Protector Amitāyus, red in colour with one face and two hands in the mudrā of meditation, holding a long-life vase containing the nectar of immortality. You wear all the silk and jewel ornaments and blaze with the supreme magnificence of the major and minor marks. On a moon disc at the top of your central channel, a multi-coloured vajra seals the aperture.

Inconceivably vast rays of light emanate once more from your heart. The rays of light extract the elixir of longevity from saṃsāra, nirvāṇa and the path which, in the form of rays of light, gently dissolve back into you. Be confident that you have obtained the immortal vajra body.

*Say that and,*

oṃ amaraṇi jīvantaye svāhā

*Recite the mantra 108 times as you actualize the visualization.*

Now that you have received these instructions on the profound path of transference properly, you must train yourself in all situations so that you become familiar with the visualization.

When it is clearly time for you to die, add the transference for one's benefit that involves the three considerations to your practice. Abandon all clinging to the appearances of this life – both attachment and aversion. Consider that your central channel is the path; that you are the one who follows that path; and that you are transferred into the heart of the lama. These are the three considerations by which the sphere of wind-mind and the syllable at your heart are transferred, your mind becomes indivisible from the wisdom-mind of the master, and you rest in that recognition.

To transfer other people as they leave this life and go beyond this world, practise the transference of the hook of compassion; this practice takes them to a pure realm, and so on. But you must be proficient in the skilful means that are most effective for benefiting self and others.

Just as you dedicate the roots of virtue derived from the practice of these profound instructions, dedicate every root of virtue ever accumulated during the three times, whatever it may be, in an untainted dedication that seals this benefit for yourself and all sentient beings in number as vast as space.

*Offer the appropriately elaborate or simple dedication and aspiration.*

Transference: Enlightenment without Meditation from the Heart-Essence of the Vast Expanse *with the addition of a short presentation of the stages of practice [for the practitioners as well as for dying people] for a more complete practice, elaborating a little on the original terma text so as to benefit beings in all places and times.*  
*Composed by Khyentse Wangpo.*

The practice is chiefly based on the two texts that I explained to you yesterday and this morning, but this one clarifies certain points that were not so clear in the previous ones.

Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo's arrangement shows us clearly how to train in the practice while we are still alive, as well as how we can practice for someone who has just died (when their outer breath has ceased but their inner breath is still present). This comprises the first part of his text.

The second part sets out how to conduct the ritual for guiding the deceased, based on the phowa practice already presented. When you practice this ritual, you need to follow a specific *sādhana*, whether it's from the Nyingma or Sarma tradition. Whichever *sādhana* you choose, you need to visualize yourself in the form of the deity and to complete the preliminaries and main part of the practice—both stages are essential. In the main part of the practice you need to focus on the deity, so if for example your practice is based on Vajrasattva, you need to visualize yourself as Vajrasattva.

Firstly, visualize that you are the deity, the *samayasattva*, then invoke the wisdom deities, the *jñānasattva*. With the mantra 'dza hung bam ho' and its associated mudrās you then unite the *samayasattva* and *jñānasattva* so that they become indivisible. You then request the deities to be seated, offer prostrations, make outer, inner and secret offerings, offer praise, and finally recite the mantra while resting in *śamādhī*. This is the practice of 'self-visualization'. You then need to generate the 'front-visualization' and complete the practice associated with it. Since the main part of the ritual for guiding the deceased is empowerment, this needs to be prepared for by generating the deity within the vase—the 'vase-visualization'. Once all these stages have been completed, it is time for the empowerment to be given.

If the practice you are following is a Nyingma one, you would then offer a *tsok* at this point. When you start to accumulate the *tsok* recitation, you bring whatever support you have been using, such

as the name card, and perform the cleansing ritual to purify all the obstacles and negative karma of the deceased person. You then give dharma instruction and confer empowerment. There are elaborate versions of this practice in which you purify, and so eliminate, the cause for rebirth in each of the six realms of existence.

At the end, after empowerment, the consciousness becomes indivisible with the deity of the maṇḍala.

You then perform the practice of sur, in which the five sensual stimulants are offered as sustenance. After that, you show the deceased person the path to the state of complete enlightenment, the state of omniscience of the buddha, through the practice of transference. Each ritual for guiding the deceased includes a practice of phowa. If you don't practice phowa, you will have summoned the dead person's consciousness and just left them hanging there! So you absolutely need to practice phowa at this point.

If you wish to practice phowa more elaborately based on the Longchen Nyíngtik tradition, you should follow the practice as presented in this text. Once the consciousness has been ejected and sent on the path to liberation, the support that you have been using becomes analogous to a corpse. Therefore you need to burn it through a funeral ritual. From the ashes that remain, *tsa tsas*, the supports of the dharmakāya, can be made.

This is a summary of the ritual for guiding the deceased which Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo mentions here. There are many such rituals, some very elaborate, some of middling length, and some very concise. However the content of the practices is essentially the same, as I have explained above. Each section of the practice needs to be present, otherwise the ritual will not work. The phowa practice that needs to be inserted in the ritual comprises the second section of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo's text.

There is also a tradition of practicing phowa and the ritual for guiding the deceased for people who are still alive. Since we can receive empowerments, we can receive the phowa transmission too.

In Kham, wealthy families would sponsor this ritual to be practiced every day for forty-nine days, sometimes several times over, as a preparation for one's death. Of course, they would also sponsor these practices once someone had died too. This is why Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo has added these instructions in the text.

While you are still alive, you should train in the practice of phowa. If you train in phowa throughout your life, you will be able to practice it when you die; you won't need to rely on someone else to do it for you. If you know how to do something, you can do it—it's simply a matter of training. If you don't train, however, you won't be able to apply the practice when you need to.

The text presents what you need to say to someone in order to guide them through the phowa practice. You tell them exactly what is written in the text, so they can follow you. The person should of course meditate upon what you're saying, while you actualize the practice yourself.

To summarize again, the text presents three different ways in which phowa can be practiced: (1) the actual practice of phowa itself, (2) phowa as part of the ritual for guiding the deceased, and (3) guidance through phowa visualization for someone who is still alive. The phowa within the ritual for guiding the deceased should only be performed by people who know how to do this practice.

The text includes a quotation from the *Tantra of the Four Vajra Seats*:

As every fault that stains us  
Is purified by the practice of transference, we are liberated.  
Utterly unstained by negative actions,  
We will reach the supreme shore beyond saṃsāra.

The lamas explain that in this context, 'every fault' refers to any act of negativity that you have committed, including those of the very worst kind—'the five negative acts with immediate retribution'.

These include killing one's father or mother, drawing blood from a buddha with malicious intent, creating a schism in the saṅgha, and so on. They are so called because whoever commits them will go directly to the hell realms after they die, without passing through the bardos. But here what the tantra says is that even if you have committed one of those negative acts, you can still be liberated through the practice of phowa.

The 'negative actions' mentioned in the second line refer to the ten negative actions as well as the five negative acts with immediate retribution. The quote clearly states that you can purify yourself of all stains of those negative actions and thereby be liberated from saṃsāra, through the practice of transference. 'The supreme shore beyond saṃsāra' here means buddhahood.

This is an extremely important and sacred quotation. All the Sarmapas and Nyingmapas quote from this tantra when they talk about the benefits of phowa practice.

People who have committed the ten types of negative action or five negative acts with immediate retribution need to feel a genuine sense of regret when the practices is being done—this is an extremely important point.

In the Vajrayāna, many tantras state that it is *not possible* to practice phowa for someone who has broken samayas with their teacher (the teacher whom they have received empowerment from), and who hasn't purified those breakages through confession practice. It simply will not work. The tantras go further and say that not only will it not help them, it will actually harm the person who practices phowa for them. So the instruction says not to practice phowa for this type of person. If you practice phowa for someone who has broken their samayas, there will be no signs of transference, such as the swelling on the head and so on. There are many stories in Tibet about how when phowa was practiced for someone who had broken their samayas, the lama died shortly afterwards. So this is an extremely important point to be aware of.

There is, however, another reason why no signs appear—it can be because the person you are practicing phowa for doesn't have an aperture of brahma. In such cases, even if no signs appear, the transference can still be successful.

I once practiced phowa for someone in Lhasa and there were no signs to show that the phowa had worked. Nonetheless I persisted, practicing even more strongly, until suddenly there was a loud 'tsak!' noise and a small amount of blood seeped from the nose and mouth of the dead person. We then had to inform the Chinese authorities of the death, which worried me a little. I thought they might even think that I had killed him! But there was no other option, so we bound his body and left him like that. According to Tibetan custom, we cut up the corpse after someone has died and offer the remains to the vultures. Later, the person in charge of cutting up the corpse told us that the top part of this man's skull had been blown away—he even brought us the skull to show us. So even if someone doesn't have an aperture of brahma, phowa can still work.

The text speaks of five different types of phowa. I didn't bring this up yesterday as I thought it might confuse you and just create more concepts in your mind. However since they have been mentioned here, I need to say something about them.

Of the five, the supreme type is the transference of the dharmakāya without reference point. This is when you rest in the state of primordial purity, beyond a person to be transferred, a place where you transfer to, and an act of transference. We are deluded beings who lost recognition of our primordial purity—on the basis of the ground we can recover that recognition and rest within the primordial purity in which everything is liberated. That's all there is to it. It's the best approach. Since most of you here are 'Rigpa' students, that's the approach that you all follow, right?

The middling approach is the transference of the saṃbhogakāya, through the practice of union. 'Union' here means the indivisibility of the dharmakāya and saṃbhogakāya. Since the saṃbhogakāya

manifests out of and dissolves back into the dharmakāya, they are inseparable, one and the same.

The lesser approach is the transference of the *nirmāṇakāya* through training, which is the one we have been studying here. The dharmakāya is unmoving and unchanging, yet there is movement and appearance on the apparent level, therefore we need to train ourselves in those appearances. We train ourselves through those appearances in order to return to the unmoving state of dharmakāya.

Then there is the phowa of transference for oneself based on the three considerations. These are to (1) consider that your central channel is the path; (2) that you are the one who follows that path; and (3) that you transfer yourself into the heart of the lama and merge your mind indivisibly with his/her wisdom mind.

Finally, there is the phowa of transference through the hook of compassion, which is the practice of phowa for someone who has just died (someone whose outer breath has ceased but inner breath is still present). Basically, you take hold of the consciousness of the dead person with the hook of compassion and lead them to liberation.

There are many different types of phowa practice, but they all fall within these five categories.

In some practices of phowa you send the consciousness of the dead person to the pure buddha field of Sukhāvatī, while in others it might be a different buddha field. For example, amongst the golden teachings of the Shangpa Kagyü tradition there is a *sādhana* of the six-arm Mahākāla. In this practice, you meditate on six-arm Mahākāla and invoke his compassion to help someone who has died. As you recite his mantra, you visualise that in one of his hands he holds a noose with which he captures the consciousness of all sentient beings of the six realms and leads them to Sukhāvatī. When I was young, I received all the golden teachings of the Shangpa Kagyü lineage from Kalu Rinpoche and during that time he explained this practice to me. I joked with him afterwards, “You’re dragging all those people to Sukhāvatī with that noose tied around their neck so by the time



you actually get there, they'll all be dead, a bunch of corpses—what's the point of that?" He really laughed at that remark.

In conclusion, there are many different ways of practicing phowa. As I said yesterday, the Vajrayāna contains many different skilful methods which makes it easy for us to accomplish the practice.



## 5. Phowa in a Nutshell

I'VE EXPLAINED PHOWA practice to you in quite some detail on this occasion, in the hope that you'll all gain a better understanding of it. I've taught phowa a number of times in my life, for example to practitioners on retreat, but never as fully as I have done here. The reason for this is that although generally speaking western people are considered to be quite intelligent, they are also often quite dumb! Western people need to be told and shown how to do everything, they cannot figure things out by themselves. For example, there's some water flowing from a spout outside this room—you would probably have to ask someone, "Can I drink this water?" before you took any. Unless you're told, "Yes, you can", you wouldn't drink it. This is because from an early age, throughout your schooling, you've been taught and shown how to do everything. You are led by the hand, you are not put into a situation where you have to figure things out by yourself. It is extremely difficult for you to do this, to come to your own conclusion. You won't do even the most simple thing unless someone tells you to. It is with this in mind that I've explained the teachings to you in considerable detail this time.

There are a lot of people here listening to me. Probably some of you understand what I've said, while others don't. Why? Because I'm not a Buddha. When a Buddha teaches, everyone is able to comprehend what he says, according to their own level of understanding and capacity. Whatever he says, gets through to each and every individual. And they understand what he says without any error. We often talk of the nine yānas of Buddhism—everyone who listens to the Buddha's teaching will hear what he says according to

whichever yāna corresponds to their own level of understanding. It's like the famous verse:

Do not commit a single unwholesome action,  
Cultivate a wealth of virtue,  
To tame this mind of ours,  
This is the teaching of the Buddha.

There are so many different ways in which this verse can be explained and understood. Depending on who the listener is—whether they are a follower of the Sūtrayāna, Vajrayāna or Dzogpachenpo—they will hear it and understand it from their own perspective. The Buddha is able to present a teaching at many different levels simultaneously and I'm just not able to do that.

Today I wish to summarize the phowa teachings that I've shared with you without referring to any text. But firstly, there are some important points that I wish to emphasize.

## **The Importance of Lineage**

The phowa teachings that you've received come from an authentic lineage. When you receive a teaching, you need to be able to say what that teaching was about. If you can't, and can only give some vague sort of answer, then it has not been a proper dharma teaching for you, just a lecture. Whichever teaching you receive, whether it pertains to the Sūtrayāna (the causal vehicle of characteristics), the Secret Mantra Vajrayāna, or the Clear Light Great Perfection, it has to have a proper lineage of transmission. I'm sure there are many people nowadays who say that lineage isn't important, but this would be a grave error.

These teachings are very special and their lineage of transmission is exceptional too. In terms of that lineage, it comprises the mind-

direct transmission of the victorious ones, the symbolic transmission of the vidyādhara, the oral transmission of the noble beings, and transmission through the words of the yellow scrolls. These different types of transmission make this teaching very special.

If a teaching is said to be an earth terma, it must have been transmitted through the yellow scrolls—the yellow scroll is like a proof of its validity. That's why a terma text will always begin with the *ḍākinī* script that appears on the yellow scrolls, to validate its authenticity.

Even the other types of terma that are not transmitted through yellow scrolls, such as mind termas, oral transmission termas, pure perception termas or recollected termas, must still have an authentic lineage of transmission. Concerning mind termas, entrustment by the *ḍākinīs* and aspirational empowerment<sup>29</sup> are very special features of their transmission. Transmission through aspirational empowerment is absolutely essential.

The Longchen Nyīngtik is a mind terma revealed by Jigme Lingpa. Jigme Lingpa received the complete empowerment and transmission of this terma as a result of the strong aspirations that he made in the past. As a consequence, he received all the aspirational empowerments. Jigme Lingpa was the incarnation of Gyalse Lharje who was the grandson of King Trisong Detsen and one of the chief disciples of Guru Rinpoche. Guru Rinpoche entrusted him with all the transmissions, empowerments and instructions related to this teaching and then concealed them so they could be of benefit to future generations. These are the very teachings that were later revealed when Gyalse Lharje appeared as Jigme Lingpa.

The omniscient king of the dharma, Longchenpa, who mastered all the teachings of the Great Perfection, also appeared to Jigme Lingpa in a series of visions. Jigme Lingpa met directly with the

---

29 One of the 'six lineages' (see footnote 11). Sometimes also translated as 'the lineage empowered by enlightened aspiration'.

omniscient Longchenpa on four occasions and received from him the complete transmission and realization of the teachings of Great Perfection. It's as if Longchenpa made a copy of his realization and transferred it to Jigme Lingpa, who then mastered all the teachings in the same way. In the teachings we say that he 'mastered the treasury of space'.

So Guru Rinpoche and Longchen Rabjam imparted all the transmissions and empowerments of these teachings to Jigme Lingpa, who made the aspiration to reveal them at the right time in the future, for the benefit of all sentient beings. This is how he received the aspirational empowerment transmission. The lineage was passed from the buddha dharmakāya to the saṃbhogakāya, from the saṃbhogakāya to the nirmāṇakāya, and then from Garab Dorje to Mañjuśrīmitra, Śrī Siṃha, Jñānasūtra, Vimalamitra, Guru Rinpoche, Khandro Yeshe Tsogyal, through to the great omniscient Longchenpa and Jigme Lingpa. The lineage was transmitted through all these great beings. There has never been so much as the slightest breakage of samaya by any of these great masters, so the teachings are completely unstained, the lineage is utterly pure. This is what we call 'the great equality and purity', meaning that in the state of primordial purity, the teacher and students are indivisible, they are both equal and pure.

Jigme Lingpa wrote down these teachings and revealed them to the world for the benefit of future generations. He first transmitted them to his main disciple, Jigme Gyalwé Nyugu, who then passed them on to Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo. The lineage then continued from Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo to Jamgon Kongtrul, from Jamgon Kongtrul to Shechen Gyaltsap, and from Shechen Gyaltsap to Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. There's another branch of the lineage that passed from Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo to Doderupchen Jigme Tenpai Nyima, to Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö, and then to Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. And it is from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche that I personally received these teachings. You can see therefore that

from the time of Jigme Lingpa, these teachings have been passed down through an unbroken lineage. When you look at all the great masters who make up that lineage, there's not one of them that you could possibly have the slightest doubt about. I received the complete cycle of the Longchen Nyingtik teachings from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche about four or five times. So many times, in fact, that I cannot remember exactly how many. That was the entire cycle of Longchen Nyingtik. I also received instruction in Longchen Nyingtik phowa practice on other occasions, separately. And I have trained in the practice too.

Lineage is extremely important and that's why I've emphasized it to you today. Nowadays some students claim that they have been fooled and lied to by their teacher—that's another reason why I thought I should talk about lineage. I'm not someone who just makes things up and blurts out whatever pops up in their mind. I'm not like that at all. What's more, I've based all the explanations that I've shared with you on the original terma text written down by Jigme Lingpa, as well as the notes that he made about how to put the terma into practice. I also shared Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo's arrangement for the phowa practice which can be found in the root volumes of the Longchen Nyingtik. There are three volumes in this set labelled Om̐, Āḥ and Hūṃ and this text appears in the third volume, Hūṃ.

If the lineage cannot be accounted for, then there's a problem. That's the approach of the Secret Mantra Vajrayāna. There's no doubt about this point. If you think you've been fooled by these teachings, you'll have to take your complaint back 2,500 years, to when they were first given! It's not my fault. I haven't tried to fool you, I've just shared what was already there. And if these teachings aren't genuine, then I'm an even bigger fool than you, because I've valued and treasured them very highly, and have practiced them diligently. As for myself, I follow the Chokling tradition. I am an incarnation of Taksham Nüden Dorje, but still have the greatest

respect and appreciation for the Longchen Nyingtik teachings. I was requested to teach you phowa from the Longchen Nyingtik cycle and that's what I've done. Today, I've presented the lineage of those teachings to you very clearly. This is very important for you to know. That's my first point.

## **The Blessings of the Lineage**

If the lineage is pure and authentic, it can bring great blessings. I've also spoken to you these past few days about the importance of blessings and the different signs that can come when you practice phowa. You can actually see whether this practice works or not, there are clear signs that indicate this. Regarding signs that cannot be seen, I've no idea how to talk about them nor how to know if they've actually happened. What do I mean by 'signs that cannot be seen'? Basically, whether or not someone goes to Sukhāvātī after phowa has been practiced for them. About that, I have no idea! I can't see whether or not this has happened. Still, we need to think that whoever we practice phowa for, does go to Sukhāvātī. And even if they don't make it to Sukhāvātī, at least they will have gone to a pure buddha field. Of this, we should have no doubt. We should be confident of this. That is my second point.

## **The Importance of Practice**

My third point is to stress the importance of putting these teachings into practice. After you receive instruction from the teacher, you need to practise what you have been taught. Otherwise, it's not going to work. Of course, the practice is called 'enlightenment without meditation', so you might think why practice then? But we can



give something all kinds of grand names, just like we call someone ‘Sangye’, but that doesn’t mean to say that he or she is a buddha! Sure, they have the ground of buddha nature, the basis through which they can become a buddha, but that doesn’t mean they are a buddha now. We also call some women ‘Tārā’ but that doesn’t mean to say they are Tārā now. What we mean is that they have the basis of Tārā within them, that enlightened nature. When we speak of ‘enlightenment without meditation’, meditation here refers to the conceptual practice of kyerim and the non-conceptual practice of dzogrim.

If we look at the Dzogchen tradition, for example, no one ever says that the first human Dzogchen master, Garab Dorje, ever meditated. What we hear is that he received the transmission of the tantras of Dzogpachenpo from Vajrasattva in a single sitting and immediately attained supreme accomplishment. I guess, however, he must have meditated a little. Garab Dorje’s student, Mañjuśrīmitra, practised for nine years in the Sosadvīpa charnel ground. His student was Śrī Siṃha, who was already extremely learned and accomplished before he met Mañjuśrīmitra. After he received instruction and transmission from his teacher, he went to practice in the charnel ground of Sosadvīpa for twelve years. Think about it—if even these great masters had to meditate, then we need to meditate too, don’t we?

The great omniscient Jigme Lingpa also practised a lot, for example entering retreat in Chimphu for three years, and so on. He probably called phowa ‘enlightenment without meditation’ because it is possible to attain enlightenment through its practice in just seven days, without having to spend years of meditation in charnel grounds.

But there’s an important point to understand here. Masters such as Mañjuśrīmitra and Śrī Siṃha were able to achieve buddhahood in one lifetime because of all the practice they had accomplished beforehand. When they passed away they dissolved into the ‘body of

great transference'. Masters such as Guru Rinpoche and Vimalamitra will pass into the body of great transference at the end of this kalpa. In any case, what you need to remember is that in a single lifetime, they all managed to reach Vajradhara's state of union, in other words complete and perfect enlightenment, the dharmakāya level of realisation.

What we mean when we say 'Transference: Enlightenment without Meditation' is that through phowa practice, you will instantly be sent to the pure buddha field of Sukhāvatī and from there will go through all the different stages (bhūmis) and levels of the path until you reach enlightenment. We are not saying that you will be fully enlightened immediately, in an instant. This is something that you need to know. It doesn't mean that you just need to train for seven days to become a buddha. Once you've transferred your consciousness to a pure land, you will then work your way towards buddhahood; it will be much easier for you. Jigme Lingpa said that when you reach the pure land of the Copper Coloured Mountain, the moment you meet Guru Rinpoche and see his face, you will perfect all the stages on the path to enlightenment—so it's even easier. This is important for you to understand. I don't want you to make the mistake of thinking that you can practice phowa for seven days and then leave your room and walk around as if you are a buddha. Don't think that!

To give you an example—suppose you have a good weapon. If you want to kill someone, just owning the weapon is not enough, you need to use it. It's the same with phowa—if you use it, if you practice, you will reach a pure buddha field and from there can reach enlightenment. This is my third point.

## Summary of How to Practise Phowa

You have been insistently requesting me to practise phowa with you, so that you can record the chant and see how the practice is done. That is your tradition and it's fine, don't worry, I will do it. I will show you how to practice (a) for someone who is still alive (but still that person needs to have some understanding of the practice), and (b) for someone whose outer breath has ceased but inner wind is still flowing, whose consciousness is still present inside their body. We went through all that yesterday. If the consciousness has already left the body, phowa practice will have no benefit—there's no point practising with a corpse. When we perform the ritual for the deceased, for example, we first have to summon the consciousness back into a support before we can practice phowa. If the person you are practicing for doesn't understand the purpose of transference, your practice will also have no benefit. And if you just sit there and practice without any understanding yourself, you cannot expect any signs to appear. Perhaps something might happen if you have incredible devotion, but otherwise there will be no result.

I've explained why and when you should practice phowa, and how you should practice, so you will understand all these points. Today, I'll summarise the key points of the practice for you once again, in case some of you haven't understood everything fully. This will then be the end of my instruction. After that, you will have to train in the practice, you will have to practise it for yourself.

Phowa means 'transference', transference from one place to another. What we transfer is our consciousness, which we transfer from our impure body and this impure field of existence, to the pure buddha field of Protector Amitābha. We transfer our consciousness into the heart of Amitābha who abides in the pure buddha field of Sukhāvātī. When we transfer our consciousness into the heart of Amitābha we become one with him ('one taste') and in this way

reach enlightenment. Once you've reached that state it's not like you're on a permanent holiday and can sleep all the time—you will then manifest emanations in order to benefit all sentient beings. This is the reason why we practice phowa.

So how do you effect this transference? You need to rely on the method called Transference: Enlightenment without Meditation. And to practice that method you first need to receive instruction and guidance from a lama.

To practice phowa, you first need to begin with refuge, bodhicitta and the seven branch offering. These are the preliminaries to all Buddhist practice and in particular any practice of the Secret Mantra Vajrayāna.

After the preliminaries comes the actual main practice itself. In some traditions, you remain in your usual form, your normal body, but a special feature of the Longchen Nyingtik phowa is that you transform your body into Vajrayoginī. A pure appearance like this is better, isn't it? Between meditating on the deity and not meditating on the deity, meditating on the deity is better, isn't it? You can find a description of how to visualize yourself as Vajrayoginī in the instructions on ngöndro practice. You will also find there a detailed explanation of the benefits of visualizing yourself as the deity and of invoking its compassionate enlightened mind—how it enables you to receive the blessings of the deities and lamas more swiftly, and so on.

You visualize Vajrayoginī as being red in colour, with one face and two hands. Her right hand holds a curved blade, her left hand a kapāla filled with blood. She wears jewels and ornaments and her body has the quality of appearing yet being empty inside, 'like an inflated bladder', as Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo wrote. Inside her body is the central channel, the width of an arrow made of reed, perfectly straight. I explained to you yesterday how this channel is open at the top and closed at the bottom. At the level of the heart is a notch, like a knot in a stick of bamboo, on which rests a green sphere of light (wind energy) which quivers slightly. On top of this green

sphere our awareness appears in the form of a red syllable *Hṛīḥ*, which radiates light like a bright oil lamp. Visualize that your wind energy and your mind manifest as the green sphere and the *Hṛīḥ* syllable, they are fully gathered into them. You should not think that the *Hṛīḥ* syllable is something separate from you. It *is* your mind. When we say ‘I’ we refer to the mind; it is this mind that rests on the wind energy within our body.

About a forearm’s distance above the aperture of brahma at the crown of your head is the protector Amitābha. He is surrounded by all the lamas of the mind direct, sign and oral transmission lineages and by all the yidam deities. You don’t have to visualize every single one of them, you just need to have a sense that they are all there. To the right of Amitābha is Avalokiteśvara and to his left is Vajrapāṇi. One point that might not be so clear for you is where it says in the text that Amitābha wears the three dharma robes. The three dharma robes are the lower skirt-like garment called the *shantab* and the two shawls worn over the upper part of the body known as the *chögö* and *namjar*. So this is where you will send your consciousness to.

In terms of the actual transference itself, the most important point that all the lamas stress is prayer. In the Secret Mantrayāna teachings, and in particular the path of Clear Light Dzogpachenpo, the root of all practice is praying to the lama. When the compassion of the lama joins with the devotion of the student, everything becomes much easier to accomplish. You therefore need to generate a strong and heartfelt devotion to the lama and not just mouth the words of the prayer. Your devotion needs to be genuine and unfabricated.

In the invocation prayer, you say that you will instantly transfer your consciousness to the pure buddha field, through the profound and powerful instructions of transference, for the sake of all sentient beings who like yourself are lost in the ocean of suffering of *saṃsāra*, trapped in an impure body and this impure world. You pray to the lama to seize you with the hook of his/her compassion and blessings so that you are able to transfer yourself successfully from this impure

world where you experience so much suffering to the pure buddha field of Sukhāvātī. This is what you should pray for when you recite the invocation. The actual words of the prayer come from the terma itself. I'm sure one of you will ask, "How many times do I need to repeat the prayer?" When Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche used to practice, he would recite the prayer seven times the first time, and then three times for each subsequent round. Actually, the number of times that you recite the prayer is up to you—you need to determine that for yourself.

After the prayer, repeat the syllable Hṛīḥ, producing the sound by moving your tongue against the upper palate of your mouth. Basically, it means by hardly moving your mouth. You don't have to recite it loudly, it's more like you are saying it to yourself. Focus on the Hṛīḥ syllable resting on the green sphere of wind energy at the centre of the heart and move it up the central channel with each repetition of Hṛīḥ—the text says like a piece of paper carried on the wind.

At one point shout 'Phaṭ!' and eject your consciousness, shooting it upwards like an arrow released by an athlete. The syllable goes directly into the heart of Amitābha where it dissolves and becomes one with him.

You repeat this cycle as many times as you can in one session. When you are training in the practice (i.e. practicing for yourself, while you are still alive) you should end the session by dissolving the protector Amitābha into light, which then dissolves into you. You then arise as the protector Amitāyus. In Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo's practice arrangement, he says at this point you should visualize a Hṛīḥ syllable in your heart which emanates rays of light which gather the essence of longevity from all corners of the universe, bringing it back into you. You then close the aperture of brahma at the crown of your head with a double-crossed vajra which is seated upon a sun and moon disc seat. These instructions were added by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and taken from other phowa practices; they are not found in the original terma text itself.

So that's how you should do the practice. I sincerely hope that you have now understood how to do it. And if you don't, there's nothing more I can do for you! You need to train in the practice, which is very short.

The next session will be devoted to questions. Whatever we do, it needs to be useful. Therefore we need to go into detail and cover everything thoroughly. We are from very different cultures and our language is different. I think probably the way we think is different too. Our habits are different. That's why when the dharma is taught in a situation like this we need to go into detail and make sure we clarify whatever questions or doubts might come up. If the lama just teaches without paying too much attention to whether or not people have understood what he/she has said, and the students listen but aren't really sure about what they have heard, what do you think the result will be? The dharma is not all that easy. Therefore we need to go into detail. Just to explain is not enough, you need to allow time for questions and to clarify any doubts that come up. If you're a Tibetan and have a doubt, you can refer back to the scriptures. But it doesn't work like that with you. You don't read Tibetan. So you need to ask questions, if you want things to be clarified.





## 6. Questions about Phowa Practice

**Q. I understand about the signs which tell you if the phowa practice has been successful, such as a swelling on the crown of the head, but are there also signs that would tell you if the phowa practice has gone badly wrong, in which case you would want to contact a master who is better placed to help that person?**

A. The signs that the phowa practice has been successful are mentioned in the terma text. For example, that a small lump forms at the aperture of brahma on the crown of the head. For some people this aperture is located directly in the middle of the head, while for others it is slightly to the right or left. When you train in the practice yourself, you might also develop headaches. Not just any sort of headache, like the ones I habitually suffer from, but rather as soon as you start to practice, you develop a kind of pain in the head. A yellowish fluid might also seep from your fontanelle. After you have trained in the practice for some time, you might even be able to insert a stalk of grass through your aperture of brahma. All these signs are clearly mentioned in the terma text and I've seen them many times.

There's no mention of any signs that would indicate the practice didn't work, what you call bad signs. Basically you can understand it in this way—if the signs of a successful transference don't appear, then it means the practice hasn't worked. That's the bad sign. As I said before, the reason you might not see signs is because the person you are practicing for doesn't actually have an aperture of brahma. There are some people this applies to. Even for people who have committed a lot of negative actions (such as the five actions with immediate retribution, the five almost as grave, and so on), it is said that if you do the phowa practice properly, signs will appear. And it makes absolutely no difference what caste or race that person comes

from. For samaya-breakers, however, there will not be any signs. That's clear from the start. This doesn't apply just to phowa, by the way—no Dharma practice can benefit them. It is clearly said that if you have broken your samayas and try to accomplish the yidam deity, it will not work.

**Q. But are there any signs on the corpse that would indicate the phowa practice had gone wrong, that you would then need to contact a realized master to put right?**

A. There are no specific signs—it's just that no signs appear, which means the practice didn't work. So you might then want to contact a powerful practitioner to try instead. Generally speaking, you should train in the practice and experience the signs for yourself, before you try to practice for others. Otherwise you cannot expect signs to come just like that.

If you have practiced phowa for other people several times before and signs have always appeared, and then find that in one or two cases this doesn't happen, you can consider them to be special cases. But if you have practiced phowa 10, 15 or 20 times before and no signs have ever appeared, it means you cannot do the practice. It simply means that you haven't trained enough in the practice yourself.

Depending on the practitioner, there can also be a difference in the impact of the phowa. When Dza Patrul Rinpoche's mother was about to pass away, he invited all the lamas from Dzachuka to practice phowa for her. One tulku, Adzom Drukpa, was quite young at that time and it was he who Patrul Rinpoche said produced the greatest signs of accomplishment. According to the custom in Kham, when you request lamas to practice phowa for someone, you need to offer them a horse. It's actually even called the 'phowa horse'. But Patrul Rinpoche didn't have a horse so instead he offered to Adzom Drukpa the transmission of the Longchen Nyingtik tsa lung. When Patrul Rinpoche was practising the Longchen Nyingtik tsa lung, he worked his way through thirteen pairs of the special loin cloth that you need

to wear when you do this practice. He also offered one of those loin cloths to Adzom Drukpa. This story shows that the practice can have a stronger or lesser impact, depending on the practitioner. In Tibet, there were people who actually checked which lama had the greatest impact when they practiced phowa.

When people in Bir ask me to come and practice phowa for someone, I always go to their house and honour their request, even until today. After I've completed the practice, I always check to see whether the practice has worked or not. If it has worked, I only do the practice once. However if no signs appear, I repeat the practice again and again until they come. In most cases, the signs do come. Some of my monks, especially the younger ones, are afraid to touch a corpse, so I always check for the signs myself. I don't ask my monks to do this. Personally, I'm not afraid of corpses. In some cases the practice just doesn't work, in which case I tell the relatives and suggest that they invite another lama or practitioner to try. This can happen.

**Q. When you practice phowa for animals, is the instruction for the visualization any different?**

A. I've no idea about this. I've heard that there are some traditions that teach how to practice phowa for animals, but I don't know about them. In India, my father once practiced phowa for a snake. Someone had struck the snake with a stone and its head had become separated from its body, but the body was still writhing around on the ground. My father looked at the snake, shouted 'Phat!' once, and immediately the body stopped moving. It was like the electricity had suddenly been turned off. I saw this with my own eyes but I've no idea how he did it.

There's also a story about the incarnation of Chokling Rinpoche, the one previous to my father. One day he was sitting on a rock eating meat with his tutor, when he accidentally dropped the knife they were using down a deep crack. The tutor became very upset because it was a particularly good knife. They tried to retrieve it,

but it had become firmly stuck. Chokling Rinpoche then said it was possible to practice phowa not just for a consciousness, but also for inanimate objects, like the knife. He shouted ‘Phaṭ!’ once and the knife flew up into the air, so he could catch it. Such stories exist.

**Q. How important is it to say Phaṭ out loud? Some of us might be in a hospital or similar such situation where that would be difficult. Can you also say the Phaṭ silently?**

A. This also I don’t know. I can see how it might be difficult to practice phowa in a place like a hospital, but my teachers never said anything about this to me. The texts say that you should say Phaṭ loudly and then visualize that the consciousness shoots up like an arrow. I don’t think there’s a single text that says you can recite Phaṭ quietly.

**Q. Can the phowa practice be done by a group of practitioners or should it always been done individually?**

A. I’ve already told you that phowa is not a group practice. There’s no phowa drupchen! It’s something that each person needs to practice individually. When we die, we don’t die in a group, do we? When lamas guide people through phowa practice as a training, however, that usually is done in large gatherings. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche used to do this for thousands of people at the same time. When I received the transmission of the *Treasury of Instructions* (Dam Ngak Dzö) from Kalu Rinpoche, he also guided us through phowa practice and a lot of people were present then. I concentrated intently on the visualization as he guided us through the practice, but suddenly my head started to itch so I had to scratch it. I panicked a little and stopped the visualization. So lamas do guide people through phowa practice as a group. Some people really follow the practice and actually pass out when this is done, especially if they are being guided by a powerful master. There was a lama who lived near to Manali called Sangzang Lama who was from Central Tibet—when

he guided people through the phowa practice, many in the audience would actually faint.

**Q. You said that a lama cannot practice phowa for a student who has broken their samayas. Is there anything else we can do for our vajra brothers and sisters when they die, if they have broken their samayas?**

A. Personally, I don't even go near such people. But then again, I've never met anyone who has seriously broken their samayas. There were a few people from the Dzongsar Shedra who turned against Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche in the past, and they were present when he gave the empowerments of the Treasury of Instructions some years ago. But the days they attended, I didn't go. I only went when they weren't there. Otherwise, I haven't been exposed to such people. I've never actually been asked to practice phowa for someone who has broken their samayas—people wouldn't call me in such cases. Unless you're requested to do the practice for someone, you don't just do it from your side.

According to the pith instructions that have been handed down by the lineage, phowa practice can be of benefit to anyone except those who have broken their samayas. Phowa doesn't work for these people, and not only doesn't it work, it can actually be harmful for the person who practices it for them. And it follows that if the lama cannot practice phowa for them, neither can the vajra brothers and sisters. The moment those people broke their samayas with their lama, they also broke their samayas with their vajra brothers and sisters. This question shows that you don't know much about the samayas and what the breakage of samaya means.

There are fourteen root samayas in the Secret Mantra Vajrayāna. The first and foremost is the samaya that you have with the lama who has given you empowerment and transmissions.

The Vajradhara said that accomplishments  
Come from following the teacher,  
So to disparage him or her  
Is explained as the first root downfall.<sup>30</sup>

It is the first one because it is the most important. The second samaya is to follow the instructions and commands that the lama gives you:

To transgress the words of the sugatas  
Is taught to be the second downfall.

Once you have received empowerment from a lama and rely upon him/her as your root teacher, if you don't follow his/her instructions, that constitutes the second breakage of samaya. These days, some people say that if the lama tells you to do something that is not in accord with the dharma, you don't have to follow their instructions. This is absolutely wrong and contradicts the tantras. There are hundreds of quotations from both the Sarma and Nyingma tantras that can be cited to refute this. Having said that, I don't believe an authentic teacher would ask you to do something that was not connected to the dharma in any way.

In the Vinaya, it is said that the rules and vows need to be in accord with the local situation and times, and can be changed if all the senior-most fully ordained monks and nuns gather in a great assembly and decide to do so. But I don't think this has ever actually happened. According to the Vinaya, it would be possible to do this, to adapt the dharma. But it's now been over two thousand years since ordination was established and I don't think this has happened even once. I've never heard of it. The 250 vows of a fully ordained monk have not changed since the time of the Buddha.

---

30 These and the subsequent two quotes derive from Āśvaghoṣa's, *Summary of the Root Downfalls of the Vajra Vehicle* (see Lotsawa House <https://www.lotsawahouse.org/indian-masters/ashvaghosha/root-downfalls>)

There was an Indian monk at a large gathering of the ordained saṅgha in Vārāṇasī some years ago who said that some of the rules of the Vinaya needed to be adapted to fit the current times. But the senior monks from Burma wholly disagreed with him and said they would never accept his proposal. The Dalai Lama wanted to propose a change to the rules for the ordination of nuns, so that it would be possible for them to receive vows of full ordination from a fully ordained monk or abbot. He wanted to put forward this proposal to a great gathering of senior monks so that a decision could be taken. As a first step, a learned abbot from the Ministry of Religious Affairs wrote to over 250 khenpos from the Tibetan tradition, all of whom were very learned in the Vinaya, to ask their opinion. The only one in favour of the change was Khenpo Pema Sherab. A few didn't reply but most of them said that this would not be possible.

My point here is that the Buddha himself said it would be possible to adapt the rules of the Vinaya. And the way this should be done is to convene a great assembly of the most revered elders and monks, and to propose the changes there. If the proposal is repeated three times and all the monks remain silent during each repetition, then it is agreed. It would only take one monk to disagree, however, for the proposal to be rejected.

Concerning the Vajrayāna, we must follow the original wisdom intent of the tantras and this cannot be changed. This is because the teachings of the tantra are the natural sound of the dharmatā. They were not written by ordinary human beings and cannot be changed simply by thinking about them.

The third samaya is to maintain pure perception towards one's vajra brothers and sisters.

Out of anger, to speak ill  
Of one's vajra siblings is the third.

There's a lot to explain in relation to this samaya. A breakage of this samaya can be on the level of the mind, i.e. you have negative thoughts towards your vajra brothers and sisters, or on the level of speech, things you actually say to them. It can also be on the bodily level, when you act upon those negative thoughts and physically abuse your vajra brothers and sisters. That's the third samaya and there are eleven more that follow.

When those samayas are broken, what can we do? Confession—and it's best if you do this before the end of the day. If your lama is present, you confess in his/her presence. Or failing that, to your vajra brothers and sisters. If you're unable to do this on the same day, your confession should at least happen within one month. If not then, within a year. The tantra says, however, that if you have committed breakages of samaya and fail to confess them within three years, they cannot be restored.

This is what you can do for breakages of the fourteen root samayas. There are also twenty-five secondary samayas. These can be restored on the tenth and twenty-fifth days of the lunar month when you offer tsok, invoke the maṇḍala of the deities, and receive their empowerment. In this way, you can purify all the breakages of samaya that you have committed.

In your question you seem to be saying that this person has broken samayas with their lama but not with their vajra brothers and sisters. But that isn't possible. In the Vajrayāna, we don't make any distinctions in the maṇḍala of the teacher and the students, we see them as equally pure.

**Q. If we are unconscious at the moment of death, for example in a coma, how can we practice phowa?**

A. I don't know much about the state of coma, you'd have to ask a doctor. Some doctors say that you can still experience sensations when you're in a coma, that you're still responsive on some level. If that's the case, it might be possible for you to do phowa. Dzongsar



Khyentse Rinpoche told me that even though some people stay in a coma for several years, they still have some level of sensory experience. You can sit next to them, talk to them, and give them various kinds of treatments. At least, this is what some doctors say.

Nowadays there are many conditions and illnesses like this. At the time the texts on phowa practice were written, I don't think such conditions were known about. What those texts dealt with was when someone's external breathing had ceased, but inner breath was still present. Is that similar to a coma? I don't know, you'd have to ask the doctors. They would know if there was still movement in the vein at the throat—that would be a sign of whether external breathing had ceased and the person was beyond being revived. Phowa practice is intended for someone who cannot be resuscitated. Some people say that patients can emerge from a coma, so I really don't know.

**Q. What can I do if I have a sudden accident, for example I'm run over by a truck, and death is instantaneous, there's no time to practice phowa?**

A. Actually if you train well in the practice, it can still be possible for you to practice phowa in such a situation. You can do it there and then, in that instant. I know cases of Dzogchen practitioners who remained in tukdam even after they were killed in an accident. They were still able to meditate. If you remember the instructions in that moment, you will be able to practice. It's also possible for someone else to do the practice for you at such times. Often after a car accident, for example, the corpse is left on the road for some time afterwards. But if you have trained well, you will be able to practice even if your death is sudden.

**Q. When I practice phowa for another person, do I visualize both myself and the other person as Vajrayoginī, or just myself?**

A. Both. There's a tradition of phowa where you consider yourself and the deceased person to be one and the same, indivisible, and

merge your two consciousnesses together. But you're advised not to practice that too much. So it's better you visualize both yourself and the dead person as Vajrayoginī, and eject both your consciousnesses, while focussing more on the dead person than yourself. But you do it together, for both of you.

**Q.** There's an increased risk nowadays that we might die suddenly, for example by a bomb going off. If that happens to me, I hope I will be able to think of all the other people who died at the same time as me. If I practice phowa at such a time, can I bring all the other people with me?

**A.** That would depend on the power of your practice. This applies to everything—it depends on your ability. If you are a powerful practitioner, then probably you would be able to help the other people who died alongside you. It is said in the Dzogchen teachings that when you reach enlightenment, you are able to bring four thousand other beings with you. Some texts even say whole countries. It depends on your capacity as a practitioner.

There's a story which can illustrate this, about the previous incarnation of Choktrul Rinpoche. Some people came to see one of Choktrul Rinpoche's main students, who himself was an important lama. They told him that there was a big risk that his teacher, Choktrul Rinpoche, might die that year. The lama then replied that it would indeed be better if his teacher did pass away. They were absolutely astounded by his answer and couldn't believe what he said. They turned to him and said, "You're one of his main students, how can you possibly say it would be better for him to pass away?"

A great deal of practice was being done for Choktrul Rinpoche's long life at that time. All the lamas, monks and lay people of the Golok region had gathered to offer a longevity ceremony (tenshyuk) to him. The people from Golok have a special character, they can be very very insistent. One lama said to Choktrul Rinpoche, "You need to live to be at least 108 years old. You have to, you've no choice. You

can't refuse me. This is my oath." Choktrul Rinpoche was taken back and impressed by his request and replied, "Yes, okay. Perhaps not for 108 years, though. I'll stay here until all of you think that this old man should have died the year before."

A few years later, the Chinese came and imprisoned all the lamas and monks from the area, including Choktrul Rinpoche. One day, the prisoners were rounded up by the guards and told that on the following day, they would all have to deliver a strong beating to Choktrul Rinpoche. They were then sent away. Afterwards, Choktrul Rinpoche approached them and asked what had happened. When they explained what the guards had ordered them to do, he turned to them and said, "I told you a few years ago that it would be better if I passed away, but you all made oaths and insisted that I shouldn't die. So I told you that I would stay until such time that all of you thought, 'He should have died last year.' Tomorrow, you're going to have to beat me up. For me, it's no problem, but throughout my whole life I've given you empowerments, transmissions and explanations of the tantras—if you beat me up, what do you think the result of that will be for you?" They pleaded with him, "But what can we do? Is there any way that you could actually pass away now?" Choktrul Rinpoche then recited the phowa practice from the Nam Chö tradition once, and immediately passed away. Many of his students who were present with him then also passed away at the same time. This is a well known story in Golok. There were so many dead bodies for the authorities to dispose of, it became a huge problem for them. They couldn't handle so many corpses all at the same time. So it seems if you are a powerful enough practitioner, you can liberate other people at the same time as yourself.

**Q. This is a question about the phowa visualization. After I transfer my consciousness into the heart of Amitābha, at what point do I then re-emerge in a lotus flower?**

A. You don't need to worry about that! Once you've reached Sukhāvātī, the only rebirth you can possibly take is in the heart of

a lotus flower. It will just happen. When you dissolve into the heart of Amitābha, that is the dharmakāya, which corresponds to death. But once you've reached the dharmakāya, you then need to arise once more as a nirmāṇakāya, in order to benefit sentient beings. That's when you will be miraculously reborn in the heart of a lotus flower. If you have some hesitation about being reborn as a human, you might stay in the lotus flower for as long as five hundred years. But even still, you will only experience a state of happiness and bliss while you're there. You won't, however, be able to see the face of the buddha during that time, you will only be able to hear his words.

**Q. I would just like to check something about the visualization. I understand that as I recite Hṛīḥ, I should visualize the bindu and Hṛīḥ syllable moving upwards through my central channel. On the last recitation of Hṛīḥ, the syllable reaches the crown of my head. Then I shout 'Phaṭ!' and eject my consciousness into the heart of Amitābha. When you did the practice, however, you recited Phaṭ five times in quick succession. What are you supposed to visualize during those five repetitions of Phaṭ?**

A. It says in the text that the first Phaṭ is for the nirmāṇakāya, the second for the saṃbhogakāya, the third for the dharmakāya, the fourth for the unchanging vajrakāya, and the fifth for the abhisambodhikāya. Therefore you say Phaṭ five times. This is a special feature of the Longchen Nyingtik phowa—in other phowa traditions, it usually says to simply recite Phaṭ as many times as you want. But you shouldn't mix instructions—if you mix together the different pith instructions from the different practice lineages, you will end up with something like a beggar's bowl of tsampa. It just won't work. There are some phowa practices in which you expel the stale air, inhale and retain the breath, and then eject your consciousness as you exhale. You associate the practice with the control of your inner air or lung. The phowa from the Longchen Nyingtik is relatively easy to understand and practice, and is related

to the approach of Dzogchen. Whichever practice you do, you should apply the pith instructions that relate to that tradition. You shouldn't mix up different instructions. Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo made some additions to clarify the practice, which are of course fine to follow.

Whether you need to say Phaṭ many times or once depends on your capacity as a practitioner. For some, just once is enough. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche used to say Phaṭ many times. But this would vary according to who he was practicing for—for some people he would say it many times, for others just a few.

**Q. When you become old and start to see signs of a degenerative disease such as dementia, or a condition that is very painful, could you ask another practitioner to practice phowa for you to end your life? Like a sort of suicide.**

A. I don't think anyone would do that for you, if you were to ask them. But there are people who do that for themselves. I've seen this many times. I had one teacher who was a khenpo from the Sakya tradition, who I received many teachings and empowerments from. He developed an incurable condition that affected his feet. I took him to a hospital for a full check-up and the doctors said that he would need to have his toes amputated. He agreed to have the operation. Some time later, he became sick again. I was not with him at that time, but someone else took him to a hospital in Mandi. This time when the doctors examined him, they said it would be necessary to amputate his legs above his knees, and he agreed to have that done. But when some time later they told him that they needed to perform yet another amputation, this time further up the leg, he said that was enough, he didn't want any more treatment. He asked his attendants to make him some momos, so they went out, bought some meat, and prepared them as he liked. He ate them with relish. After he'd finished, he sat up in his bed and recited the phowa of Khecarī; he then immediately passed away. It didn't take even five minutes. His

name was Khenpo Chime and he was a student of Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö. There are many such stories. So this is something that you might choose to do yourself. That's what we call freedom, right?

I don't think it's quite the same as suicide. Suicide is something more common here in the West. If someone can die merely by shouting 'Phat!', would you call that suicide? I doubt whether legally it would be called as such. There are of course a lot of different opinions about this topic, but I don't think we have time for this now.

**Q.** Rinpoche, you said that when you are reborn in Sukhāvātī, you're not liberated straight away and still have to go through all the stages of the path. Whereas if you are reborn in Zangdokpalri, you meet Guru Rinpoche face-to-face and become fully liberated there and then. So wouldn't it be better for us to be reborn in Zangdokpalri?

**A.** To be honest with you, I don't know. When you give a dharma teaching, you need to follow the specific tradition that it comes from and to present the instructions accordingly. So when you teach the Longchen Nyingtik phowa, you need to talk about Sukhāvātī. There are other phowa traditions where you are reborn in Zangdokpalri, the Copper-Coloured Mountain, but they are different. Karma Chakmé, Raga Asé, said it was more beneficial to be reborn in Sukhāvātī than in Zangdokpalri, and presented many reasons to support that view. This was in the context of his teachings on the special qualities of Sukhāvātī.

There are five buddha fields related to the five buddha families: the buddha fields of the Fully-Arrayed, Consummate Activity, Manifest Joy, and so on. Raga Asé said it is difficult to be reborn in those buddha fields—for that to happen, you need to have a high level of realization and to have accumulated many causes and conditions. But Sukhāvātī is much easier for you to reach. In order to be reborn there, you just need to bring your hands together and pray

to Amitābha, and to hear his name and the name of his buddhafield. In Sukhāvātī, you will find incredible pleasure, joy and happiness—everything described in the prayer that Karma Chakmé wrote.<sup>31</sup>

It is said:

The duration of this fortunate eon  
Is one day in Sukhāvātī.  
Throughout countless eons, there is no death.  
May I always remain in that realm.

The entire duration of the Good Kalpa, our present age, that began with the first buddha Krakucchanda and will end with the 1002th buddha, Vairocana, corresponds to just one day in Sukhāvātī. That is what Karma Chakmé wrote in his *Prayer of Aspiration to be Reborn in Sukhāvātī*. The prayer continues,

From Maitreya up to Rocana, when all the buddhas  
Of this fortunate eon come to this world,  
May I come here with miraculous powers,  
Present offerings to those buddhas,  
Listen to the genuine dharma,  
And return unimpeded  
To the realm of Sukhāvātī.

He said that when the buddhas of the Good Kalpa appear and turn the wheel of the dharma, you will travel from Sukhāvātī to listen to their teachings and return back straight after. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche once explained this prayer to me, but I'm the type of person who has all kinds of thoughts and questions, so I said to him, "But if that's true, doesn't it mean that in a single day you have go and come back

---

31 See Appendix IV

to Sukhāvātī one thousand times, just to receive those teachings?” He really laughed when I said that. If you occupy your mind with a lot of thinking, you end up asking questions like that! We have all sorts of strange thoughts and ideas now in this degenerate age.

In any case, Sukhāvātī is an extraordinarily sacred and blessed place. Karma Chakmé said that it is easy to be reborn in the Copper-Coloured Mountain, but the benefits are small. For one thing, Zangdokpalri is not a celestial realm but is located on the earth. Another point is that in order to benefit as many beings as possible, and especially the people of Tibet, Guru Rinpoche has sent a large number of armies there. This has its complications. You will encounter the five degenerations and many obstacles there, and the kinds of situation in which it is difficult to accomplish Guru Rinpoche’s commands. You will need to deal with all of that and many other difficulties. This is what Karma Chakmé said and that’s why he thinks it’s better to be reborn in Sukhāvātī.

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche himself, however, prayed to be reborn in the Copper-Coloured Mountain. His consort, Khandro Lhamo, preferred Sukhāvātī. She would pray twenty-four hours a day to be reborn there. When she woke up at night, she would immediately start to recite the prayer, “Emaho! Amitābha, magnificent Buddha of Boundless Light...” When they ate together, one would take the side of Sukhāvātī, and the other Zangdokpalri. She would repeat what Karma Chakmé had written, as I just told you: “Things are complicated with the Copper-Coloured Mountain. He will send you back to fight in wars.” To which one day Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche said, “You do know that Trulshik Rinpoche prefers Sukhāvātī to the Copper-Coloured Mountain, don’t you?” Trulshik Rinpoche was eating with them at the time. I was there too. He immediately said to Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, “Oh, please pray that I will be reborn in Sukhāvātī.” Khyentse Rinpoche said, “Okay. I’ll do that.”

A few minutes later Khyentse Rinpoche said to both of them, “It was Karma Chakmé who said that if you go to Zangdokpalri, Guru



Rinpoche will send you back to fight in wars, whereas if you go to Sukhāvatī, you will never come back, right?” Trulshik Rinpoche replied, “Yes.” Khyentse Rinpoche continued, “It’s said in Karma Chakmé’s biography that after he passed away, he went to Sukhāvatī and took all his students with him, including even their dogs. But they didn’t all stay in Sukhāvatī, did they? There’s a tulku of Karma Chakmé here in Nepal. And now that he’s back, he has to deal with all the problems that his children have created, getting drunk, fighting, and so on. Isn’t that so? Karma Chakmé’s tulku came back, didn’t he?” Neither Trulshik Rinpoche nor Khandro Lhamo had anything to say to that!

We’ve focussed on the Longchen Nyingtik phowa this time and therefore we’ve only talked about Sukhāvatī. But actually, you shouldn’t think that the different buddha fields such as the Copper-Coloured Mountain and Sukhāvatī are any different. That’s a very gross way to think, if you believe that. You shouldn’t see them as being different in any way. The moment you reach a pure buddha field, you will cease to have any gross, impure thoughts like that.



# Appendices



**I.**  
**Transference: Enlightenment**  
**without Meditation**  
**from The Heart-Essence of the Vast Expanse**

*revealed by Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa*

Homage to the expanse of the view!

The path of the clear light Great Perfection  
Is the natural freedom of the dharmakāya, beyond objective.  
Someone who captures this stronghold  
Is beyond that which is transferred and the act of transference.  
Yet for those who prefer elaborate means of attaining nirvāṇa,  
The ‘Transference: Enlightenment without Meditation’ is taught.  
The preliminaries, refuge and bodhicitta are done in the general way.  
Whether practising for your self or for another,  
It is crucial to incorporate the four immeasurables.  
For the main practice, visualise yourself as Vajrayoginī,  
According to the outer practice of Guru Yoga, then continue with:

In the middle of her body runs the central channel  
As thick as a hollow reed arrow,  
Empty and clear like a tube of light.  
Its upper end is open at the brahma-aperture,  
And its lower end touches the navel centre.

Upon the notch at the heart-centre,  
In the centre of a light green sphere of inner air (lung)  
Awareness clearly appears as a red syllable Hrīḥ.  
A forearm's length above the crown of one's head  
Appears the Buddha Amitābha, 'Limitless Light',  
Complete with all the major and minor marks.

Pray with fervent devotion.  
Not allowing the mind to wander elsewhere,  
And with single-pointed aspiration.  
Recite "Hrīḥ Hrīḥ" from the upper palate,  
Recite them five times together,  
While holding upper body tight and focusing on the head.  
Awareness is in the form of a red syllable Hrīḥ,  
Lifted like paper carried on the wind,  
Rising ever higher and higher.  
With a loud "Phaṭ!" it shoots up like an arrow  
And dissolves into Amitābha's heart.  
Through training like this repeatedly,  
Signs of proficiency will arise: the brahma-aperture will tremble; the  
head will ache; a drop of serum, shining like dew, will appear; and it  
will be possible to slowly insert a grass stalk.

Then, the form of Amitābha  
Melts into light and dissolves into me.  
Through that, I too become Amitāyus,  
Perfect in the very instant of recollection.

Recite the amaraṇi mantra one hundred times.  
Dedicate the virtue and make prayers of aspiration.  
This will not damage your life.  
In fact, due to the truth of interdependence, it will pacify obstacles  
to life.

This secret mantra path is superior in its methods,  
 So guard the crucial points of Transference: Buddhahood without  
 Meditation  
 As dearer than your own heart or eyes!  
 Samaya!

### **Prayer**

Emaho!  
 In the self-appearing realm, the ultimate Akaniṣṭha,  
 Is an expanse of interweaving rainbow light of intense devotion.  
 Here, the embodiment of all objects of refuge, one's own root guru,  
 In an extraordinary form and with a radiant body,  
 Abides as the essence of Buddha Amitābha.  
 With intense devotion, we pray:  
 Inspire us to accomplish the path of transference!  
 Inspire us to reach the realm of Akaniṣṭha!  
 May we capture the domain of dharmakāya expanse!

Phaṭ! (Nirmāṇakāya) Phaṭ! (Sambhogakāya) Phaṭ! (Dharmakāya)  
 Phaṭ! (Unchanging Vajrakāya) Phaṭ! (Abhisambodhikāya)

*Translated by Adam Pearcey, 2018. Revised with assistance from Gyurme Avertin, 2021.*





## II.

# Transferring the Consciousness of the Dead

*by Jigme Lingpa*

*Before transferring the consciousness of a dead person, begin with saying the name of the deceased an appropriate number of times.*

[Name of the deceased], having experienced impermanence you are now dead.

*Repeat three times.*

You are not the only person to have experienced what we call ‘death’; it is the path every one of the five kinds of sentient being (gods, humans, animals, *pretas*, and hell beings) must follow. Once birth has taken place, life or living can only end in death—such is the nature of things. There is not a single sentient being in this world—from the rich and powerful universal monarch to the starving beggar unable even to feed himself—who can free themselves from life and death, so don’t despair.

Be aware that nothing you are attached to—your family, your friends, your house, your wealth, your possessions and so on—can go with you. Understand that your time with them is now over. As it is said:

When his time has come, even a king has to die,  
 And neither his friends nor his wealth can follow him.  
 So for us—wherever we stay, wherever we go—  
 Karma follows us like a shadow.<sup>32</sup>

Now that you are personally experiencing the ripening of the truth of suffering described in this verse, which is the very nature of things, the danger is that your attachment to your relatives, wealth and possessions will lead you to a lower realm. This is why, in the *Sutra Requested by the Girl called Precious*<sup>33</sup>, the Buddha said:

In that moment, your father, mother, relatives,  
 Friends or people you are close to, cannot afford you any protection.  
 Sons, daughters are no refuge.  
 Only those endowed with great qualities can protect you,  
 Which no worldly protector can give you.

You should therefore rejoice at being able to experience death and transference at a time when the teachings of the Buddha exist in this world. During this fortunate time, just to hear the names of the bhagavān buddhas—no matter who recites them—is very powerful. If a dead person with a joyful mind really trusts in the Buddha, hearing the names of the buddhas during the process of transference will liberate them from a lower rebirth and they will instead be reborn as a human or a god. As the Buddha said in *The Hundred Deeds*:<sup>34</sup>

“O monks, if a bird descends from the sky and lands in front of me, will it see me?”, he asked. “O Noble Bhagavān, it will see

---

32 *Rajavavada Sutra*. [https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Four\\_thoughts](https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Four_thoughts)

33 *Putriratnaparipriccha-sutra*, *Bu mo rin chen gyis zhus pa'i mdo*.

34 A sutra. *Karmaśataka*, *las brgya pa*. Toh 340.

you”, they replied. “O monks, if the bird comes to like me, it will not leave but will stay and follow me. So if you have appreciation for me in mind at the moment of death and transference, you will have a rebirth much better than being reborn here in Rājagṛha in the family of rich merchants, and will become a monk who follows my teachings. In only seven years after having taken ordination, you will overcome all negative emotions and become a foe destroyer, an arhat.”

Just one moment of faith in the Buddha brings about these benefits. As you are born in a world where the teachings of the Victorious One are present, you have heard the name of the Buddha, and you also have the good fortune to be able to appreciate his teachings. So, sincerely arouse an even greater faith in our teacher, the Tathāgata, take refuge in the Dharma, his perfect teachings and aspire to respect the sangha of bodhisattvas. Buddha promised that all fear in the bardos and all the causes of lower rebirth will be completely eliminated the moment anyone remembers his name and words, and abides by the view.

Do not forget to rely on the protector Amitābha and the bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi, or their buddha-field called Sukhāvatī. Since you are now free of your physical body of flesh and blood, go straight to this supreme buddha field.

Think of and meditate on the lama for whom you have devotion. Remember your yidam and the view. Meditate on the Mahayana’s bodhicitta in aspiration and action.

Having created auspicious circumstances by following these key instructions, apply the instructions on transference that lead to the attainment of enlightenment without meditation. Since you are reincarnating lifetime after lifetime, meditate on a white syllable *a* in your heart. As I repeat *a*, bring into your experience what I have just said. Consider that *a* (*in some particular cases you can also change it*

*to brih)* goes straight to the buddha-field of Sukhāvātī, like an arrow shot by a strong man.

*Say this to inspire the dead person and actualize it yourself. Then, repeat the same number of a as the number of years the person lived, in a gentle tone of voice. To send the dead person to a higher rebirth, pull the hair on the crown of their head and repeat a twenty-one times. The Tantra of the Union of the Sun and the Moon<sup>35</sup> says:*

*If, having applied the syllable a  
To the breath and the number of years the person lived,  
They do not die at that very moment,  
Gather the consciousness of the air from the brahma aperture  
Into the middle of the body  
Focusing on the syllable a.*

*And,*

*If the dying person is still breathing as you do this practice,  
By applying the letter to the breath  
Their consciousness will be transferred from this world –  
Of this there is no doubt.*

*Associating the unborn syllable a with the expelled air once the process of dissolution has begun to manifest, is an extremely profound instruction.*

*Emphasize merging the mind of the person you practice for with the wisdom of space-like expanse, using the skilful means of great compassion. Alternatively, you could practise more elaborately at this*

---

35 nyi zla kha sbyor gyi rgyud.

*point by doing one of the many phowa as it appears elsewhere.<sup>36</sup> In any case, block the entrance to the lower realms with the names of the buddhas, and with the mantras, dharanis and special aspirations made by the buddhas. Bear in mind that it is difficult to guide those who are completely unfamiliar with spiritual practice through kyerim, and to introduce them to appearance, increase and attainment, and so on, because it is very hard to communicate with those who are in the blank state of alaya.*

*This text was written by Rangjung Dorje, in the presence of Losal.*

---

<sup>36</sup> For example the Longchen Nyingtik Powa: <https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/jigme-lingpa/longchen-nyingtik-phowa-root>



### III.

## A Short and Clear Arrangement of the Phowa Practice from the Longchen Nyingtik Cycle of Dzogpachenpo

*by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo*

Namaḥ śrī gurave

*This arrangement of phowa practice from the Longchen Nyingtik cycle of Dzogpachenpo is for those who wish to elaborate a little on the usual arrangement.*<sup>37</sup>

### **Preliminaries to Purify the Mind**

*Say, from the arrangement of the practice given to us by Jigme Lingpa, the Greatly Precious Omniscient One:*

Since you are reincarnating lifetime after lifetime...<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Jigme Lingpa, *Transferring the Consciousness of the Dead*.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, page 2.

*Then continue with:*

...to purify your mindstream, begin by thinking of all sources of refuge, the ocean of the deities of the three jewels indivisible from your lama, who appear vividly in the space in front of you. With that in mind, take refuge and generate the supreme mind of enlightenment and so on, as I follow the words of the prayers and, without getting distracted, concentrate on actualizing their meaning.

*Actualize the meaning of these words and follow the relevant preliminary prayers of bodhicitta and so on, long or short. Recite the names of the Buddha and specific dhāraṇīs, and read the Tantra of the Only Son of the Dharma<sup>39</sup> and so on, as appropriate.*

## **Actual Phowa Practice**

Having purified my mind by practising the common stages of the path, I will now follow the clear arrangement of the powerful practice of phowa. I will not let my mind be distracted while I visualize, as follows.

OM MAHA SHUNYATA JNANA BENZA SOBHAVA EMAKO  
HANG

All dualistic appearances that involve the duality of subject and object – in other words all phenomena – become empty and free of reference.

---

<sup>39</sup> *Tib. bstan pa bu gcig gi rgyud.*



From the natural state of emptiness, my body instantly appears in the form of the mother of all the Victorious Ones, Vajrayoginī, red in colour with one face and two hands. She holds a curved knife in her right hand and a skull-cup filled with blood in the left. On her left shoulder, she holds the male deity, the heruka in the form of a khaṭvāṅga. She is adorned with the silk, jewel and bone ornaments. Her right leg slightly bent and her left extended in dancing posture. She stands on a lotus, sun and corpse. Visualise her body clearly and empty like an inflated bladder.

Her central channel is as thick as a hollow reed arrow; it is empty and clear, like a tube of light. The top opens like a skylight at her brahma-aperture; the bottom, which is closed, is four fingers below the navel. At her heart, a bamboo notch appears to interrupt the channel, on which the inner wind appears in the form of a light green sphere the size of a pea that moves a little. It is clearly marked with a red syllable Hṛīḥ that is as bright as a blazing oil lamp; the essence of the Hṛīḥ is awareness. I visualize this clearly.

A forearm's length above the crown of my head, appears the great, ultimate Akaniṣṭha of dharmadhātu. In an expanse of vajra chains of awareness, rainbow light and bindus, on a lotus and moon seat, sits the embodiment of all refuges, the Bhagavān Protector Infinite Light, Amitābha, indivisible from our kind root teacher. He is red in colour with one face and two hands in the mudra of meditation, and he holds a begging bowl filled with the nectar of immortality. He wears the three saffron-coloured dharma robes. The supreme resplendence of his major and minor marks shines brightly. His two legs are crossed in the full vajra posture. To his right is the bodhisattva Lord Avalokiteśvara and on his left is the bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi and so on. He is surrounded by buddhas and bodhisattvas and an infinite number of victorious deities of the Three Roots. The great guide to the path to liberation is vividly present right in front of me.

I pray to the lama and recite Hriḥ five times.

I pray one-pointedly, with fervent devotion to the lama sitting on top of my head, without allowing my mind to wander. As a result, the sphere in my heart that is marked with the seed syllable and is in nature my mind and wind energy, ascends through the central channel like paper blown by the wind. As I shout Phaṭ, I eject the sphere, which shoots straight up like an arrow. The sphere dissolves into the heart of the lama above my head. My mind becomes indivisible with the wisdom mind of my master, and I rest in meditative equipoise in the basic space beyond ordinary mind, free from conceptual elaboration.

*Pray with one-pointed devotion to the lord of the mandala, then say the prayer that begins, “Emaho! In the self-appearing realm, the ultimate Akaniṣṭha...”. down to “May we capture the domain of dharmakaya expanse! Hriḥ Hriḥ Hriḥ Hriḥ Hriḥ”<sup>40</sup> Say the Hriḥs with your tongue on your palate.*

*Say, Phaṭ! Phaṭ! Phaṭ! Phaṭ! Phaṭ! Saying that transfers the consciousness to the expanse of great bliss indivisible from the five wisdoms and the five kāyas of the Protector Amitābha.*

*Train yourself to do this visualization and get used to it; repeat it until the signs of stability and confidence in the practice arise.*

*Then rest in meditative equipoise within emptiness, free from the elaborations of the three spheres of subject, object and action.*

---

40 In the Longchen Nyingtik Powa. <https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/jigme-lingpa/longchen-nyingtik-phowa-root>. Note that Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo added here that we need to inset five Hriḥs before Phaṭ! Phaṭ! Phaṭ! Phaṭ! Phaṭ!

*When you arise from that meditation, bring to mind great compassion in post-meditation as you dedicate and make aspiration prayers as elaborately as you can.*

## **Phowa as part of the Ritual for Guiding the Dead**

*At the time of guiding the dead person, say,*

*“O, [Name of the dead person], you have now died. But you are not the only person ever to have experienced what we call ‘death’...” until, “Meditate on Mahayāna’s bodhicitta in aspiration and action”, as in the Longchen Nyingtik phowa text.*

*Having created the right circumstances by actualizing these points, O Bhagavān [say the name of the buddha you have been practising], it is now time to open the great mandala so that I may grant the empowerment for guiding the dead and show the path to liberation through this profound ritual.*

Your consciousness can remain in your corpse or the name-card, either of which will provide it with a support.

Prostrate with your body and take refuge verbally as you reject all thoughts and concepts of attachment, aversion and ignorance. Pray one-pointedly and with heartfelt devotion to the lama, who is indivisible from all the deities of the mandala.

*Then, offer prostration, take refuge, grant the empowerment and so on, according to whichever text you are following.*

*If you don't do the phowa as part of a ritual for guiding the dead, do the practice from the generation of the support visualization up until giving food. Then, say,*

After negativities have been purified and the empowerments granted, you will now instantly be sent to the great, pure buddha field, on the swift path of the profound yoga of transference. So do not let your mind wander as you actualize this visualisation.

*Recite, OM MAHA SHUNYATA JNANA BENZA SOBHAVA  
EMAKO HANG and the rest of the prayer as above.*

## **Guiding a Living Person through the Phowa Visualization**

*The stages of phowa visualisation can also be given to the living. In that case say,*

Cultivate the supreme aspiration to be of benefit to all sentient beings in number as vast as space. Listen to the holy dharma, which is the doorway to the path of the great beings and which gathers immeasurable merit. As Nāgārjuna said in the *Garland of Jewels*,<sup>41</sup>

Sentient beings have an infinite number of dispositions,  
And there are as many ways to benefit them.

Keep all sentient beings in mind as you listen to this teaching. What is it about? As the great master Śāntideva said,

---

41 Skt. Ratnavali. Tib. rin chen phreng ba.

So hard to find the ease and wealth  
 Whereby the aims of beings may be gained.  
 If now I fail to turn it to my profit,  
 How could such a chance be mine again?<sup>42</sup>

The value of having obtained such an excellent support endowed with freedom cannot even be compared to a precious wish-fulfilling jewel falling into your hand; the jewel would represent a mere hundredth or a thousandth of the value of this life. Therefore, when we have such an opportunity, we must fully devote ourselves to using all available methods in order to attain liberation and omniscience.

The perfectly enlightened buddhas whose skilful means and compassion are immeasurable, adapt to every disposition and do not exclude even one sentient being. Thus, they teach the inconceivable nectar of the sacred dharma according to the disposition, capacity, mind and habitual tendencies of beings to be trained. The most excellent of all these teachings is the supreme and unsurpassable path of Vajrayāna, and the instructions on the practice of transference it contains. As the *Four Vajra Seats Tantra* says,

As every fault that stains us  
 Is purified by the practice of transference, we are liberated.  
 Utterly unstained by negative actions,  
 We will reach the supreme shore beyond samsara.

The Great Vajradhara who Pervades All Victorious Ones repeatedly praised the power of this swift path of transference that allows us to attain Buddhahood without meditation. As a way of caring for you, I

---

42 *Sāntideva. The Way of the Bodhisattva. Translated by Padmakara. Shambhala Publications, 2011, chapter 1, verse 4, page 31.*

will now offer the profound instructions for easily attaining the level of Khecharī based on this path of transference.

These teachings on transference contain an infinite number of practical instructions that can be essentialized as five kinds of transference: the best is the *dharmakāya* transference free of reference; the middling is the *sambhogakāya* transference of union; the lesser is the *nirmāṇakāya* transference of training; there is also the transference for one's own benefit by means of the three metaphors; and the transference of the hook of compassion to benefit others.

Here, I will present the *nirmāṇakāya* transference of training. To practise its instructions, you must follow a threefold structure: preliminaries, main part and conclusion.

### 1. Preliminaries

Begin with the preliminaries to purify your mind stream. Consider that the lama indivisible from all sources of refuge, appears in the space in front of you, vividly present, along with the infinite deities of the Three Jewels. Place yourself and every single sentient being before them.

Think, “from now until we realize the heart of enlightenment, whatever we do, take care of us”. Take refuge with complete trust.

Think, “I will reach the precious level of complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings by practising the deep yoga of the profound path of transference.”

As you bring to mind these thoughts, repeat the words of refuge and generate bodhicitta:

In the three jewels, and their essence, the sugatas, in the three  
 roots,  
 In the channels, inner air and bindus, and their nature, the  
 bodhicitta,  
 In the mandala of essence, nature and compassion,  
 I take refuge, until enlightenment is fully realized.<sup>43</sup>  
 Ho!  
 Mesmerized by the sheer variety of perceptions, which are like  
 the illusory reflections of the moon in water,  
 Beings wander endlessly astray in samsara's vicious cycle.  
 In order that they may find comfort and ease in the luminosity  
 and all-pervading space of the true nature of their minds,  
 I generate the immeasurable love, compassion, joy and equanimity  
 of the awakened mind, the heart of bodhicitta.<sup>44</sup>

*Recite these two prayers of refuge and bodhicitta three times each. If you want to elaborate,*

Generate the field of merit and offer the seven branches that bring  
 together the key points of the accumulations, purification of  
 negativity, and the increase of merit and wisdom already accumulated,  
 by repeating the words of the following prayer:

Ho! Like bubbles bubbling out of water,  
 The deities manifest from the basic space of wisdom;  
 As many times as there are atoms in the universe,  
 I multiply my body and offer you prostrations.  
 With both real offerings and those created in the mind through  
 the power of samadhi,

---

43 *From Longchen Nyingtik Ngondro.* <https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/dodrupchen-1/longchen-nyingtik>

44 *Ibid.*

I offer the entire universe in one vast ‘gesture of offering’.  
 All the harmful actions of my body, speech and mind,  
 I confess and purify in the luminosity of dharmakāya.  
 Whether they be relative or absolute,  
 I rejoice in all positive, virtuous actions.  
 According to the receptivity and needs of different beings,  
 I implore you to turn the wheel of dharma of the three yānas.  
 Till samsara is completely empty, and all beings liberated,  
 Do not pass into nirvāṇa, but remain here among us, I pray.  
 All the merit and positive actions of past, present and future,  
 I dedicate so that all beings may attain supreme enlightenment.<sup>45</sup>  
 (three times)

## 2. Main Part

Once you have purified your mindstream with these ordinary preliminary practices, enter the main part of the practice of the swift and profound path by applying the key points of the body, by sitting cross-legged with your back straight; the speech, by following the natural flow of the breath; and the mind, by not letting your mind wander but keeping it focused on this visualisation.

Say,

OM MAHA SHUNYATA JNANA VAJRA SVABHAVA ATMA  
 KOH HANG.

Then,

---

45 The first two lines are from the Rigdzin Düpa seven branch offering, and the rest the Longchen Nyingtik Ngondro's seven branch offering. (Longchen Nyingtik Ngondro: see note 7. Rigdzin Düpa: Jigme Lingpa, Patrul Rinpoche, Khenpo Chemchok, and Taye. *The Gathering of Vidyadharas: Text and Commentaries on the Rigdzin Düpa*. Translated by Gyurme Avertin. Boulder: Snow Lion, 2017, page 164.)



Actualize: all impure appearances, such as your aggregates, elements and sense sources, are beyond reference and have become emptiness. From the natural state of emptiness, this place appears as the pure and infinite Akaniṣṭha, the great city of the vajra queen Khecharī. Instantly at its centre, your physical body appears in the form of the mother of the Victorious Ones, Vajrayoginī...*add the rest of the visualization. Say the prayer and cultivate the visualisation as necessary.*

### 3. Conclusion

*At the end,*

Once you have completed the main part, practise the concluding sections. Meditate on the lama on top of your head, indivisible from Amitābha. The sphere of your wind and mind marked with the letter Hṛīḥ descends from Amitābha heart into your heart and comes to rest on a lotus seat. Focus on this visualization for a while.

Then, the deities in the retinue above your head dissolve into the main deity. The main deity dissolves into a red light that appears in the form of nectar and descends into you, filling you completely. Instantly, you become the Bhagavān Protector Amitāyus, red in colour with one face and two hands in the mudra of meditation, holding a long-life vase containing the nectar of immortality. You wear all the silk and jewel ornaments and blaze with the supreme magnificence of the major and minor marks. On a moon disc at the top of your central channel, a multi-coloured vajra seals the aperture.

Inconceivably vast rays of light emanate once more from your heart. The rays of light extract the elixir of longevity from samsara, nirvana and the path which, in the form of rays of light, gently dissolve back into you. Be confident that you have obtained the immortal vajra body.

*Say that and,*

OM AMARAṆI JĪVANTAYE SVĀHĀ

*Recite the mantra 108 times as you actualize the visualization.*

Now that you have received these instructions on the profound path of transference properly, you must train yourself in all situations so that you become familiar with the visualization.

When it is clearly time for you to die, add the transference for one's benefit that involves the three considerations to your practice. Abandon all clinging to the appearances of this life – both attachment and aversion. Consider that your central channel is the path; that you are the one who follows that path; and that you are transferred into the heart of the lama. These are the three considerations by which the sphere of wind-mind and the syllable at your heart are transferred, your mind becomes indivisible from the wisdom-mind of the master, and you rest in that recognition.

To transfer other people as they leave this life and go beyond this world, practise the transference of the hook of compassion; this practice takes them to a pure realm, and so on. But you must be proficient in the skilful means that are most effective for benefiting self and others.

Just as you dedicate the roots of virtue derived from the practice of these profound instructions, dedicate every root of virtue ever accumulated during the three times, whatever it may be, in an untainted dedication that seals this benefit for yourself and all sentient beings in number as vast as space.

*Offer the appropriately elaborate or simple dedication and aspiration.*

Transference: Enlightenment without Meditation from the Heart-Essence of the Vast Expanse *with the addition of a short presentation of the stages of practice [for the practitioners as well as for dying people] for a more complete practice, elaborating a little on the original terma text so as to benefit beings in all places and times. Composed by Khyentse Wangpo.*

*Translation by Gyurme Avertin, April 2020.*



# IV.

## Aspiration for Birth in the Pure Realm of Sukhavati

*by Karma Chagmé*

*This is the treasury of Karma Chagme's practice.  
I have written it with the work of my own hand.  
I think it might benefit quite a few beings.  
If you don't want to copy it, borrow it.*

*There is nothing more beneficial than this.  
There are no instructions more profound than this.  
It is the root of my dharma.  
Don't cast it aside; strive in its practice.  
As this is of the sutra tradition, it is appropriate  
To recite it even if you have not received the transmission.*

Emaho! In the direction of the setting sun from here,  
Past innumerable worlds,  
And slightly elevated above us,  
Is the pure realm of Sukhavati.  
Although I do not see it with my fluid-filled eye,  
It is vividly clear in my mind.

There resides the bhagavat Amitabha.  
The color of ruby, he blazes with majesty.

He is adorned by the thirty-two good marks and the eighty signs,  
Such as the ushnisha on his head and the wheels on his feet.  
He has one face and two hands, and holds an alms bowl in meditation.  
Wearing the three dharma robes, he is seated in vajra posture  
On a thousand-petaled lotus and a moon disc seat.  
His back is supported by a bodhi tree.  
He gazes upon me from a distance with compassionate eyes.

On his right is the bodhisattva Avalokita.  
He is white and holds a white lotus in his left hand.  
On Amitabha's left is the bodhisattva Mahasthamaprapta.  
He is blue and holds in his left hand a lotus with a vajra on it.  
The right hands of them both display to me the mudra of giving  
protection.  
These three principals are like Mount Meru,  
Vivid, distinct, and brilliant.  
Their retinue is a trillion bodhisattva bhikshus.  
All of them are golden in color and adorned by the marks and signs.  
Wearing the three dharma robes, they fill the realm with yellow.  
As there is no difference between near and far for devoted prostration,  
I devotedly prostrate to you with my three gates.

The dharmakaya Amitabha is the lord of the family.  
The light-rays of his right hand emanate Avalokita  
And a billion further emanations of Avalokita.  
The light-rays of his left hand emanate Tara  
And a billion further emanations of Tara.

The light-rays of his heart emanate Padmakara  
And a billion further emanations of Padmakara.  
I prostrate to the dharmakaya Amitabha.

Buddha, you kindly and constantly regard  
 All beings throughout the six times of day and night.  
 You always know what thoughts  
 Are moving through the mind of every being.  
 You always hear distinctly  
 The words spoken by every being.  
 I prostrate to the omniscient Amitabha.

It is said that, other than those who have rejected dharma  
 Or done any of the five worst actions, all with faith in you  
 Who make the aspiration to be born in Sukhavati will fulfill that  
 aspiration.  
 You will appear in the bardo and lead them to your realm.  
 I prostrate to the guide Amitabha.

For the length of your life, innumerable kalpas,  
 You will not pass into nirvana.  
 You abide manifestly now.  
 It is said that anyone who prays to you with one-pointed devotion,  
 Even if their life is exhausted,  
 Unless that is caused by the ripening of karma,  
 Will live a hundred years.  
 You will avert all untimely death.  
 I prostrate to the protector Amitayu.

It is said that there is greater merit  
 In hearing of Amitabha's name and Sukhavati  
 And joining one's palms with faith  
 Than in filling countless billion-world realms  
 With jewels and giving them in generosity.  
 I therefore prostrate to Amitabha with devotion.

Anyone who, hearing Amitabha's name,  
Sincerely gives rise to faith  
From the depths of their heart even once,  
Cannot be turned back from the path of awakening.  
I prostrate to the protector Amitabha.

Having heard the name of the buddha Amitabha,  
Until one reaches the essence of awakening,  
One will not be born as a woman without power.  
One will be born of good family.  
In every birth one's morality will be pure.  
I prostrate to the sugata Amitabha.

I offer my body, possessions, and roots of virtue;  
Whatever actually prepared offerings there are;  
Mentally emanated auspicious substances and signs, and the seven  
jewels;  
The pre-existing billion worlds with their billion sets  
Of four continents, Mount Meru, the sun, and the moon;  
And all the luxuries of devas, nagas, and humans.  
Bringing all these to mind, I offer them to Amitabha.  
For my benefit, accept them through your compassion.  
I confess all the wrongdoing I and all beings, my parents included,  
Have done throughout beginningless time up to now,  
Such as killing, stealing, and fornication:  
I admit and confess the three wrongdoings of body.

Lying, calumny, harsh words, and gossip:  
I admit and confess the four wrongdoings of speech.  
Covetousness, malice, and wrong views:  
I admit and confess the three wrongdoings of mind.



The killing of one's father, mother, acharya, or an arhat;  
 And the shedding of a buddha's blood with malicious intent:  
 I admit and confess the five worst actions.  
 Killing a bhikshu or shramanera, seducing a nun,  
 And destroying images, stupas, or temples:  
 I admit and confess the nearly worst actions.

Swearing by the three jewels, temples, scriptures,  
 Or the three supports, and swearing by them falsely:  
 I admit and confess the wrongdoing of rejecting dharma.  
 Worse than killing all beings in the three realms  
 Is the denigration of bodhisattvas.  
 I admit and confess pointless great wrongdoing.

Thinking that the benefits of virtue, the harm from wrongdoing,  
 And the suffering and lifespan in hell are untrue, mere sayings,  
 Is worse than the five worst actions.  
 I admit and confess the wrongdoing from which it is hard to be  
 freed.

The four defeats, the thirteen remainders, the downfalls,  
 The confessables, and the misdemeanors—the five classes:  
 I admit and confess impairments of the pratimoksha morality.  
 The four negativities; and the five, five, and eight downfalls:  
 I admit and confess impairments of the bodhisattva training.  
 The fourteen root downfalls and the eight major branches:  
 I admit and confess impairments of secret mantra samaya.

The wrongdoing done when not under vows,  
 Such as fornication and drinking alcohol,  
 Actions that are naturally unwholesome:  
 I admit and confess unwitting wrongdoing.

Although I have taken the vow of refuge and empowerments,  
I admit and confess downfalls of commitment through  
Not knowing how to keep the vows and samaya they entail.

Without regret, confession will not purify.  
I confess all past wrongdoing with great shame, fear, and regret,  
As though I had swallowed poison.

If there is no commitment henceforth, there will be no purification.  
From now onward, even at the risk of my life,  
I vow not to engage in wrongdoing.  
Sugata Amitabha and your bodhisattvas,  
Grant your blessings that my being be purified.

If, when one hears of another's virtue,  
One is without the negativity of jealousy,  
And rejoices from one's heart,  
It is said that one will gain equal merit.

I therefore rejoice in all the virtuous deeds  
Of aryas and ordinary beings.  
I rejoice in their generation of bodhicitta  
And their vast benefit for beings.

The ten virtues that are the opposites of the ten wrongdoings—  
Saving others' lives, giving generously,  
Chastity, speaking truthfully,  
Healing discord, speaking gently and straightforwardly,  
Conversing meaningfully, having little desire,  
Cultivating love and compassion, and practicing dharma:  
I rejoice in those virtuous actions.

All you who have recently attained  
 Perfect buddhahood in any of the  
 Numberless realms in the ten directions:  
 I urge you to soon turn the vast dharmachakra.

I pray that you hear me with your clairvoyance.  
 All buddhas, bodhisattvas, holders of dharma,  
 And spiritual friends who wish to pass into nirvana:  
 I pray that you not do so, but remain.

I dedicate this and all my virtue of the three times  
 To the benefit of all beings. May they all  
 Quickly attain unsurpassable awakening,  
 And empty samsara's three realms from their depths.

May this virtue quickly ripen in me.  
 In this life, may the eighteen untimely deaths be prevented.  
 May I be healthy and as vigorous as a youth.  
 May my wealth be as inexhaustible as the Ganges in summer.

Unharmed by maras or enemies, may I practice genuine dharma.  
 May all my wishes be fulfilled in accord with dharma and my  
 intentions.  
 May I accomplish vast benefit for dharma and beings.  
 May my human body be meaningful.

May I and all connected to me,  
 As soon as we pass from this life,  
 Actually see in front of us  
 The emanated buddha Amitabha  
 Surrounded by his sangha of bodhisattvas.  
 Seeing them, may we feel joy.  
 May we be without suffering at death.

May the eight bodhisattvas  
Appear miraculously in the sky.  
May they show me the way  
And lead me to Sukhavati.

The suffering in lower states is unbearable.  
The pleasures of devas and humans are impermanent.  
May I be afraid of this.  
Throughout beginningless time up to now,  
Samsara has lasted for a very long time.  
May I feel sorrow about this.

I might be born repeatedly as a human being, but I would  
Experience birth, ageing, sickness, and death countless times.  
There are many obstacles in this degenerate time.  
The pleasures of humans and devas  
Are like food mixed with poison.  
May I have not so much as a hair's worth of desire for them.

My family, food, wealth, and friends  
Are impermanent, like illusions or dreams.  
May I have not so much as a hair's worth of attachment to them.  
My land, my vicinity, and my home  
Are just like one's home in a dream.  
May I know them to be unreal.

May I flee the ocean of samsara, from which it is so hard to get free,  
Like a felon escaping from prison.  
May I flee to the realm of Sukhavati  
Without looking back.

Having severed all craving and clinging,  
 May I fly through the western sky  
 Like a vulture freed from a snare,  
 Passing countless worlds in an instant,  
 And reach Sukhavati.

May I see the face of Amitabha,  
 Who is actually present there.  
 May all my obscurations be purified.

The best of the four births is instantaneous  
 Birth in the heart of a lotus flower.  
 May I take such a birth.  
 My body complete in an instant,  
 May it have the marks and signs.

Doubt as to whether or not I will be born there  
 Would cause me to remain in the lotus for five hundred years.  
 I would be happy and comfortable,  
 And would hear the buddha's speech,  
 But because of the flower not opening  
 My seeing the buddha's face would be delayed.  
 May that not happen to me.

As soon as I am born, may my flower open.  
 May I see Amitabha's face.  
 Through merit and miraculous powers,  
 May vast clouds of offerings  
 Emanate from my palms.  
 May I present them to the buddha and his entourage.

At that time, may that tathagata extend  
 His right hand and place it on my head.

May I receive prophecy of my awakening.  
Having heard profound and vast dharma,  
May my being be ripened and liberated.  
May I be blessed and cared for by  
The two foremost bodhisattvas,  
Avalokita and Mahasthamprapta.

Every day, innumerable buddhas and bodhisattvas  
Gather from the ten directions in order to  
Present offerings to Amitabha  
And view that realm. At that time,  
May I attend them and receive  
The amrita of dharma.

With unimpeded miraculous powers,  
May I go to the realms of Joyous, Glorious,  
Perfect Action, and Densely Arrayed.  
Going there in the morning, may I receive  
Empowerment, blessings, and vows from  
Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amoghasiddhi,  
Vairochana, and other buddhas.  
Having presented many offerings,  
May I return without difficulty  
To Sukhavati in the evening.

In Potala, Alakavati,  
Chamaradvipa, and Uddiyana;  
In a billion nirmanakaya realms,  
May I meet a billion Avalokitas, Taras,  
Vajrapanis, and Padmakaras.  
May I present oceans of offerings to them  
And receive empowerment and profound instructions.

May I quickly then return unimpeded  
To my own residence in Sukhavati.

May I see with the divine eye  
My surviving family, monks, and disciples.  
May I protect and bless them,  
And lead them to that realm at death.

The duration of this fortunate kalpa  
Is one day in Sukhavati.  
Throughout countless kalpas, there is no death.  
May I always remain in that realm.

From Maitreya up to Rochana, when all the buddhas  
Of this fortunate kalpa come to this world,  
May I come here with miraculous powers,  
Present offerings to those buddhas,  
Listen to the genuine dharma,  
And return unimpeded  
To the realm of Sukhavati.

All the features and attributes of the realms  
Of eighty-one septillion buddhas are combined  
In that realm that is superior to all others.  
May I be born in the realm of Sukhavati.

Its precious ground is as even as the palm of a hand.  
Vast and spacious, it blazes brightly and radiantly.  
It is soft and supple.  
May I be born in that pleasant, gentle, spacious realm.

The wish-fulfilling trees are composed of many jewels,  
And are decorated by leaves of silk and precious fruit.

In them are emanated birds whose sweet calls  
Proclaim profound and vast dharma.  
May I be born in that wondrous realm.

There are many rivers of scented water with the eight attributes.  
There are also bathing pools of amrita,  
Surrounded by steps and bricks of the seven jewels.  
Lotus flowers with sweet fragrance and fruit  
Emit countless rays of light.  
The ends of those Light-rays are adorned by emanated buddhas.  
May I be born in that amazing realm.

Even the names of the eight unleisured states  
And lower realms are unheard there. Kleshas,  
The five and three poisons, sickness, dons, enmity,  
Poverty, quarreling, and all other sufferings  
Are unheard of in that realm.  
May I be born in that realm of great happiness.

There is no sexuality there, and no birth from a womb.  
All are born from within lotus flowers.  
Everyone's bodies are alike, and golden in color.  
They are adorned by the marks and signs, such as the ushnisha on  
their heads.  
All have the five clairvoyances and the five eyes.  
May I be born in that realm of countless attributes.

In self-arisen palaces of diverse jewels  
Whatever is wanted arises upon recollection.  
No effort is necessary; everything one needs or wants is spontaneously  
present.  
There is no "I", no "you", and no self-fixation.



Offering clouds of whatever one wishes arise from the palms of one's hands.

Everyone there practices the unsurpassable mahayana dharma.  
May I be born in that realm where every joy and comfort arises.

A fragrant breeze sends down rains of flowers.  
From all the trees, rivers, and lotuses,  
Clouds of sumptuous offerings constantly emerge,  
Pleasing forms, sounds, scents, tastes, and textures.

Although there is no ordinary gender,  
Emanated clevis constantly present offerings.  
When one wishes to sit, there are precious palaces.  
When one wishes to lie down, there are mattresses  
And pillows of silk on fine, precious beds.

When one wishes to hear them, birds, trees, rivers,  
Give forth the melodic sound of dharma.  
When one does not wish to, they are unheard.  
The pools and rivers of amrita are and music  
Of whatever temperature is desired.  
May I be born in that realm where everything is as wished.

In that realm, the perfect buddha Amitabha will remain,  
Not passing into nirvana, for countless kalpas.  
May I attend him for all that time.

After Amitabha passes into peace,  
His dharma will remain for twice  
As many kalpas as the Ganges' sand grains.  
During that time, may I be inseparable from Avalokita,  
His regent, and uphold the genuine dharma.

The dharma will wane at sunset.  
At the following dawn, Avalokita will attain buddhahood,  
Becoming the buddha called King of Massive Splendor  
Elevated Above All. From that time,  
May I serve him and listen to the dharma.

His lifespan will be ninety-six septillion kalpas.  
May I continually attend and serve him,  
And uphold the dharma with perfect retention.  
After his nirvana, his dharma will remain  
For six hundred ten million,  
Three hundred thousand kalpas.  
During that time, may I uphold the dharma  
And be inseparable from Mahasthamprapta.

Then, Mahasthamprapta will attain buddhahood,  
Becoming the tathagata called King of Amassed Jewels  
And Stable Qualities. His lifespan and dharma  
Will equal those of Avalokita. May I continually  
Attend that buddha, present offerings to him,  
And uphold all his genuine dharma.

Then, after that life, either in that realm,  
Or in another pure realm,  
May I attain unsurpassable, perfect buddhahood.

After my buddhahood, like Amitayu, may I ripen  
And liberate all the beings who even just hear my name.  
May I guide beings through countless emanations,  
And benefit beings effortlessly, spontaneously, and immeasurably.

Tathagata of immeasurable lifespan,  
Merit, qualities, pristine wisdom, and majesty;

Dharmakaya Amitabha;  
 Bhagavat of immeasurable life and wisdom:  
 It was said by Shakyamuni that anyone  
 Who recollects your name will be protected from  
 Fire, water, poison, weapons, yakshas, rakshasas,  
 And all danger, unless it is  
 The ripening of previous karma.  
 I recollect your name and prostrate to you.  
 I pray that you protect me from all danger and suffering.  
 Grant the blessing of perfect auspiciousness.

Through the blessing of the buddhas' attainment of the trikaya,  
 The blessing of the unchanging truth of dharmata,  
 And the blessing of the sangha's unwavering harmony,  
 May my aspirations be fulfilled as intended.

I prostrate to the three jewels.  
 TADYATHĀ PAÑCHANDRIYA ĀVABODHĀNAYE SVĀHĀ

*The dharani for the fulfilment of aspirations.*

I prostrate to the three jewels.  
 NAMO MANJUSHRIYE. NAMO SUSHRIYE. NAMO  
 UTTAMASHRIYE SVĀHĀ.

If, saying that you do three prostrations, it is said that they will be equivalent to a hundred thousand. Therefore do, if possible, one hundred prostrations; or, as many as you can; or at least seven. If possible, recite this aspiration every day; if not, once every month or every year. At least, when you are at leisure, face the west and recollect the realm of Sukhavati. join your palms and pray to Amitabha with one-pointed faith. If you do so, obstacles in this life will be dispelled. There is no doubt that you will be re-born in Sukhavati after this life. This is the intention of the Amitabha Sutra,

the Sutra on Sukhavati, the Pundarika Sutra, and the Drumbeat of Immortality. It was composed by the Bhikshu Ragasya. May it be a cause of many beings' birth in Sukhavati!

Translated by the Kagyu Monlam Translation Team.

## V. Brief Sukhāvatī Aspiration

*from the Terma of Mingyur Dorje*

Emaho! Amitābha, magnificent Buddha of Boundless Light,  
With the great compassionate lord Avalokiteśvara to his right,  
And Vajrapāṇi-Mahāsthāmaprāpta on his left,  
Surrounded by an assembly of countless buddhas and bodhisattvas  
In the place of wonder and boundless joy and happiness  
That is the heavenly realm of Sukhāvatī, the Blissful Paradise.  
When the time comes for me to leave this present life,  
May I go there directly, without any other birth upon the way,  
And being reborn there, may I see Amitābha face to face!  
May this, my fervent prayer of aspiration,  
Be blessed by all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions  
So that it is accomplished, without the slightest hindrance!  
tadyathā pañcendriyāvabodhanīye svāhā

*When Tulku Mingyur Dorje was thirteen years old, on the 7th day of the month of Saga Dawa, Fire Bird year (1657), he had a vision of the deities of the maṇḍala, and Buddha Amitābha spoke these words directly.*

Rigpa Translations, 2016



## VI.

### The Thirty-five Buddhas of Confession

The names of the thirty-five buddhas of confession appear in the following extract from *The Bodhisattva's Confession of Downfalls* from the Words of the Buddha.

- I prostrate to the bhagawan, tathagata, arhat, the fully and perfectly enlightened Shakyamuni;
- I prostrate to Utterly Vanquishing Vajra Essence;
- I prostrate to Emanating Jewel Light;
- I prostrate to King of the Mighty Nagas;
- I prostrate to Community of Heroes;
- I prostrate to Glorious Joy;
- I prostrate to Jewel Fire;
- I prostrate to Jewel Moonlight;
- I prostrate to Meaningful to Behold;
- I prostrate to Jewel Moon;
- I prostrate to Immaculate One;
- I prostrate to Glorious Giving;
- I prostrate to Purity;
- I prostrate to Pure Giving;
- I prostrate to God of Waters;
- I prostrate to God of the Gods of Waters;
- I prostrate to Glorious Good;
- I prostrate to Glorious Sandalwood;

I prostrate to Boundless Splendour;  
I prostrate to Glorious Light;  
I prostrate to Sorrowless Glory;  
I prostrate to Son of Non-craving;  
I prostrate to Glorious Flower;  
I prostrate to the Tathagata Omniscient Manifold Play of Pure Light  
Rays;  
I prostrate to the Tathagata Omniscient Manifold Play of Lotus  
Light Rays;  
I prostrate to Glorious Wealth;  
I prostrate to Glorious Mindfulness;  
I prostrate to Glorious Name of Universal Renown;  
I prostrate to King Mighty Pinnacle of the Victory Banner;  
I prostrate to Extremely All-Overpowering Glory;  
I prostrate to Extremely Victorious in All Battles;  
I prostrate to All-Overpowering Glory Who has Gone;  
I prostrate to Array of All-Illuminating Glory;  
I prostrate to All-Overpowering Jewel Lotus;  
I prostrate to the tathagata, arhat, fully and perfectly enlightened  
one, Buddha Completely Abiding in Jewel and Lotus, King of  
the Mighty Mountain.

Translation by Padmakara



## VII.

# The Secret Crown Seed Tantra that is the Only Child of All Buddhas

In the Kalapingka Dzo yogini language: Buddha Gushtha Dhaka  
Emana

In Tibetan: sangs rgyas thams cad kyi sras gcig po gsang ba cod pan  
sa bon gyi rgyud.

Homage to the expanse of self-existing nature.  
The teacher Samantabhadra, with consort,  
Spoke this from the natural expanse:

Listen, retinue, self-expressions of the natural state.  
This single self-existing wakefulness  
Is the only child of all buddhas.  
This empty essence performs all deeds.

It is the seed of Samantabhadra.  
This is what everything arises from and is freed into.  
This self-existing single tantra  
Awakens by seeing, hearing, and remembering.

This seed tantra, the only child of the buddhas, is complete.  
Seal, seal, seal. Seal of Body. Seal of Speech. Seal of Mind.

*Buddha Samantabhadra; This short tantra is considered to be liberation  
through hearing, reading and remembering.*

Translation by Erik Pema Kunsang



## VIII.

### Special Dharanis

*The dhāraṇī of Akshobya:*

namo ratna trayaya  
om kamkani kamkani  
rotsani rotsani  
trotani trotani  
trasani trasani  
tratihana tratihana  
sarwa karma paramparanimé soha

*The dhāraṇī of Variochana, known as ‘kunrig’ (‘embodying all families’):*

om name bhagavate  
sarva durgate pari shodhani rajaya  
tathāgataya  
arhate samyaksam buddhaya  
tadyatha  
om shodhani shodhani  
sarva papam vishodhani  
shudhe vishudhe  
sarva karma avarana vishodhani svaha

*The hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva:*

om benza sato samaya  
manupalaya  
benza sato tenopa tishta dridho mé bhava  
sutokhayo mé bhava  
supokhayo mé bhava

anurakto mé bhava  
sarva siddhi mé prayaccha  
sarva karma su tsa mé  
tsittam shreyang  
kuru hung  
ha ha ha ha ho  
bhagavan  
sarva tatagata benza ma mé muntsa benzi bhava maha samaya sato  
ah

*Six-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva:*

om benza sato hung

*The maṇi mantra, the heart essence of Avalokiteśvara:*

om mani pemé hung

*The dhāraṇī that is the essence of Khorwa Dongdruk:*

om vipula-garbhe maṇi-prabhe  
tathāgata nirdeshāni  
maṇi maṇi  
suprabhe vimala sāgara  
gambhīra hūṃ hūṃ  
jvala jvala  
buddhāvalokite  
guhyādhiṣṭhite garbhe svāhā  
padmadhara amogha jayate churu churu svāhā

*The dhāraṇī of Buddha Śākyamuni:*

teyata om mune mune maha muniye shakya mune ye soha

