



# SHENPEN ÖSEL

*The Clear Light of the Buddha's Teachings Which Benefits All Beings*

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U sing your practice in this life to confront and remedy your particular makeup of kleshas is very helpful in the bardo and in general. ♦ We see that some people practice meditation for a relatively short time and find that their minds are effectively pacified and tamed by their practice, whereas other people can practice meditation for a much longer time without deriving much benefit. ♦ When we look at the difference between these two types of practitioners, we may say that the samadhi or meditation that they are practicing is fundamentally the same. ♦ The difference between them lies not so much in the technique of meditation used as it does in the intention or focus with which the meditation is performed. ♦ In the case of a very effective practice of meditation, the person is applying the meditation to their actual kleshas, the actual problems which they face. ♦ If someone has that intention, the intention that their meditation practice serve as a remedy to particular kleshas, then the meditation practice will serve as that remedy and, therefore, will be effective. ♦ If, on the other hand, someone practices a fundamentally similar meditation, but with a very vague motivation, without focusing on particular things that need to be worked through or relinquished, then the meditation itself will be less effective. ♦ It is important, therefore, to remember that meditation, and indeed all dharma practice, becomes most effective when you particularly and consciously apply it as a remedy to particular problems or particular kleshas. ♦ This is beneficial in general, and especially when these kleshas arise in the bardo.

**THE VERY VENERABLE KHENCHEN THRANGU RINPOCHE**  
***JOURNEY OF THE MIND***

# SHENPEN ÖSEL

*The Clear Light of the Buddha's Teachings Which Benefits All Beings*

VOLUME 2

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*This issue of Shenpen Ösel is devoted to a series of teachings on the bardo given by The Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche. © 1998, Journey of the Mind, Thrangu Rinpoche*

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### Editorial policy

Shenpen Ösel is a tri-annual publication of Kagyu Shenpen Ösel Chöling (KSOC), a center for the study and practice of Tibetan vajrayana Buddhism located in Seattle, Washington. The magazine seeks to present the teachings of recognized and fully qualified lamas and teachers, with an emphasis on the Karma Kagyu and the Shangpa Kagyu lineages. The contents are derived in large part from transcripts of teachings hosted by our center. Shenpen Ösel is produced and mailed exclusively through volunteer labor and does not make a profit. (Your subscriptions and donations are greatly appreciated.) We publish with the aspiration to present the clear light of the Buddha's teachings. May it bring benefit and may all be auspicious. May all beings be inspired and assisted in uncovering their own true nature.

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## Introduction

Perhaps nothing in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition has evoked more sustained popular curiosity than the teachings on the intermediate state between death and rebirth, first published in the English language under the title, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, but more correctly translated as *The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo*. Especially the detailed description of the appearance during the bardo of dharmata of the one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities in all of their magnificent, phantasmagorical, and sometimes frightening detail, together with brilliant light paths leading to buddha realms and liberation, and dull light paths leading back into the various realms of samsara with all their attendant suffering, seemed to magnetize the imaginative fascination even of the most casual reader.

And yet it seems that it was the very abundance of detailed description of all of these deities and buddha realms and light displays that made the teachings somehow inaccessible. They seemed so foreign to the Western imagination, and, even if one accepted the truth of the teachings on faith, how could one remember all of those details, and how could one possibly internalize all of these teachings sufficiently to render them an effective tool during and after one's death?

One could speculate that the majority of readers of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* in the early days of its appearance in the West finally concluded that it was hopeless for them to try to learn these teachings and that their only recourse was to be a good person, practice dharma as best one could, and hope for the best.

But here in these extraordinary teachings given by The Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche in May and June of 1997, Thrangu Rinpoche gives us a fresh perspective on the bardo, de-emphasizing the detailed descriptions of the actual deities themselves, and emphasizing the relationship between various aspects of one's dharma practice—shamatha, vipashyana, mahamudra, ngöndro, deity meditation and other aspects of the stages of creation and completion—and one's experience of death, the intermediate state between death and rebirth, and rebirth itself. The instructions given in these teachings are, therefore, very practical and not at all impossible to include in one's daily life. In fact, one comes away from these teachings with great encouragement that, if one applies oneself to the study and practice of these teachings, one could demystify death and make a good job of the journey through the bardo to a positive rebirth as a bare minimum, and that one might very well be able, even as a "mere Westerner," to attain true liberation and enlightenment.



There are three terms used frequently in this text—mindfulness, alertness, and carefulness—that are very important. Mindfulness is the quality of establishing the intention to conduct oneself in a certain fashion, to give up certain (presumably negative) actions and/or to adopt certain (presumably positive) actions. The quality of alertness is that aspect of mind that watches and notices whether or not one is conducting oneself in accordance with one’s intentions. And carefulness is the quality of mind that restrains carelessness in one’s activities, that prevents one from giving oneself permission to drop one’s mindfulness and alertness and to act contrary to one’s intentions. Carefulness restrains one from slipping into negative activities of body, speech, and mind, as we often do through giving in to strong emotions, through involvement in “samsaric spontaneity,” or through mental laziness. Mindfulness, alertness, and carefulness are at the core of dharma practice.


It should be noted that the terms element, constituent, drop, tige (Tibetan), and bindu (Sanskrit) are used interchangeably in this and other dharma texts.

Similarly, it may be useful to note that the terms emptiness, ultimate bodhicitta, absolute truth, prajñāparamita, clear light, radiant clarity, cognitive lucidity, cognitive clarity, luminosity, luminosity of the ground, mother luminosity, dharmata, dharmadhatu, dharmakaya, basic nature, true nature, true nature of mind, true nature of reality, primordial wisdom, primordial awareness, primordial purity, great non-conceptual wisdom, and rigpa, while not totally synonymous, are simply various ways of referring to and conceptualizing from a dualistic perspective the same ineffable truth that transcends dualistic and varying perceptions and conceptuality and is the essence or true nature of everything.



In order to practice these teachings with optimal efficaciousness, one should try to receive the empowerment of The Peaceful and Wrathful Deities of the Bardo and to review these instructions with a qualified lama. It is especially important not to try to practice phowa (Tib: *pho ba*) without empowerment, scriptural authorization, and instruction from a qualified lama.



We would like to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to Thrangu Rinpoche for giving these teachings and permission to publish them, to Lama Yeshe Gyamtso for translating them, to Dzogchen Pönlop Rinpoche for suggesting that these teachings be requested and for clarifying certain aspects of these teachings, and to the board of directors and members of Karma Thekchen Chöling in Vancouver B.C. for all of their effort in sponsoring these teachings. 

—Lama Tashi Namgyal



The Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

# *Journey of the Mind:* Putting the teachings on the bardo into effective practice during this life

*In May and June of 1997 in Vancouver, British Columbia, The Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche gave a five-day teaching on the bardo, entitled Journey of the Mind. The following is an edited transcript of that teaching, which Rinpoche gave in Tibetan and which was translated by Lama Yeshe Gyamtso.*

By The Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

I am delighted to meet all of you, and to see that you have come here this evening to hear this explanation of the bardo. We are going to begin by reciting a traditional supplication to our lineage. While doing so, please remain in a state of faith and devotion.

Receiving instructions on the bardo, or “interval,” and also practicing these instructions is very important, particularly because we have been born as human beings. It is very important not only to receive these instructions but also to put them into practice.

Some people regard the bardo as something unimportant and take the attitude that there is no point in thinking about it or worrying about it. This is a mistaken attitude. The bardo is something that we have experienced already in the past and

that we will definitely come to experience again in the future, so it seems unrealistic and an insufficient response to our life situation simply to dismiss it as something one need not think about.

Other people are so terrified by the idea of the bardo and what they have heard about the bardo that they dislike hearing about it or thinking about it. It may be that from one point of view the bardo is terrifying, but from another point of view it is not. Since the beginning of this universe and since beginningless time, all of the numberless beings that have been born and have died have passed through the bardo, and all the beings that will die in the future will do so also. So must we.

The experience of the bardo does not have to be such a bad or terrifying experience. It could be very negative, but it could also be very positive. Rather than forgetting about it, however, it would be better actually to prevent the bardo from becoming a negative experience and to cause it to become a positive experience by preparing for it in this life. Therefore, the best attitude toward the bardo is the resolution that you will do whatever you can to ensure that the bardo becomes a positive and not a negative experience for you. This is an appropriate attitude, because if you put these teachings into practice, you can actually determine what will happen.

Sometimes people have the attitude that, although instructions for traversing the bardo exist, they are not easy to practice. These people seem to be too timid to practice these instructions, feeling that they will be unable either to practice them at all or to practice them effectively. But it is not that difficult to understand the process of the bardo, and it is by no means impossible to put the teachings on the bardo into effective practice. Just as the appearances of this life are produced by states of mind, so are the appearances in the bardo and the appearances in one's future lives produced by states of mind. Positive states of mind produce positive experiences, and negative states of mind

produce negative appearances or experiences. Therefore, if you cultivate a positive state of mind in this life, the appearances or experiences of this life, of future lives, and of the bardo will become more and more positive. While you may regard the bardo as a state that you have very little control over, the fact is that if you cultivate a strong positive state of mind, you will gain some control over it.

**I**n the instructions of the mahasiddhas, we find different classifications of the bardos or intervals, classified primarily into six bardos and into four bardos. If we use the classification of the bardos into four, the first of these is called the natural interval or natural bardo between birth and death. [Tib: *rang bzhin skye gnas kyi bar do*] This is the period or bardo starting from your

birth and ending in your death. The particular significance of this bardo, which seems somewhat distinct from the bardos that occur after death, is that one uses this period of one's life to practice in preparation for one's death and for one's experience of subsequent bardos. By practicing, one develops a certain impetus or momentum in this natural bardo of life, which will be of benefit when the bardo of dharmata\* and the bardo of becoming and so on arise at the time of death and afterwards.

Therefore, tonight I am going to begin by looking at the first of the four bardos, the natural bardo between birth and death.

What is the principal practice that we should be doing in our present state, the natural bardo between birth and death, to prepare ourselves for death? The most obvious difference between this

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\*Editor's note: In Tibetan, *chö nyi*, *chö* meaning phenomena and *nyi* meaning the essential nature thereof or the essence thereof. Therefore, dharmata means the "isness" of phenomena, the essence or essential nature of phenomena or reality altogether, which in Buddhism is understood to be the same as the true nature of mind.

state or this bardo and, for example, the bardo of becoming, which occurs after death, is in the quality of the appearances which arise. The appearances which arise to us now, no matter how unstable our minds may be, are grounded in our physical bodies. Being so grounded causes a stability of place and location. For example, in our present state, when we think of some place other than where we are, our minds will still stay where we are because our minds are held here by our bodies. Therefore, in this present bardo, the natural bardo between birth and death, appearances are characterized by a stability produced by this physical groundedness.

However, in the bardo of becoming, because the body and mind have separated and the mind is, therefore, no longer physically grounded, the mind is unstable. When the mind thinks of a place, it immediately finds itself there; then again, thinking of some other place, it finds itself at that other place. So the mind is unstable in the bardo of becoming. Even if it wishes to, it cannot stay in one place. Therefore, the practice of meditation in this life, in our present state of physical groundedness, will help in that future bardo a great deal. If you practice meditation during your life, then the principal benefit that you gain is control over mind and freedom of mind. If you do not practice meditation, then you will not be able to send the mind to a chosen place or to hold the mind on a chosen object in the bardo. Through the practice of meditation, you gain the ability to apply your mind to a chosen object or state of mind and to hold it there. This produces a stability of mind which is very helpful after death in the bardo of becoming, in which the only stability is produced by mental stability, and not by physical groundedness, as in this present life.

When someone has had no experience of meditation whatsoever, then when their mind experiences the bardo, their consciousness wanders uncontrollably. They cannot control what happens, so

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they have no ability whatsoever to direct or control their rebirth. On the other hand, if someone has had some experience of meditation and, therefore, has gained some control over their mind and some stability of mind, then they have some degree of control or freedom in the bardo. By recollecting that this interval between the onset of dying and rebirth is a period of vital importance—one in which the dying person/bardo being must not become distracted and must not allow their mind to wander—and by remembering that they must be careful, and by virtue of the momentum of their previous training in meditation, they will be able to avoid suffering and avoid negative rebirths and will have a degree of control over what happens to them in the bardo. It is for this reason,

among many others, that meditation is very important. Particularly in the beginning of one's path, the practice of shamatha, or tranquility meditation, is important.

The practice of tranquility meditation produces a state of mental stability, and this mental stability in turn gives you the ability to control or direct your traversal of the bardo states. While tranquility meditation has many other benefits, from the point of view of traversing the bardo, we would have to say that the most significant benefit is this one.

In the bardo states after death, because one's mind lacks stability, it is easily affected by the arising of kleshas [negative emotions]. Just as kleshas arise in our present situation, they will continue to arise in the bardo. These kleshas, such as anger and attachment and states of anxiety and so forth, because of the particular situation after death, can take hold of you and become very strong. In order to prevent this from happening, we need to practice meditation and, in particular, tranquility meditation in this life.

The particular approach to meditation that one takes in preparation for this aspect of the

bardo is to focus one's meditation on those kleshas which arise, and especially on those which are strongest for you as an individual. Now, people vary. For some people, anger or aggression is their strongest klesha; for other people jealousy is the strongest, and for others pride. To begin with, it is helpful to recognize which kleshas afflict you most, and then to focus your practice on developing a faculty of mindfulness which will serve as an effective remedy to the arising of those kleshas.

When you focus your meditation on its becoming a remedy to those kleshas, when you have that aspiration and intention, then at best you will be able to totally relinquish those kleshas; at the very least you will certainly be able to weaken them substantially. Through developing this type of meditation and intention you will weaken your kleshas in this life, and as a result, through the habit of weakening the kleshas and remedying them with mindfulness in this life, when they arise in the bardo they will be much weaker and less overwhelming. The appearances of the bardo, and especially the hallucinations produced by the kleshas, will be much less bewildering and less overwhelming. Therefore, the practice that we do in this life in preparation for the bardo is to cultivate meditation, and especially to dedicate one's meditation to being a remedy for one's kleshas, starting with those kleshas which one recognizes most strongly afflict one.

Using your practice in this life to confront and remedy your particular makeup of kleshas is very helpful in the bardo and in general. We see that some people practice meditation for a relatively short time and find that their minds are effectively pacified and tamed by their practice, whereas other people can practice meditation for a much longer time without deriving much benefit. When we look at the difference between these two types of practitioners, we may say that the samadhi or meditation that they are practicing is fundamentally the same. The difference between

them lies not so much in the technique of meditation used as it does in the intention or focus with which the meditation is performed. In the case of a very effective practice of meditation, the person is applying the meditation to their actual kleshas, the actual problems which they face. If someone has that intention, the intention that their meditation practice serve as a remedy to particular kleshas, then the meditation practice will serve as that remedy and, therefore, will be effective. If, on the other hand, someone practices a fundamentally similar meditation, but with a very vague motivation, without focusing on particular things that need to be worked through or relinquished, then the meditation itself will be less effective. It is important, therefore, to remember that meditation, and indeed all dharma practice, becomes most effective when you particularly and consciously apply it as a remedy to particular prob-

lems or particular kleshas. This is beneficial in general, and especially when these kleshas arise in the bardo.

In addition to the practice of shamatha or tranquility meditation, another effective technique in training for the bardo is a technique of the vajrayana or secret mantra called the generation stage [Tib: *b skyed rim*], which refers to the visualization of the forms or bodies of various deities or yidams. These deities include

many that are peaceful, many that are wrathful, and so on. In general, regardless of the nature of the deity, this technique of visualizing yourself in the form of a deity is very effective in producing progress in meditation and in causing the blessing of these deities to enter into you. Deity meditation is especially beneficial in training for the bardo, because in the bardo after one's death a variety of appearances will arise, some of them seemingly threatening. Although these appearances are not in any way external to you and are merely the projections of your mind, because of the confusion of your mind in that state you will tend to mistake them as external to you and, therefore, will tend

## The practice that we do in this life in preparation for the bardo is . . . to dedicate one's meditation to being a remedy for one's kleshas



to regard them as threatening, which will, of course, produce fear.

The important point to remember in the bardo is to recognize these appearances to be merely the projections of your mind. Therefore, working with the practice and visualization of a yidam such as Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha Amitabha, or some other deity, is very helpful, because by doing these deity visualizations in this life, you cultivate the habit of recognizing appearances as projections of mind. When you first practice these meditations, the form of the deity may be very unclear, but as you continue to practice, eventually you are able to generate a clear image. Sometimes, though the image is clear, it may initially still be unstable, but if you continue to practice, it will not only be clear but will also become a stable image. This comes about simply through becoming accustomed to the practice itself.

When you have cultivated a clear and stable image of the deity in this life, then through that habit you will generate an even clearer and more stable image of the deity in the bardo, because the appearances or projections of mind are much more vivid in the bardo. When this especially vivid and stable image of the deity arises in the bardo, it will serve as a remedy to the confused and terrifying projections which you would otherwise generate and will cause these to subside or to be purified.

The other aspect of vajrayana practice is called the completion stage [Tib: *rdzogs rim*]. The completion stage, as distinct from the generation stage, is essentially the vajrayana equivalent to what in the sutra tradition is called insight or vipashyana, as distinct from the technique of tranquility or shamatha.

Essentially, we use the term vipashyana to mean much the same thing as what is meant by the completion stage. What this meditation consists of is what the Buddha taught in the sutras as meditation upon emptiness and in the tantras as medi-

tation upon the nature of mind or on the mind in itself. If we look at the traditions of instruction which have arisen through the various masters in Tibet, we find that the main object of meditation has also been the nature of one's own mind. There-

fore, having cultivated a good practice of tranquility as a foundation, one should then go on and receive instruction in and cultivate the practice of insight meditation.

What is recognized through the practice of insight meditation is that, in its nature, your mind is without birth or origination and is without substantial existence of any kind. This recognition frees you from the fear that would otherwise be produced by the appearances of the bardo. Having recog-

nized the nature of your mind, you recognize that the only thing to fear in the bardo is the panic, the fear, and the suffering that the mind experiences upon encountering its own appearances. You recognize that this fear and panic arise simply because you have no control over your mind. If you understand this, and if you resolve to take control or gain control of your mind, then, through practicing this insight or vipashyana, you *can* gain control of your mind and thereby be free from any kind of fear that would otherwise arise when the mind experiences its own projections.

It is for this reason that it is always worthwhile to receive instruction in the meditations of mahamudra and dzogchen and to practice these. At best, of course, it is wonderful if you can practice these in a complete way and come to a definitive realization; but even if you cannot gain a definitive realization, any degree of connection with these teachings and these practices is always worthwhile, because any degree of habit of this kind of recognition that is produced in your mind is always helpful. Even to receive a slight amount of instruction in mahamudra or dzogchen and to practice it is good, because the habit of the recognition of the mind's nature that is produced thereby will benefit you in the bardo. Therefore,

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the more you can inculcate this habit of recognition, the better.

**T**here are two other aspects to our meditation training: meditation itself and post-meditation. Meditation, as we have seen, consists fundamentally of three types of techniques: tranquility or shamatha meditation; the generation stage or meditation upon deities; and insight or vipashyana meditation, also called the completion stage. We have seen how, when practiced in coordination with one another, these bring about great benefit in the bardo after death. However, our practice consists more of post-meditation than of meditation itself, since the amount of time we spend meditating formally may not be proportionally very much of our time at all. Therefore we cannot ignore the need to practice in a continuous if informal way throughout all of our various activities.

Even though we are not doing a formal practice of meditation in post-meditation, we still cannot afford to let our minds run wild. We need to preserve some degree of mindfulness, alertness and carefulness in our conduct. For example, if your principal practice is tranquility or shamatha meditation, then throughout all of your various activities—eating, sitting around, walking, lying down, talking, and so on—you should attempt to preserve some degree of mindfulness, alertness, and carefulness in your mind and in your conduct. Through preserving this kind of mindfulness and so forth, your post-meditation conduct, rather than taking away from your meditation, will come to enhance it. As a result, your formal meditation, as well, will come to produce naturally a state of mindfulness in post-meditation and to enhance that state. So, fundamentally, we always need to apply mindfulness, alertness, and carefulness.

If your principal practice is meditation upon deities, then in a similar way you should attempt to bring some degree of the awareness or mindful-

ness of that practice into your post-meditation. Even if you cannot generate a clear appearance of the deity in post-meditation, you can generate a confidence or pride of actually being the deity. This is based upon an understanding of the nature of appearances. The actual nature of appearances, no matter how impure we may consider them to be, is pure, because the nature of all things is emptiness, not a static or dead emptiness, but an emptiness that is at the same time a fullness of all of the qualities of buddha nature. Because this is the nature of all things, therefore, the fundamental nature of all appearances and all experiences is pure.

The recognition of this, which is the basis of the application of deity meditation in post-meditation, produces a confidence in the purity of appearances, which will be very helpful in the bardo, because it will cause you to be less confused or overwhelmed by the different appearances which will arise there.

The third meditation technique is vipashyana or insight meditation. Through this practice you generate some experience in your mind of its own nature. This experience arises initially principally in the formal practice of meditation. However, in post-meditation you do not relinquish or abandon this experience, but attempt to bring it back or flash on it again and again throughout your various activities. If you do not, if you simply cast the experience of formal meditation away in your post-meditation, then no matter how good your experience may have been, there will be very little progress, because your post-meditation activities will interfere with the practice of meditation.

Therefore, it is important, in whatever practice you are doing, to cultivate mindfulness, alertness, and carefulness in post-meditation. Through inculcating these habits in your mind, then the same habits will arise for you in the bardo. And when the habits of mindfulness, alertness, carefulness, and so forth arise in the bardo, they will cause the

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appearances of the bardo to be far less overwhelming. And because the experience of the appearances of the bardo will then be less overwhelming, you will gain more control over what happens to you, including more control over your rebirth. Therefore, mindfulness and alertness are extremely important.

Not only are mindfulness and alertness important and beneficial, they are also convenient to practice. We all need to work in this world, to eat, to talk, and so on, and from one point of view we might regard these activities as inconvenient, because they seem to interfere with our practice of meditation. But if you understand meditation as consisting not only of formal meditation but also of the practice of post-meditation, which can be combined easily with our daily activities, then you will understand that the practice of mindfulness throughout your many activities, far from being a concession to that which is interfering with your practice, is a way to enhance it and a way to inculcate a very strong habit of mindfulness, which will help you in the bardo.

So far, all of the practices of which I have been speaking are fundamentally mental. But we do not practice with our minds alone in isolation; we also have to concern ourselves with and work with our bodies and our speech. Although we may engage in the mental practice of meditation, if we are careless in our physical and verbal conduct, if we engage carelessly in physical and verbal wrongdoing, then our actions will counteract the benefit of our meditation, and there will be no progress or improvement. Therefore, our mindfulness and alertness must extend beyond our states of mind and include our modes of conduct of body and speech.

This is especially important in connection with the bardo. While it is true that once one is in the bardo after death, one does not actually have a physical body and, therefore, does not have actual physical speech, nevertheless, through a long-standing habit of physical embodiment, there is

the appearance in the bardo of a mental body and a corresponding faculty of speech. Furthermore, the appearances which arise in the bardo are fundamentally produced by habits that have developed in one's mind. Therefore, if you have a habit of good conduct of body and speech, then the appearances of body and speech which arise in the bardo will be correspondingly positive; and if you have a habit of careless or negative conduct of body and speech, then the appearances corresponding to these which will arise in the bardo will be, in the same way, negative.

Now, all of these points are concerned with how one can use one's present interval or bardo, which is the natural bardo of this life, as a way to prepare for the states after death. I would like to stop here, but if you have any questions, please ask them.

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

Rinpoche: Generally speaking, this bardo is classified as beginning from the moment of birth, and going up to the time of death, especially in the context of

talking about practices which can be done by someone who is living in a human body.

Question: Is the appearance of a person's body and speech in the bardo similar to that which they had in their previous life? Does it maintain the same appearance or characteristics?

Rinpoche: There are various explanations of this question, but the most common one is that, given that the bardo lasts for seven weeks, for the first three weeks the body appears to take the form of the body one had in the previous life; for the fourth week, it is a mixture in appearance of the body one had in the previous life and what one will have in the next life; and for the last three weeks it generally takes the form of the body one will have in one's next life.

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and our speech**

Question: Could Rinpoche expand on the post-meditation practice of awareness in connection with the practice of deity meditation?

Rinpoche: The practice of deity meditation consists fundamentally of three elements, which are clear appearance, stable pride or stable confidence, and recollection of purity. Of these three, it is difficult to cultivate clear appearance and the recollection of purity in post-meditation. Therefore, the principal post-meditation practice in connection with the generation stage is the maintenance of the stable pride or stable confidence of actually being the deity—which means to maintain the confidence or certainty that the true nature of your body, speech, and mind is the body, speech, and mind of the deity being practiced. We find this expressly stated in commentaries on deity meditation, where it is commonly said, “In post-meditation, never part from the confidence of being the deity.”

Question: When one has nightmares, is this a sign of lacking control over one’s mind?

Rinpoche: Having nightmares is not particularly a sign that you have absolutely no control over your mind. Nightmares can occur for different reasons. Sometimes we have nightmares because we are thinking a lot about things or because we are becoming very emotionally disturbed or anxious about something. But sometimes you will have a nightmare, even though you haven’t become particularly disturbed or anxious on that particular day, through the emergence of a habit from sometime in the past, possibly even from a long time in the past. If you are afflicted by nightmares, one thing that will help is to meditate immediately before going to sleep, not allowing your mind to run wild with many thoughts or many kleshas or a great deal of anxiety. If you go to sleep in a meditative state, then nightmares will tend not to arise; whereas if, immediately before going to sleep, your mind is running wild with thoughts and fears and anxieties, then, of course, this state of mind will tend to produce nightmares.


Question: So, in the context of the bardo, what is the definition of the moment of death?

Rinpoche: First of all, the term bardo or interval refers to an interval or gap between two things, a period which follows the ending of something and precedes the beginning of something else. So we use the term to refer to these four or six states which are periods in between one thing and another. We talk about the natural bardo between, or interval between, birth and death, the bardo of the time of death, the bardo of dharmata, the bardo of becoming, and so on. The basic definition of death, and, therefore, the defining moment/event of death, is the separation of body and mind, because what defines a living being, from this point of view, is that the body of that being and the mind of that being are combined in such a way that anything that happens to one will affect the other. So, for example, when you are alive, if your physical body becomes ill, that causes you to have a mental experience of suffering, and so on.

Now what happens when you die is that, through this separation of your body and mind, your mind becomes unconscious. When it emerges from that state of unconsciousness into a state of consciousness, not only does it no longer reside in that previous body, but it is unable to effectively re-enter it. This is distinct from states of unconsciousness that we experience in this life. When we re-arise from unconsciousness in this life we are still in our bodies. But when unconsciousness is produced by the separation of body and mind, then the consciousness cannot re-enter the body. That is the definition of death here.

Question: Is it possible in states of deep meditation for the soul to go out of the body?

Rinpoche: There exist such practices of meditation.

So we could stop there for tonight and conclude with the dedication. 

I would like to begin by thanking all of you for coming again tonight. I am delighted that I can give this teaching and that you can receive it, because, while I myself possess no miraculous power whatsoever, these instructions which I am attempting to convey to you are both profound and useful. They are especially so because the bardo or interval between death and rebirth is something that each and every one of us will definitely experience. I can give you a one-hundred-percent guarantee that every being who is born will come to experience the bardo. Therefore, we all require guidance. Receiving this guidance in the form of these instructions is definitely beneficial. Thank you for your interest and enthusiasm. As we did last night, let us begin by reciting the lineage supplication.

Last night, of the four bardos or intervals, we looked at the natural bardo between birth and death, which in the usual, narrow sense of using the term bardo to mean the interval after death, is not, in fact, a bardo [or “the bardo”] at all. The reason, however, that we discuss it as a bardo is that it is during this period of your experience, during the period while you are still alive, that you can practice most usefully to prepare yourself for the bardo after death. Therefore, it requires discussion.

Tonight I am going to talk about the second bardo, which is the bardo of the time of death. Because the time of death can be a particularly traumatic time, it is often called the death time bardo of suffering or misery [Tib: *‘chi kha sdug bsngal gyi bar do*]. The exact period which is included in this bardo is the period starting from when you contract the illness or other condition which will cause your death until your mind and body actually separate. The moment when death actually occurs and when, as a result of death, what is called the ground luminosity arises, is no longer the bardo of the time of death but the next bardo, the bardo of dharmata. So the bardo of the time



## *Journey of the Mind:* Going Through The Bardo of The Time of Death

of death really consists of the final moments of your life, in which the appearances of this life are gradually dissolving, or diminishing in their vividness.

It is necessary to make a distinction in the way death is experienced by different people based on the amount of practice they have done. In a simple way, we could say that there are three types of people in this connection: those who have practiced extensively, those who have done some practice, and those who have no training at all. By those who have practiced extensively is meant great individuals such as the famous mahasiddhas of the past and so forth. Such individuals, because they have completely and fully recognized the dharmata, the nature of all things, do not even leave a body behind them. Because their recognition is so intense, even their physical bodies dissolve into emptiness, which is referred to as a rainbow body. This is an indication that this person has attained full buddhahood. Such individuals do not wander through the bardo at all.

The second type of individual is someone who, through some degree of practice and training, has recognized dharmata, the nature of things, but has not perfected that recognition. Therefore, their realization is not sufficient to cause their physical aggregates, their physical body, to dissolve into emptiness, but it is strong enough so that, while dying, they do not have the coarse conceptuality of thinking, “I am dying; I must leave this world and go to another,” and so on. In fact, such a person dies in a state of samadhi or meditative absorption. For them as well there is no bardo.

Those who actually must experience this wandering through the bardo are people of the third type, who have no training whatsoever, or very little. Therefore, since virtually all of us are going to experience the bardo, we all definitely need some kind of instruction.

It is common for those who are dying to experience an intense feeling of loss because of attachment to the circumstances, appearances, and experiences of this life. Therefore, we usually dislike death; we regard it as a sad event, and we are afraid of

it. But we need to recognize that the fear of death is not particularly helpful at the time of death, nor is it appropriate, because, no matter how strong our clinging may be, we cannot hold onto this life by clinging to it.

What is helpful at the time of death is to have the kind of confidence that is produced by a recognition of the way things work. For example, you could say to yourself, “Well, I am not alone; I am not the only being who is going to die. Everyone dies. Of course, if I were the only person who was going to die, that would be depressing. But this is a normal thing, and there’s no reason why I should be particularly depressed or feel particularly afflicted by it.” If you understand the context in which your death will occur, then you can find the strength and the stability of mind to deal with it and to actually have some freedom of mind at the time of death. So it is helpful to think about death in that way.

**A**nother thing that is helpful is to learn the signs which indicate that you are approaching the moment of death. By learning them you will be able to recognize them when they start to occur. You will then be able to tell yourself that death is beginning to happen, and you will be able to prepare yourself properly for it. These signs are both mental and physical. There are some external signs that can be observed by other individuals as well, but what we are principally concerned with is what the dying person himself or herself will experience.

The basis for the particular types of experiences which are spoken of in this context is the fact that your body is compounded, from the [very] beginning, of the five elements: earth, water, fire, air, and consciousness, in this case [space and consciousness in this teaching are used interchangeably]. The vitality of your body, which maintains your life, is based upon these five elements remaining together. As you die, there occurs in several stages a dissolution of these same elements. In the tradition of

methodical instruction, this process of dissolution is very much connected with the channels and chakras which are contained within your body, and what you observe is connected with the destruction of these

**Since virtually all of us are going to experience the bardo, we all definitely need some kind of instruction**

chakras and the cessation of the movement of the winds in them.

Generally speaking, while you are alive, there is a movement of energies or winds (called prana in Sanskrit and chi in Chinese) throughout the channels of your body, which corresponds to your mental and physical state. As you die, the dissolution of the elements occurs in the form of the cessation of the winds in specific parts of your body. Those winds and those parts of your body correspond to the specific elements. As this occurs, there are internal experiences and definite appearances which arise in your experience, which indicate that a particular specific stage of dissolution is occurring. If you know about these, it can help you to recognize what is going on.

The first stage of this dissolution occurs when the channels of the chakra at the navel start to break apart. As this happens, the earth element of your physical body starts to dissolve into the water element. As this is happening, because the element of earth is dissolving, your mind becomes extremely unclear, dull, and torpid. That is the basic internal, cognitive experience. At the same time you experience a secret appearance. Because of the gradual diminution of coarse perceptions or appearances, you start to approach the subtle and very subtle appearances of dharmata, which will occur in the subsequent bardo of dharmata. So, at this first stage of dissolution, you see something that looks very much like a shimmering mirage.

The second stage of dissolution occurs when the channels and the winds at your heart cease to function, which is to say, the channels fall apart and the winds moving in those channels cease to move. As a result, the element of water dissolves into the element of fire. This produces a further state of mental obscurity; but in this case, because of the connection with the heart, this obscurity is marked by a quality of wildness or disturbance. That is the cognitive experience. Because you are coming ever closer to the appearances or display of emptiness, which you will experience in the next bardo, at this time you again ex-

perience a secret appearance. What was previously seen as a shimmering mirage becomes more vivid and starts to look more like thick smoke.

The third stage of dissolution is connected with the dissolution of the channels and winds at the throat. At this stage, the element fire dissolves into the element of wind. As a result, you start to feel quite cold, physically; the warmth of your body starts to diminish. Your mind at this point, as far as the cognitive experience goes, becomes alternately clear and unclear; it is no longer simply a state of torpor. And as you further approach the experience of emptiness, your secret appearance or experience becomes even more vivid. At this point, what was previously seen as smoke starts to come more into focus in your perception and takes the appearance of something like fireflies.

The fourth stage of dissolution is connected with the secret chakra, the chakra in the lower abdomen at the level of the genitals. At this point, when the channels and winds in that part of your body cease to function, the wind element dissolves into the element of consciousness itself. At this point, because the four elements have dissolved into consciousness, your mind becomes extremely confused or bewildered and unseated; therefore, a variety of hallucinations can occur at this point. This is the basic cognitive experience. As far as the secret appearance is concerned, what was previously seen as fireflies becomes clearer and takes the appearance of something like a lamp flame.

It is said traditionally that, even though someone may have reached this point in the dying process, under certain circumstances and depending upon what is causing their death, it is still possible for them to be revived. They have not yet reached the point of no return. But after this point, the further stages of dissolution are ones that occur only after the dissolution of the coarse, physically produced appearances has already been completed. There is thereafter only a further, inward dissolution connected with the more subtle and more mental elements. If the process continues beyond

**There are internal experiences and definite appearances which arise in your experience, which indicate that a particular specific stage of dissolution is occurring**

what we have already described here—into this stage of the dissolution of these more subtle and mental elements—then there is no way to bring the person back.

The next thing that happens—the next stage, the fifth stage of this process—is that the fundamental constituents which have produced your body, which are the white element, found in the top of your head, and the red element or constituent, found below the navel, move from their seats, where they have resided during your life.\* First, the white element moves or flows downward from the top of your head toward your heart. As it moves downward, you experience a pervasive, brilliant whiteness, as though everything had become entirely composed of white light. This appearance increases as this white drop approaches your heart. At this time, through the movement of this white drop or white constituent, of the various types of thoughts which you have been having throughout your life, all of the conceptuality and thought connected with aversion, anger, and aggression cease. Traditionally, all the different types of thoughts are enumerated as eighty. Of these, thirty-three are connected with aggression. These thirty-three types of aggressive thoughts stop at this point.

The second stage of this subtle and final dissolution is that the red drop or red constituent, previously found below the navel, flows or moves upwards, also approaching your heart. As it moves upward, whereas in the previous stage everything was perceived as a brilliant whiteness, everything is now perceived as a brilliant redness, as though everything were a brilliant red light. As this stage of dissolution occurs, all of the thoughts and conceptuality connected with attachment or desire cease. In the traditional enumeration of the eighty different types of thoughts, there are forty connected with desire, which cease at this time.

The third stage occurs when the two drops—the white drop which descends from the head and the red

drop which rises from the abdomen—meet at the heart. As they meet, they enclose or sandwich your consciousness between them, as a result of which you experience a pervasive blackness, an absolute obscurity. At that moment, the final seven of the eighty different types of thoughts, the seven thoughts which are connected with bewilderment, cease.

This process occurs normally as an unrecognized event for most people. However, because at this point in the death process all the different types of thoughts connected with the three fundamental kleshas have ceased, if there is some stability of mind and some recognition of this process in the dying person, then this moment becomes a great opportunity, and the death process can become the basis of liberation. It is for this reason that Padampa Sangye said that death is not death for the yogi or yogini; it is buddhahood. What is meant here is that, if you possess in-

structions and training, then what naturally occurs at the time of death, because of the cessation of conceptuality, can be an opportunity to attain buddhahood.

**N**ow, what type of practice or instruction will help us at this time? As the dissolution process indicates, the impediments or obstacles to be overcome at the time of death are the kleshas themselves, and among these, principally attachment and aversion. Therefore, the fundamental preparation or practice for dealing with this stage of the bardo is to weaken or lessen these kleshas in any way you can.

For example, we have a tremendous amount of attachment to the experiences and things of this life. We are attached to our friends and our families; we are attached to possessions, to food, wealth, and various circumstances and places. And we suffer tremendously at the time of death because of the fear of losing them. So if you can lessen attachment—which means lessening your attachment starting from now—in preparation for death, then this will help you tremendously at the time of death. You lessen attachment by means of

## What naturally occurs at the time of death, because of the cessation of conceptuality, can be an opportunity to attain buddhahood

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\*Editor's note: The translator here is translating what in Sanskrit is bindu and in Tibetan tige variously as drop, element, and constituent.



reflecting upon the situation of attachment and its uselessness, and through the practice of meditation.

We also suffer from aversion and aggression. We have a tremendous aversion for those we perceive as enemies or as threatening, and we also have a lot of associated reactive emotions such as jealousy and others. All of these aspects of aversion become a tremendous problem for us in the bardo, and none of them can do us any good, even while we are alive. So the fundamental approach in connection with the bardo of this life is to recognize that the cultivation of kleshas is unnecessary and ill-advised, and, therefore, to weaken them, especially attachment and aversion.

As for how one actually relinquishes or weakens the kleshas, three approaches have been taught. The first of these, which was taught by the Buddha in the sutras, is *distancing*, which means to distance yourself from any particular klesha. You do this, first, by recognizing the presence of the klesha in your makeup, and, second, by recognizing how much harm it does you. So, for example, you might think, “I am afflicted by the klesha of attachment,” or of pride or of aversion and so on, whatever klesha it is. You recognize that this klesha is present in your makeup and then you think about what the actual effect on your life and on the lives of others this klesha has had. What maintains the kleshas in our makeup is the illusion or misconception that somehow these kleshas help us. We hold on to these kleshas because we think that we need them to function or that somehow they make us more effective. If you come to understand that the kleshas are not helpful in any way, that they harm you and they harm everyone who is connected to you, then you will naturally wish to be rid of them. Wishing to be rid of a klesha creates a distance between your mind and the klesha, which makes it very easy to let go of it.

The second approach to dealing with kleshas is to weaken the klesha or to attack the klesha itself directly [*attacking directly*]. This is what I was speaking of yes-

**The fundamental approach in connection with the bardo of this life is to recognize that the cultivation of kleshas is unnecessary and ill-advised, and, therefore, to weaken them, especially attachment and aversion**

terday when I talked about applying your meditation practice as a remedy to a specific problem or a specific klesha. Fundamentally, this technique consists of having the intention that your practice be directed to serving as a remedy to a specific klesha, that it serve to weaken that specific klesha. This approach can be applied to any meditation practice. We can use, for example, the vajrayana technique of the generation stage, which consists primarily of meditation upon deities. If you are doing a practice such as Vajrasattva, in which you visualize the deity Vajrasattva above your head, then you visualize the hundred-syllable mantra in his heart, and that the amrita or ambrosia of wisdom is descending from this mantra, entering and filling your entire body, and purifying all obscurations and all wrongdoing.

When you are doing this practice, you would include, of course, all obscurations and wrongdoing as objects of purification, but you would particularly focus on whatever klesha it is that is your biggest problem at any particular time, your foremost klesha. You might think, “Well, I am a jealous person” or “I am a bewildered person” or “I am an aggressive person.” Whatever the klesha is, when you are doing the practice, then you think that all of that klesha—all of your jealousy or all of your bewilderment or all of your aggression—is swept out of you and completely purified by the amrita which is flowing from the body of Vajrasattva. In an analogous way, you could apply the practice of the Chenrezig meditation to the same problem. You would visualize the form of the deity Chenrezig with the six-syllable mantra in his heart, and you could think that the rays of light from these six syllables of his mantra purify all of your kleshas in general and especially that klesha on which you are focusing at that time.

The third approach to dealing with the kleshas is called *eradication*, which means to directly expel the klesha from your mind. This is done by means of what is called the samadhi of dharmata, which is a meditative absorption in which you are

resting in a direct recognition of the nature of all things. In the specific context of working with the kleshas, what this refers to is looking directly at the klesha and perceiving its nature, which is to say, its lack of true existence, its insubstantiality. This can be done by beginning with some degree of analysis. For example, when we become angry, we normally tend to react in a strong way, with the thought, “Oh, I am angry,” and we tend to panic. If, instead of doing that, you look directly at the anger and you try to find the anger—exactly where the anger is and whether or not it has any substantial characteristics—this can help a great deal. For example, you say, “Well, I am angry. Exactly what is this anger? Where is it? Is it inside my body or outside my body? If it is mine, surely it must be inside my body, in which case it must be somewhere specific. Is it in the top part of my body or the bottom part of my body?” And so on. You do this in an experiential way; you actually try to track this emotion down and find exactly where it is seated in your body. If it is seated anywhere, you will be able to find it, because it is your emotion that is present in your mind. And furthermore, it should have, if it exists at all, some kind of substantial characteristic, some kind of shape, some kind of color, some kind of size, some kind of location, and so on. So you keep on looking for these characteristics until you have resolved, through direct experience, that the klesha of anger does not have any of these characteristics. When you experience that directly, it causes the nature of the klesha to be perceived, which causes the klesha to dissolve. This will pacify the klesha, but when you emerge from this recognition of the klesha’s nature, it may come up again, in which case you have to do it again.

In the case of the application of any of these three remedies, they must be applied continually. One application of the remedy will not eradicate the klesha forever. But if you gradually cultivate the habit of applying these remedies to your kleshas, the kleshas will be gradually weakened. Furthermore, there is a particular significance to the habit of remedying the kleshas. At the time of death, the way you think and what you

**At the time of death, the way you think and what you think is particularly powerful and significant, because it can steer the direction you move in after death**

think is particularly powerful and significant, because it can steer the direction you move in after death. Therefore, it is very important that you be in a positive state of mind while dying. If, throughout your life, you have spent most of your time in a state of klesha, then certainly as you are dying the kleshas will come up again and will determine your direction. If, on the other hand, you have devoted most of your time to a state of mindfulness, in which you have remedied the kleshas as they arose, then this habit which you have cultivated will also emerge at the time of death and will help you accordingly. Therefore, it is necessary to generate this habit of mindfulness now, while you are still alive.

Both the person who is dying and those people who are accompanying the person as they die need as much stability of mind as possible. In fact, when you come to die, you need to select those people who will accompany you as you die very carefully. They need to be people who are not so overcome by their grief at your death that their weeping and other evidence of grief will distract you and disturb you from attending to your death mindfully. You also need to make sure that the people who are around while you are dying are not going to talk to you about things that are going to bring up your kleshas. So, for example, while you are dying, you should not have someone around who is saying things like, “Well, what’s going to happen to your money?” or “Should we sue so-and-so?” or any other thing which will bring up a great deal of useless attachment and aversion in your mind. It is very harmful if the companions of a dying person say things or do things that agitate the dying person. So you need to select people who are positive, benevolent, tranquil, and stable in their minds as your companions at that time. And the dying person, himself or herself, also, of course, has to avoid as much as possible thinking of things, as they die, that are going to make them extremely agitated.

The best type of person to have with you as you die is someone who knows enough about the death process that they can help to guide you through it, who can remind you of what will occur, which will make it easier

for you to recognize these various signs of dissolution and so on. But, failing that, it is absolutely necessary that the person with you or persons with you be as stable as possible.

That completes the presentation of the bardo of the time of death, the second bardo. The third bardo, which we will deal with as we go on, is the bardo of dharmata. I would like to stop here for this evening, but if you have any questions, please feel free to ask them.

Question: Rinpoche, can the period of time taken for the dissolution of the elements one into another vary?

Rinpoche: At the longest, two or three days. Normally this dissolution process will occur during one day. In the case of a sudden death, it is a different situation, the whole thing happens very, very quickly; and, in fact, one can't even talk about a definite sequence.

Question: If we learn of a friend who has died, without our being in their presence, is it possible to recite these guidances after their death; and, if so, will it be of help?

Rinpoche: Yes, this would definitely be a big help for the person, because when someone has died and when they have regained consciousness in the bardo, their consciousness has the miraculous ability of travel, and the person's consciousness will tend to return to those persons to whom they were most attached. So if you were someone's friend, then they are likely, at some point, to come close to you. Now, if you recite things such as *The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo* [Tib: *bar do thos gro!*], and so forth, then, because the person likes you, and if you have a good intention to actually benefit the person with your recitation, then they will be able to directly experience the quality of your intention, and therefore they will feel good about it and they will listen, and what they hear may help them a great deal.

Question: If someone dies in a sudden accident, does the body still go through this process, and are there still

these signs?

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

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

Rinpoche: When someone is in a coma before death, it is believed that, although, of course, they cannot communicate with you, they still may be able to hear and understand some of what you say to them. Therefore, it is still worthwhile to attempt to communicate

this dissolution process, and so on, to them. The way to do it would be to give them this guidance in a very gentle and very reassuring way.

Question: I worked as a pediatric nurse with children dying of leukemia and cancer, and I noticed that in many cases, perhaps three or four days before their death, they would complain about a weight pressing down on their chest, making it uncomfortable for

them to lie flat, and would ask to sit up; and also, for at least a period of twenty-four hours before their deaths, they would not void either liquids or solids. In some cases, and in the case of one person in particular, I noticed that the voice seemed to disappear inward and to become less distinct. Is this connected with the dissolution of the elements?

Rinpoche: In general, yes, it is connected with the dissolution of the elements. In more detail, the things that you are talking about are specific signs of the cessation of specific winds. Among the five root winds or energies which make up the vitality of a living being, the one that is connected with talking and also with

## When you come to die, you need to select those people who will accompany you as you die very carefully

eating is called the upward moving wind; and as the upward moving wind starts to cease or becomes weaker, then the voice and so on would become weaker. Then there is also one called the downward moving or downward eliminating wind; and the eliminating wind, as its name would indicate, is connected with the elimination of waste and with other similar processes. And as this wind ceases to function, then the person becomes unable to void. Therefore, when the dying person ceases to void liquids and solids, it would indicate that the downward eliminating wind has ceased to function. Another of the five winds is called the pervasive wind and is the wind or energy that allows for and produces movement, for example, movement of the limbs and so on. As this wind ceases, movement becomes impossible, and a feeling of paralysis sets in.

Question: Rinpoche, how should we treat the body of the person who has died? In this country, at least in some states, it is customary for the body to be removed immediately after death has been pronounced, to be placed in a mortuary where it is embalmed, which involves, among other things, the removal of all the blood and so on, which would seem hardly helpful to the person in the bardo. How should we deal with this?

Rinpoche: Well, there's a specific case which can occur, which is an exception to this, which is that of organ donors. Organ donors are people who, because they have great compassion, are willing to give up parts of their bodies, such as their eyes or their kidneys or whatever, immediately after death. Those people, probably because they have this intention while they are alive, are probably not particularly attached to their bodies once they have died. But, with the exception of people who have generated that intention during their life, most people will tend to be somewhat attached to their bodies, and the consciousness of the being in the bardo will still regard this dead body as their body and identify with it. So it is best if the body

can be treated as gently as possible.

Question: There is, nowadays, more and more information about near death experiences and the experiences of people who have supposedly died and returned or been brought back to life. Is there any significance in this, other than the obvious change in their lives, both for themselves and for others; and, if so, what is that significance?

Rinpoche: In the texts on the bardo, it talks about the fact that, even after the four stages of the physical dissolution of the elements have been gone through, it is possible, depending upon the cause of the near death, for the person to be brought back to life; whereas it is said that, if the complete process of the internal dissolution of the subtle constituents has been experienced, then it is impossible for the person to return to life. So

when people have near death experiences, it seems that what is happening, from the context of this point of view, is that they have gone through the coarse dissolution of the physical elements and then been brought back to life. As for the significance of this, their experience can sometimes be of some degree of inspiration to others, but, realistically, it is difficult for the accounts or experiences of people who have gone through near death experiences to really have much of an effect on other people.

Question: Would Rinpoche please tell us why Yamantaka is called the slayer of the lord of death, and why this practice is helpful, and if it is

helpful in connection with dying?

Rinpoche: Yamantaka is a wrathful deity, and it is normal for wrathful deities to be given names that make them sound really rough or tough, and so Yamantaka in Sanskrit means the slayer of the lord of death. But it does not particularly mean that this particular yidam is more connected with preparing for death in the bardo experience than

**When someone is in a coma before death . . . they still may be able to hear and understand some of what you say to them. Therefore, it is still worthwhile to attempt to communicate this dissolution process**

any other.

We could stop there.





*Journey of the Mind:*  
**To the Bardo of  
Dharmata, an  
Interval Without  
Confusion**

**A**gain, I would like to welcome you all here this evening. I will be going on with my explanation of the bardos, but before I do, I would like to mention that it is important that we not treat this merely as something that I am telling you and that you are listening to. It is necessary that this information actually become useful and beneficial to you. The degree to which this information will become practically beneficial depends primarily upon our receiving the blessing of the lineage, and that is why, as I have done on the previous two evenings, I will begin by reciting the traditional lineage supplication. Please join me in this with an attitude of faith and devotion.

The next topic in our presentation of the bardos, which is a continuation of the discussion of the second bardo, the painful bardo of the time of death, is the practice of the ejection or transference of consciousness, phowa. It is traditional that some instruction in phowa be given at this point in going through the bardos. The vajrayana is characterized primarily by its variety of

methods. The approach taken in the vajrayana is to give the practitioner a variety of approaches to deal with any given situation or problem, so that if one does not work, another one will. So here you are given instructions on the bardo of the time of death, which might enable you to take that bardo on the path and traverse it, but in case this does not work, you are also given instructions on the ejection of consciousness. In case that does not work, you are also given instructions on the next bardo, the bardo of dharmata, and so on. In any case, some understanding of the transference or ejection of consciousness is important.

Phowa is a particular technique based upon the relationship between body and mind. As we have seen, when you die, your perception of everything changes a great deal, the way things appear to you changes a great deal, and the reason for this change is that your body and mind separate. While you are alive, your body and mind are so linked with one another that they seem to be one thing; experiences seem to be both physical and mental at the same time. In fact, to be more precise, it seems to us as though our mind resides inside our body. Now, looking at it from that point of view, we would say that the mind is a resident in the body, and that there are nine gates or doors, which are the major orifices of the body, by which the mind might leave the body at the time of death. Now, it was said by the pandita Naropa, “Eight doors are the gates to samsara, and one is the path of mahamudra.” The meaning of this is that if, at the time of death, your consciousness leaves your body by any of the orifices other than the aperture at the very top of the head, this will cause you to be reborn in a samsaric realm—such as the hell realm, the preta realm, or the animal realm—that corresponds to that particular orifice. Therefore, the technique of phowa consists fundamentally of blocking off the other eight openings or orifices so that your con-

sciousness leaves only from the very top of the head.

Now, what are the characteristics or requirements of the person who practices or performs phowa? If someone has excellent training and realization of mahamudra or of dzogchen, then they do not require the practice of phowa, because at the time of their death, they will definitely be liberated in the dharmata, in the nature of all things. Now, in spite of this, we might see in the lives of certain mahasiddhas that they appeared to perform phowa at the time of their death. In fact, this exhibition of phowa by certain mahasiddhas is really just a display to instruct people in the practice of it; it was not that they particularly needed to perform the ejection of consciousness. An example of this is Lord Marpa, who at the time of his death sat up very straight and said, “If you perform the ejection of consciousness, do it like this,” and then immediately shot his wisdom in the

form of a sphere, a five-colored light, out the top of his head into space. In fact, he was not really doing phowa—he had already realized something beyond that—but he was demonstrating this as a form of instruction.

If those with consummate realization do not need to perform phowa, who is it that does need to? It is the rest of us, those who have some degree of practice but do not have such confidence that we can be liberated at the time of death spontaneously into the nature of all things. At what time does one effect or perform this ejection of consciousness? It should be done after the coarse elements—earth, water, fire, and wind—have dissolved, at that point before the final dissolution of the subtle elements.

There are two aspects to the practice of phowa. One is the training, which is done during one’s life, so that one can effect the actual ejection at the time of death; and the second is the actual ejection of the consciousness at the time of death. There

**The approach taken in the vajrayana is to give the practitioner a variety of approaches to deal with any given situation or problem, so that if one does not work, another one will**

are also many different types of phowa, which can be classified into two, into three, into five, and so on.

First is what is called dharmakaya phowa, which is the ejection of consciousness into the dharmakaya itself. This is the type of phowa which is effected by those who have great realization. When someone has thorough realization of either mahamudra or dzogchen, then, at the time of their death, through the power of their realization, they are spontaneously or automatically liberated in the expanse of the nature of all things. That is called the phowa of the dharmakaya. It is not really a technique of phowa *per se* that has to be separately cultivated.

The second type of phowa is called the sambhogakaya phowa. This phowa is done by a practitioner who has an extremely stable practice of the generation stage of their yidam, which is to say that they have actually seen the face of the yidam. They have actually accomplished their yidam practice fully, and have, therefore, some experience of what is called the illusory body. Such a practitioner, through the power of their realization, will naturally find themselves immediately transported at the time of their death to the pure realm of their yidam. Therefore, they also do not need to train in a particular technique of phowa. Nevertheless, their transference is called the sambhogakaya phowa.

The phowa that is actually practiced as a distinct or separate technique is what is called nirmanakaya phowa. The actual practice of nirmanakaya phowa begins with the preliminary of going for refuge to the three jewels and generating bodhicitta. Then the actual practice consists of the coordinated application of three techniques, which are the physical technique, the technique of the breathing, and the visualization. The physical technique is the posture which you take when you practice phowa. The essential point of this posture is that your back be as straight and

upright as possible. The reason for this is that the technique of phowa is based upon working with the central channel, the avadhuti, and using the avadhuti as a pathway to send your consciousness out the top of your head. Therefore, it is most helpful if your avadhuti is straight. In order to make it straight, you straighten your back.

The second aspect of the practice is the breathing, and the key point here is that you somewhat hold the breath, and then, at the moment at which you perform the visualization of shooting your consciousness up from your heart through the avadhuti and out the top of your head, you exhale and let the breath go, let the breath out.

The third point is the visualization, which has several elements. The first, as we saw, is the closing or blocking of what are called the impure gates, which are the openings or orifices of the body. If your consciousness goes out from one of them, it will cause rebirth in samsara. The eight of these are as follows (from the bottom up): the anus, the urethra, the navel, the mouth, the nose, the two ears (counted as one), the two eyes (counted as one), and between the eyebrows. Those are the eight impure gates. They are sealed by visualizing a HRI syllable outside, right against each one of these, preventing the consciousness from leaving by any of these gates.

The second aspect of the visualization is that you visualize in the center of your body, starting from the heart in this case and extending upward to the top of your head, a channel of light, the central channel or the avadhuti in Sanskrit. Now, this channel is like a tube of light that goes

straight upwards without impediment and without any kind of twist or blockage. The only other characteristic it has is that, at the top of the head, it widens like the mouth of a trumpet; so it flares at the top. And above the opening of the avadhuti, at the very center of the top of your head, you visualize, most commonly in phowa practices, the

**The eight impure gates . . . are sealed by visualizing a HRI syllable outside, right against each one of these, preventing the consciousness from leaving by any of these gates**



Buddha Amitabha. But, alternatively, and according to the specific liturgy of phowa which you are using, you may be called upon to visualize your particular yidam, and so forth. In addition, you visualize, originally in your heart, either a drop of light or a syllable or the figure of the deity. Exactly what you visualize will depend upon the particular form and liturgy of phowa that you are using. It does not make any difference which of the three it is. The point is that what you are representing by any one of these three visualizations is your mind, which is inseparable from the subtle winds on which it rides. So this is referred to as the visualization of inseparable wind and mind [Tib: *rlung sems dbyer med*].

The practice consists of shooting this visualized drop or syllable or deity up through the central channel and out the top of your head, in coordination with the breathing, as was described before. Now, when you are practicing this during your lifetime, that is to say, when you are doing it at a time at which you are not about to die, then you shoot it up just to the top of your head and then bring it back down. The repetition of that constitutes the main body of the practice. For example, if you are visualizing Amitabha seated above your head as the target of the phowa, so to speak, then you would think that his feet are actually blocking the aperture at the top of your head, and that when you shoot your consciousness up, it merely touches the soles of his feet and then returns back down, and then goes up for another try, and so on. The training in phowa would consist of the repetition of that type of visualization.

Now, because you are practicing shooting your consciousness out of your body, out of the top of your head, there is a slight danger that you could shorten your life by doing this. In order to remedy that or prevent that from becoming a problem, it is customary, in between sessions of formal practice, to visualize either the letter HUM or a golden

double vajra or something similar blocking the aperture which you have been visualizing at the top of your head, so that your consciousness does remain firmly seated in your body. You generate this visualization strongly at the end of every session of phowa practice.

## The most important thing about the application of phowa at the time of death is that you have no attachment whatsoever to the things of this life

You will remember that earlier I said that there were five types of phowa. We have been discussing the third of these. The fourth type is called the phowa of the guru, in which practice you actually attempt to eject your consciousness into the visualized body of your root guru. This is a form of phowa that is based upon having the utmost faith and devotion in the guru, and is customarily not emphasized nowadays.

The fifth type of phowa is called the celestial phowa, or the *kachari phowa*, of which there are several different forms. One of the practices under this category entails using the practice of lucid dreaming to train in the approach and transference to pure realms. In such a practice, through the cultivation of lucid dreaming and the training of the dream state, you gain the ability, at will, to send your mind out of your body, actually going to pure realms such as the realms of the five buddhas of the five buddha families, such as Amitabha and so on. And if you gain that kind of familiarity with a particular realm during your life, then you will be reborn there upon your death.

So, of the five types of phowa, the one that is actually practiced and used in training and preparation for death is the third, which is the nirmanakaya phowa that has been presented.

Now the way that phowa is performed, when you actually apply it at the time of your death, is, as has been mentioned, somewhat different from the way it is practiced during your life. First of all, the most important thing about the application of phowa at the time of death is that you have no attachment whatsoever to the things of this life. At-

tachment to this life and the things of this life will seriously impede your ability to perform the ejection of consciousness. And, furthermore, if you really think about it, attachment to the things of this life is not going to help you at the time of your death anyway. So the first point is utterly to let go of this life.

The next point is that if, while you are attempting to effect the ejection of your consciousness, you are disturbed or agitated by the arising of kleshas such as anger or jealousy and so on, then this will distract you, and will also impede the intensity of the visualization which is necessary to actually effect the transference. So you need to have a very stable visualization that is unimpeded and undistracted, either by the arising of kleshas or by attachment to the things of this life.

Now, there is a great deal of difference between practicing phowa during your life and actually applying it at the time of death. When you practice phowa while you are very much alive and your mind is still firmly seated in your body, your mind will not actually leave your body. And so, in a sense, you will find that what you are practicing will seem like pretending that something that is not happening is happening. Nevertheless, when you are just about to die, and you do this same visualization, it will really happen. As a result there are some differences in the visualization. For example, whether you are visualizing your yidam or the Buddha Amitabha as the object or target of transference, at the time of death you do not visualize that his or her foot is blocking the top of your head. You visualize them one cubit\* above your head. And rather than merely touching the deity or buddha's foot, when you perform the ejection, you visualize that your consciousness in the form of the drop or the syllable or the scepter or the deity, whatever your specific practice of phowa calls for, flies up com-

pletely out of your body and goes up through the deity's body until it reaches the deity's heart and comes to rest there.

Now, I realize that phowa itself is not really a topic that is included within the discussion of the bardos, but it is what we could call a useful digression, and it is presented as a useful digression in the traditional commentaries at this point. Therefore, I've gone through it. It is important to discuss this practice because, if you actually practice it, it will help you a great deal at the time of death.

**O**ur actual topic for this evening is the third bardo, which is called the luminous bardo of dharmata.\*\* The luminous bardo of dharmata begins when the stages of dissolution that were presented last night are completed. So after the dissolution of the coarse elements into the

**The duration of the appearances of luminosity will be five times the amount of time that that person could rest their mind in a state of complete non-distraction during their life**

dharmadhatu, then the basic ground, the luminosity of the ground or the display of the ground, arises. The duration of the arising of the ground luminosity and its display depends to a great extent upon the degree of training of the particular being who has just died. When someone has trained in meditation and in meditative absorption or samadhi, then the length of time that they are able to rest their mind during their life without any distraction whatsoever is called a meditation day. And when in commentaries on the bardo it talks

about the first day, the second day, the third day, these refer to meditation days. So basically the duration of the appearances of luminosity will be five times the amount of time that that person could rest their mind in a state of complete non-distraction during their life. So, for example, if someone has trained in meditation to the point at which they can rest their mind for one hour without any

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\*Editor's note: A cubit is the length between the tip of one's elbow to the tip of one's outstretched middle finger.

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\*\*Editor's note: literally dharmata, luminosity bardo; dharmata, clear light bardo; or dharmata, radiant clarity bardo (Tib: *chos nyid 'od gsal gyi bar do*).

distraction whatsoever, then the third bardo, the bardo of dharmata, will last for five hours, which would be called five meditation days. If someone could rest their mind for five minutes, then their experience of the bardo of dharmata will last for twenty-five minutes, which will still be referred to as five meditation days, a meditation day being however long that person could rest their mind. And if someone has no training whatsoever in meditation and cannot rest their mind without distraction for any period whatsoever, then the ground luminosity and its appearances will be experienced very, very quickly; they will appear and disappear almost simultaneously. If someone has great training, so that they can rest their mind without distraction for a very long period of time, then the appearances of the bardo of dharmata could last for many days.

In any case, regardless of the person's training, the experience of the bardo of dharmata will definitely occur. The appearances will definitely arise. The only variation is in their duration. The greater the person's training, the longer the duration of this bardo will be; the less their training, the shorter it will be.

Now, in order to understand the reason for this, it is necessary to understand the basic view of appearances held by this tradition. The basic view is that all appearances which we experience are confused projections.\* In other words, they are appearances which are not actually existent as what they appear to be. What happens at the time of death, specifically during this bardo, is this: Because the conditions which have produced the previous appearances of the previous life have ceased to be present, those appearances have ceased to be experienced; and because the conditions which will produce the appearances of the next life have not completely taken effect, the appearances of the

**If the basic nature, the dharmata, or the luminosity of the ground, which is experienced without confusion at this time, is recognized, this is called the meeting of mother and child**

next life have not yet arisen. So there is a space, an interval or bardo, without confusion. The key point here is to recognize the basic nature at this time. The basic nature will definitely be experi-

enced. The question is whether it will or will not be recognized.

Now, there is a simple analogy that could be given for what happens at this point in the bardo. Think of the appearances of this life as being like what is displayed on the screen of a television. Even though a television is a comparatively small box or container, it still contains a whole world of appearances. We can see mountains and rivers and trees and so on, all displayed on the screen of the television. Now, suppose the television were turned

off and left off for a brief period of time, and then at some point after that turned back on again. In this case, the turning off of the television is like the ending of one life, and the turning on of it later on is like the beginning of the next life. Just as in that situation there would be a space or interval where there would be no television, in the same way, in this bardo there is a space or interval where there are no confused projections, no projections of confusion. Now, if the basic nature, the dharmata, or the luminosity of the ground, which is experienced without confusion at this time, is recognized, this is called the meeting of mother and child. The mother luminosity refers to the actual nature itself, and child refers to the cultivated meditative experience of luminosity by the practitioner during the preceding life. At this point, if practitioners of dharma can meditate in this situation, then their previous partial experience of luminosity becomes complete, because it directly encounters the mother, the original luminosity itself.

Now, what is initially experienced in the bardo of dharmata is called the luminosity of the ground. And luminosity of the ground is what is called in the sutras prajñāparamita. It is what is called in the madhyamika teachings the absolute truth,

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\*Editor's note: This term (Tib: *khrol snang*) is variously translated as illusory projections, confused appearances, deluded appearances, mistaken appearances.

emptiness. It is what is called in the mahamudra teachings great non-conceptual wisdom. This is the true nature of all things and a state that is beyond the confusion of mind. In the sutra path, we attempt to realize this true nature through logical analysis. In tantric paths, we attempt to experience it through having it pointed out directly. In the case of the experience of this true nature in the bardo, it simply arises naturally in the experience of everyone; and it arises simply because, as we saw last night, the eighty types of conceptuality or thought connected with the kleshas have ceased. However, although it will arise for everyone at this point in the death process, it may not be recognized. It is in order to recognize it that we need to train in meditation. Because, although this experience arises, if it is unrecognized, then after whatever duration [in time] it has, confusion will re-arise as before.

**I**n order to prepare for this phase of the bardo, one needs to cultivate a particular type of samadhi or meditation. In the instructions of the mahasiddhas of the past, there are basically two approaches to doing this. They are called taking inferential valid cognition as the path and taking direct valid cognition as the path. These two approaches exist not only as approaches for dealing with the bardo but as two distinct and important aspects or styles of dharma practice in general.

The first of these, taking inferential valid cognition as the path, is making use of logical reasoning in order to determine the actual nature of things. It is using your intelligence, using your capacity to reason clearly, with guidance, in order to correctly determine that things are not what they appear to be. The practice basically consists of thinking very, very carefully. To give a brief example, if you were to consider the nature of appearances, you might say, “Well, what is the actual nature of what appears?” Then, through detailed analysis, you would determine that the coarse substances that appear to you are really composed of particles and have no existence whatsoever as what they appear to be. You would determine that what they appear to be [shoes and ships and sealing wax, cabbages and kings] are

merely mental impositions or imputations. Then you would determine that the particles that make up these objects themselves in turn have no substantial or material existence, and that any such material existence is also simply a mental imputation.

Then you would turn and examine the status of your cognition, or mind, and determine that it is a series of discrete instants which have no duration.\*

This type of analysis is the basis of arriving at the understanding expressed in the *Heart Sutra*, for example, where it says, “No eyes, no ears, no mouth, no nose. . .” and so on. The basic approach is to break things down further and further and further.\*\* You use analysis in this way to the point of resolving, in a decisive way, the actual nature of things, and then you meditate within the confidence of understanding that nature. That, essentially, is the first approach, which is taking inference, or inferential valid cognition, as the path.

Now, when this type of analysis is conducted in a thorough way, it resolves two things, which are called the selflessness of persons or individuals and the selflessness\*\*\* of things or dharmas in

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\*Editor’s note: i.e., there is no basic, shortest instant of cognition, inasmuch as they are infinitely divisible into beginning, middle, and end.

\*\*Editor’s note: Finding thereby through analysis that, no matter how small a basic unit of matter or instant of time is, it cannot be a substantial or real particle or instant, because it is still divisible, and that, therefore, matter and time cannot possibly exist.

\*\*\*Editor’s note: Selflessness, in the writings of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, is called egolessness. One-fold egolessness is the equivalent of the selflessness of persons. One-and-a-half-fold egolessness is the selflessness of persons plus the lack of inherent existence of phenomena; while two-fold egolessness is the selflessness of persons, the lack of inherent existence of phenomena, plus the lack of inherent existence of consciousness. In Thrangu Rinpoche’s rendering here, the selflessness of dharmas—phenomena—includes both halves of the second fold of egolessness. The view presented by Trungpa Rinpoche was the view of Maitreya, and hence belongs to the shentong view; whereas, in the context here of analytical meditation, Thrangu Rinpoche presents the rangtong view of Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti. In the latter view, since phenomena exist only in dependence upon the consciousnesses that perceive them, and consciousnesses exist only in dependence on the phenomenon they perceive, it is nonsensical to discuss or categorize them as though they were independent entities.

general. The selflessness of persons is the lack of inherent existence of persons or individuals, and the selflessness of dharmas is the lack of inherent existence of dharmas in general. The basic format of this type of meditation and study has been laid down very clearly.

Generally speaking, it comes from the instructions of Lord Nagarjuna and was passed down and introduced in Tibet by Lord Atisha.

These instructions exist, and we use them, but we do not use them as our main technique of meditation. The reason for this is that, first of all, in the application of this approach to meditation, a great deal of rigorous study is necessary, and only after that study has been

engaged in can you begin the process of an equally rigorous scrutiny, applying what has been learned in study. And through that scrutiny and analysis you gradually develop certainty as to the nature of things as they have been analyzed. But at that point, when you begin to apply this analysis and the certainty arising from it as a basis for meditation practice, it seems that it takes a very long time to actually develop a meditative realization. So, according to the lineage of uncommon instructions [vajrayana], it is traditional to use this type of analytical reasoning as a mode of study and reflection, but not as the primary technique of meditation.

When it comes to the actual practice of meditation, we emphasize the other approach, which is taking direct valid cognition as the path. According to this approach, in which we use direct experience as the basis of meditation technique, we do not worry too much about the existential status of external things. If external things that appear to us are empty, that is fine; if they are not empty, that is fine too. Because our problem, our situation, is really caused by and determined by our mind, therefore, from this point of view we would say that that which is most important as an object of scrutiny is the mind itself. We experience happiness and sadness, we experience attachment and aversion, we experience faith and devotion, and all

of these experiences are thoughts or styles of thought that arise in our mind. They are not produced by external objects. Therefore, it is our minds themselves that must be scrutinized and it is the true nature of our minds that must be recognized.

Now, we generally never look at our minds. We never examine our minds to see what they really consist of. We have an ongoing and underlying assumption that our minds exist, and we tend to assume that they must have some substantial existence and characteristics. But we have never actually checked to see; we have never actually looked at our minds to see whether or not

they really do exist.

Now, when you look at your mind directly, which you may never have done before, what you discover is that your mind is the nature of things, that your mind is dharmata itself. The mind's obvious and fully manifest characteristics are the characteristics of the ultimate nature. And this can be seen and is seen directly by you as an individual, and this seeing has nothing whatsoever to do with logical reasoning or the drawing of inferences of any kind. Because it is your mind, you are the only person who can directly experience your mind. And it is the easiest thing for you to look at and the easiest thing for you to experience directly as an individual. No one else knows your mind, but you know your mind.

Now, how do you look at the mind? You could begin by looking to see where the mind is. Is it inside your body or outside the body? Certainly you might say it is not outside the body, but if it is inside your body, exactly where is it? Can you pinpoint it? And, if you find where it is, exactly how much space does it occupy? How big is your mind? Is it big or is it small? And what substantial characteristics, such as color and shape and so forth, does it have? When you try to track down and scrutinize the mind, asking these various questions and coming to the answers not through reasoning but through what you experience as you

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look at and look for the mind, you gradually discover that there is nothing to find. The mind seems not to be anywhere. In fact, the mind seems to be utterly nonexistent. You discover that, in fact, we have just had this assumption all along that the mind existed, and yet there does not seem to be anything there whatsoever.

Now, you might think at this point that you are not finding the mind because you are not looking in the right way, that you do not know how to look, but that is not the case. Or you might think that you do not find the mind because the mind is too small or because the mind is too subtle or because the mind is too transparent, too diaphanous to be seen. But in fact it is not for any of these reasons that you cannot find your mind. The reason that you cannot find anything when you look for your mind is that the mind is not a self. The mind has no true or inherent existence, which is what the Buddha meant when he talked about selflessness and when he talked about emptiness; this is it, exactly. And when you have seen that your mind has no existence, then you have no need whatsoever to ask anyone about what this nature is—what emptiness is, and so on. This is something that we can each, as individuals, experience for ourselves within our own minds. This is very important. And the first thing that you need to understand about this is that this is not some kind of doctrine or belief; it is not something you should take on faith or on authority. You should not have the attitude, “Well, the lama said there is no mind, so that must be how it is; there must be no mind there.” Or, “I’ve heard that there is no mind, that the mind does not exist; okay, it must be true.” This has nothing whatsoever to do with what you have been told about the mind, because this is something that you can see as an individual for yourself. And it is not something that is in any way difficult to discover. Any time you care to look at your mind, you will see this right away. Not only is it easy to see, it is impossible for you to look at your

mind and not see that there is nothing to see. So please look at your mind.

Now, when you look at your mind during your lifetime, you are seeing the basic nature in the midst of the coarse appearances of this life. The difference between looking at it now and looking at it in the bardo of dharmata is that, when you look at this same nature in the bardo of dharmata, there are no appearances which will distract you from it or obscure it. So if you have at that time a recognition of that nature, then that recognition of and immersion in that basic nature becomes very powerful.

The bardo of dharmata has two phases. What we have been talking about, the luminosity of the ground, which is also called the luminosity of the primordially pure dharmakaya, is the first phase. When one emerges from that phase, in which there are no appearances whatsoever, there is a second phase, which involves the appearances that are called the spontaneous appearances of dharmata, consisting of such appearances as light, rays of light, various sounds, drops or spheres of light, and so on. But I do not want to get into that tonight, because I am afraid that if we deal with too many things in one evening, then you will forget the first thing because you remember the second thing. What we have gone over just now is so important that I do not want to eclipse it by following it with anything else.

But if you have any questions you would like to ask, please go ahead.

Question: In the application of inferential valid cognition in a meditation technique which is, in its basic form, using direct valid cognition, does one extend the inferential valid cognition until it becomes refined into direct valid cognition, or does one consciously relinquish or set aside the inferential valid cognition and transfer one’s attention to a separate discipline or experience of direct valid cognition?

Rinpoche: Well, one of the traditional ways that

**When you have seen that your mind has no existence, then you have no need whatsoever to ask anyone about what this nature is—what emptiness is**

this has been explained is that one can begin by generating a correct inferential valid cognition of emptiness, of the nature of things, and on the basis of that inferential ascertainment of the nature, then one can generate a direct valid cognition of that same nature. What this involves initially is developing a conceptual certainty of the nature of things, in short, a certain understanding of the meaning of the statement that all dharmas or all things are empty. What is meant by certainty here, according to the instructions of the masters of the past, is such intense certainty, such absolute conviction that, no matter who appeared before you and said, “It is not true, all dharmas are not empty,” it would not in the least shake or unsettle you in your conviction.

Now, having first gained such a conviction through the analysis of inferential valid cognition, one would then proceed to refine that by means of thinking about it again and again and again. Gradually the clarity or intensity of the certainty would increase, and through this process, then, its conceptual content would be refined increasingly away through the increasing clarity of this certainty, until it would, at some point, become a direct valid cognition of emptiness.

Question: Rinpoche, if, as you have said, the appearances of the previous life have ceased and the appearances of the next life have not yet begun in this phase of the bardo of dharmata, then how is it possible for the consciousness of that being not to recognize this nature as it is manifest; and, if it is not recognized, what is the exact experience of that consciousness in this bardo like?

Rinpoche: Well, in answer to the first question, the reason why it is possible for a being in this phase of the bardo not to recognize the ground luminosity is coemergent ignorance, the most subtle and fundamental level of ignorance, which persists even in the absence of what could be called

manifest confusion or bewilderment. This is something we can experience in our own lives. For example, when we look at our minds as we have been instructed to do, then at that moment there is no reason whatsoever why we should not experience it. In fact, there is no reason whatsoever why we should not be experiencing the nature of our minds continually, because we are continually, in a sense, experiencing it anyway, but nevertheless we do not.\* And when we do have some experience of the mind’s nature in meditation, having been introduced to it, then when we arise from that meditation, we lose it; we return back to the same kind of confusion we were in before. We might say, by the same token, that there is no reason why that confusion should start again either, but it

does, because of the habit or continuity of subtle ignorance.

As to the second question—what is the experience of a being who does not recognize the ground luminosity but nevertheless experiences it—the answer is that they do not have much experience at all. It is very much like what happens every time we go to sleep. In fact, every time you go to sleep there is a less intense or more subtle version of the same stages of dissolution

that occur when you die. But although these do arise every time we go to sleep, we do not recognize them as they occur, nor do we remember them. In fact, when we go to sleep, although there is a specific moment where you actually go from being awake to being asleep, it is very rare for us to be aware of this. In fact we do not even remember having gone to sleep, nor do we know exactly when we went to sleep. It is the same thing when a being dies. When a being dies and goes into the bardo, although they do experience the ground luminosity at that point, they are not aware of expe-

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\*Editor’s note: It is unclear here whether Rinpoche’s intention was “continuous recognition of mind’s true nature” or “continual recognition of mind’s true nature.” The former would imply buddhahood; the latter that one would constantly be recognizing gaps in one’s confusion.

riencing it. They are, in fact, not even aware that they have died or anything else like that. So it is very much like what happens when you go to sleep.

Question: In the context of the five paths, at what stage on those five paths could it be said that a practitioner will definitely recognize the ground luminosity in this bardo?

Rinpoche: Well, when we look at the five paths,\* basically what you are practicing on the second path, the path of juncture, is the cultivation of a mental fabrication of emptiness. The practice at this level is called taking enthusiasm or aspiration as the path, because there is only a mental fabrication and not a direct experience of the nature of things. Therefore, there is no certainty that a practitioner on this level will recognize the ground luminosity. The first level at which the ground luminosity is recognized by the practitioner and, therefore, the level at which the ground luminosity will definitely be recognized at the time of death, is the path of seeing.

However, this does bring up another issue, which is that a comparison of the paths of sutra and tantra is not always that easy or simple, because when we compare the qualities and attainments upon the various levels of these two parallel paths, we find that, in comparing one to the other, there is the additional issue of how the path is traversed. There can be a gradual sequential traversal of the path and there can be an instanta-

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\*Editor's note: The five paths—*tshogs lam*, *sbyor lam*, *mthong lam*, *sgom lam*, and *mthar phyin pa'i lam* in Tibetan—describe the stages of the path to enlightenment, from the very beginning of the path to buddhahood. These paths are rendered variously in English. Standard renderings include the path of accumulation or preparation; the path of juncture, joining, unification, or application; the path of seeing or insight; the path of meditation; and the path of perfection or fulfillment. See Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* for clarification.

neous traversal of the path, and then there can be what is called a skipping or hopping traversal of the path, where things can be a little bit out of order. And that makes this more complex than it may seem at first. However, basically, if we have to say one thing or another, we would say that the level on which a practitioner will definitely recognize the ground luminosity at the time of death is on the path of seeing.

## The first level at which the ground luminosity is recognized by the practitioner and, therefore, the level at which the ground luminosity will definitely be recognized at the time of death, is the path of seeing

Question: What is meant by the term ground luminosity? And, with regard to the physical difference between males and females, and specifically with regard to certain orifices, is this difference accounted for in the blocking visualization in connection with phowa?

Rinpoche: To answer your first question first, with regard to the terms ground and the luminosity of the ground: these appearances that we experience—the external world and everything in it, your body, your mind, and all the appearances, thoughts, and kleshas that arise in your mind, all of

these various aspects of what you experience—are regarded as being the projections of confusion. This means that they are projections or images that occur upon a certain ground, or arise from a certain ground. That ground or basis for their arising is at the same time their true nature, what they really are. And this is like, for example, the screen on which the images of a television arise. All of the images on a television are a display that arises on the screen, and when the images are removed, the screen is still there as the ever-present ground for their arising.

Now, in the case of the actual appearances we experience, the ground is their emptiness, their true nature. And we call this the ground because everything arises from this nature of emptiness, and everything is of this nature of emptiness and, therefore, dissolves back into it. When we call this



ground emptiness, however, it does not mean that it is an absolute nothingness, like the idea of completely empty space. If you think of completely empty space, you think of it as an absence or a vacuity, a nothingness, and as well you are thinking of something that has no cognition. Here, what is meant by the ground is an emptiness in the sense of being an absolute absence of substantial, inherent existence, but, nevertheless, not an absolute nothingness, because it is, at the same time, a cognitive lucidity. However, this cognitive lucidity, which is the characteristic of the ground, is not in any way substantial or existent in the usual sense of the term, and therefore is beyond any kind of conceptual apprehension or estimation. There are two approaches you can take to understanding this. One is to develop a conceptual understanding through inferential valid cognition and then gradually refine that and attempt to apply that in your experience; and the other way is to gain a direct experience of this nature through looking at your mind, and this, in turn, will give you a conceptual understanding.

As for your second question, whether women would require the visualization of an additional HRI, the answer is no. The reason is basically that the channels, which are the source of these actual gates, are more similar in men and women than the external appearances of their bodies would suggest. The second reason is that most practices of phowa, whether you are male or female, involve visualizing yourself as a female deity anyway, so you use one HRI to block off that entire area. The reason for visualizing yourself as a female deity is that female deities are embodiments of prajña or insight, and, therefore, most practices of phowa involve visualizing yourself as a female deity, most commonly Vajrayogini.

Question: Does the actual deity, such as Amitabha or the Medicine Buddha, that you visualize above your head when you practice phowa,


actually determine the specific realm to which your consciousness transfers? And if it does, are you thereafter limited to that realm?

Rinpoche: First, with regard to whether the deity you visualize above your head will affect where you actually go after effecting phowa, it depends in part upon how good your phowa is. If you have a very strong phowa practice, then it is possible it might make a difference. You might, by ejecting your consciousness out of the top of your head into Amitabha's heart, succeed in being reborn in Sukhavati; and you might, by ejecting your consciousness out of the top of your head into the heart of the Medicine Buddha, succeed in being reborn in his realm, which is called "Beautiful to See." But it is also possible that the successful

transference of your consciousness out of the top of your head might lead merely to an excellent rebirth and not necessarily to a pure realm. In this case it would not have made that much difference which deity you visualized, except that meditating on a deity to which you feel strong devotion and in which you have great confidence may make a possible difference in efficaciousness.

With regard to whether or not transference to a pure realm will limit you to that realm, it depends upon the realm. There are different kinds of pure realms,

and there are also impure realms as well. There are sambhogakaya pure realms and nirmanakaya pure realms, and then there are ordinary realms that are not really pure realms. If you are reborn in some of these, you are free to move about. For example, according to the sutras, if you are reborn in Sukhavati, then you can remain there attending Amitabha, but you are also free to go to the realms of other buddhas, attend them, and receive their teachings, and so on. So, depending upon the realm, you might be able to travel.

Now we are going to conclude with the dedication of merit. 

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*Journey of the Mind:*  
**The Luminosity of  
Spontaneous Presence  
Arises Next in the  
Bardo of Dharmata**

**I** am delighted to see you all again this evening to continue with the presentation of instructions on the bardo. The purpose of these instructions, as I have mentioned, is to prevent us from having to suffer extensively in the future and to enable us to progress easily on the path. As on the previous evenings, I would like to begin by

reciting the lineage supplication. Please join me in this, praying with the utmost devotion.

We have seen that the arising of the bardo of dharmata is caused by the cessation of the eighty types of thought or conceptuality. We have also seen that the bardo of dharmata has two aspects, which arise in sequence. The first of these is called the luminosity of the dharmakaya, which is primordial purity,\* and the second is called the luminosity of spontaneous presence. The luminosity of the dharmakaya is what we looked at last night, the direct experience in that phase of the bardo of emptiness. In order to learn to recognize this nature or emptiness as it arises, we do our practice. Any practice will help to facilitate that recognition. Tonight we are going to study the second phase of the bardo of dharmata, which is called the luminosity of spontaneous presence.

You will remember that what led to the bardo of dharmata was the dissolution of the elements one into another: earth dissolved into water, water dissolved into fire, fire dissolved into air, and finally air dissolved into space. The painful bardo of the time of death ends, and one enters into the luminosity of primordial purity, when space dissolves into luminosity, into the clear light.

Now, what happens at the end of the appearance of the luminosity of the ground, or the luminosity of primordial purity, is that luminosity or clear light dissolves into what is called unity or integration [Tib: *zung jug*]. Unity here refers to the unity of appearance and emptiness, which means that at this point in the bardo of dharmata, from that state, or within that state, of primordial purity—the ground or emptiness itself—there arise what are called the appearances of spontaneous presence. Essentially these appearances manifest in three basic forms. There are the appearances of the forms of deities; there are drops or spheres of light; and there are brilliant and penetrating rays of multi-colored

\*Editor's note: Earlier referred to as the luminosity of the primordial pure dharmakaya.

light.

The forms of deities are also of three basic types: wrathful, peaceful, and semi-wrathful. It is said that the wrathful deities will appear first. These consist of the five buddhas and the eight male and eight female bodhisattvas, manifesting not in their peaceful forms but in their wrathful forms. The principal deity among the wrathful ones is called the Supreme Great Heruka; and, in his retinue are the five buddhas in the form of the wrathful deities or herukas of the five buddha families. Then those who as peaceful deities are the eight male and eight female bodhisattvas, appear in this context in their wrathful forms as two groups of eight female deities. The first are called the eight Matrikas or eight mothers, and the second are called the eight Tramsens or eight goddesses of mixed appearance. All of these are fe-

male. These wrathful deities appear in a variety of costumes and are holding different sorts of things. Some of them have three faces; some of them have one face; some of them even have the heads of different kinds of animals and so on.

Now, at the same time that these wrathful deities are appearing, you will hear a very sharp, loud, and penetrating sound, which is called the sound of dharmata itself. This sound is said to be like the sound of a thunderclap multiplied by a thousand in inten-

sity. So all at the same time, at this first phase of the appearances of spontaneous presence, you hear this extremely loud and intense sound, and you see these wrathful forms of deities and, coming from the bodies of these wrathful deities, you see intensely bright, multi-colored rays of light, which seem to be shooting towards you. Now, if the person has had extensive meditation experience, and if, as a result, they recognize these deities as sources of refuge and not as something threatening or as enemies, and if they also recognize these as simply their own projection and not

**At the same time that these wrathful deities are appearing, you will hear a very sharp, loud, and penetrating sound, which is called the sound of the dharmata itself**

as something external, then they will not be terrified by them. But a person who has had no experience and no training will be terrified by the brilliance, the majesty, and the form of these various forms and sounds. And perceiving these things as external to themselves and, therefore, as extremely threatening, they will faint with terror. Then, when they wake up from that faint, these forms and sounds will have vanished into space.

After awakening from the previous faint, there will then arise to the bardo being the appearance of the peaceful deities. At this point you start to perceive your entire environment as utterly insubstantial, no longer composed of coarse or solid elements such as earth and stones and mountains and rocks and so on. Everything is perceived as a boundless or limitless expanse of rainbow lights and rainbows. This rainbow light in which you find yourself is extremely lustrous and brilliant, extremely vast and spacious, and utterly without impediment of any kind. In fact, the appearances at this point become extremely beautiful; and if you look in front of you, behind you, to your left, to your right, above and below you, you seem to be able to see into the distance to the very limits of space. And all of this space is filled with rainbows composed of five-colored light. Some of these rainbows are like arching rainbows, some of them are stretching straight out into space, and some of them are coiled in on themselves to form circles of rainbow light. In these circles you perceive the peaceful deities: the peaceful deities are Vairocana and so forth, the buddhas of the five families together with their consorts, the female buddhas of the five families,\* along with the eight male bodhisattvas—Avalokiteshvara or Chenrezig, and so on—and the eight female bodhisattvas—the goddess of flowers and so on.\*\* All of these deities

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\*Editor's note: The five male buddhas are Vairocana, Akshobya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, and Amoghasiddhi. The five female buddhas are Dhatvishvari, Locana, Mamaki, Pandaravasini, and Samayatara.

are peaceful in appearance but have various costumes and various positions and are holding various things and so on. All of them are extremely majestic and pleasing in appearance—but so majestic that they are difficult to look upon.

From the hearts of all of these deities, rays of multicolored light are projecting, and all of these rays of light are shining right on your heart. Also, emerging from these bands or rays of light are tiny spheres of the same multicolored light. After you perceive these visions, at a certain point, all of this entire display dissolves back into your heart.

At the end of this display, all of these appearances of deities and so on will dissolve into you;

and that will complete the section in which the appearances of these deities, first wrathful and then peaceful, will have first appeared. That section, as you will remember, is called luminosity dissolving into unity or integration.

Now, the next thing that happens, after all of these appearances have dissolved, is called integration or unity dissolving into wisdom. At this point you perceive rays of four-colored light, this time shooting up from your heart and forming above you canopies of

blue, white, yellow, and red light, respectively, one above the other. And these canopies of light are adorned with many drops or spheres of light, some very large and some very tiny.

Now, these canopies of light, one above another—the blue one, then the white one, then the yellow one, and then the red one—are each adorned by spheres or circles of light of their own respective colors. They are adorned basically with a large sphere, inside of which are five smaller

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\*\*Editor's note: The eight male bodhisattvas are Kshitigarbha, Maitreya, Akashagarbha, Samantabhadra, Avalokiteshvara, Manjusri, Vajrapani, and Sarvanirvaranavishkambin. Practitioners of ngöndro will recognize these as being identical to the eight great bodhisattvas who represent the exalted sangha in the field of refuge. The eight female bodhisattvas are Lasya, Pushpa, Mala, Dhupa, Gita, Aloka, Gandha, and Nritya. These are identical to the offering goddesses in the mandala offering.

**A person who has had no experience and no training will be terrified by the brilliance, the majesty, and the form of these various forms and sounds**

ones, inside of each of which are smaller ones, and so on. And the way that these appear is like the shimmering colors of the tail of a peacock.

The reason that, at this point, you perceive only four-colored rays of light and canopies of only four different colors is that the color green is missing. Green, among the five wisdoms, is the display of the wisdom of accomplishment. The five wisdoms are the dharmadhatu wisdom, the mirror-like wisdom, the wisdom of sameness or equality, the discriminating wisdom, and the wisdom of accomplishment. Now, the wisdom of accomplishment is actually the source of the activity of a fully awakened buddha; and, in fact, the wisdom of accomplishment is not fully present until one attains buddhahood. Since one has not yet attained buddhahood at this point in the bardo, there is no appearance of the wisdom of accomplishment in the form of green light, and so, therefore, there are only the other four colors.

The next phase of this part of the bardo of dharmata is what is called the dissolution of wisdom into spontaneous presence. Up to this point, first the wrathful deities appeared, then the peaceful deities appeared, and then these canopies of light appeared. Next there appears a further display of light above you in something like a parasol made of five-colored light. In the midst of this, you perceive the mandalas of both the wrathful and the peaceful deities. All of this appears in a particular form like something appearing in a cloudless sky. And the appearance, in particular, of the cloudless sky above you at this point is called the display of the dharmakaya and the display of primordial purity.

At this point, at the same time as there is above you the appearance of the pure mandalas of the wrathful and peaceful deities and so on, below you you perceive the worlds of the six realms displayed clearly like images in a mirror. Now, if you

have practiced dharma extensively, then at this point there is the opportunity to attain liberation; but, if you have not practiced, or are not familiar with the deities through the practice of the generation stage, and if you are not also familiar with these displays of light and rays of light, then at this point you will not become liberated and will instead proceed on to the next bardo, which is the bardo of becoming.

**The particular form of meditation that prepares you for this particular bardo is based upon the idea of coming to recognize these one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities as nothing other than your own display**

**N**ow, as for the preparation that is required in order to attain liberation at this point in the bardo, while it is true that the wrathful deities and peaceful deities in these various displays, such as the display of primordial purity and so forth, will appear for everyone, for someone who is not accustomed to this practice, these appearances will flash by very briefly, making it very difficult for recognition to occur. Therefore, the primary factor in the recognition of these deities and other ap-

pearances is the practice of meditation.

The particular form of meditation that prepares you for this particular bardo is based upon the idea of coming to recognize these one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities as nothing other than your own display or your own projection, coming to recognize that they are not external to you. Now, in the bardo of dharmata, when the peaceful and wrathful deities appear, they do appear more or less in front of you, as though they were external to you. But they appear that way because these deities have always, during your life, resided inside your body [and have thereby been obscured to you].

The approach to practice here [in this life to prepare you for this phase of the bardo] is to recognize that these one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities exist naturally, or are spontaneously present, within your own body. The essence of these one hundred deities is the Buddha

Vajrasattva, and the reason that his mantra has one hundred syllables is that his mantra is the essence mantra of the one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities. In fact, it is for that reason that this mantra is so effective in the purification of wrongdoing and obscurations. So the practice associated with [preparation for] this phase of the bardo is to visualize yourself as Vajrasattva and to think that in the center of your heart, in the midst of an expanse of swirling rainbow light and rays of rainbow light, are the forty-two peaceful deities—the dharmakaya Samantabhadra, together with the five male and five female buddhas, the eight male and eight female bodhisattvas, and so on—all of these actually present within your heart in the midst of an expanse of rainbow light and spheres of light and so forth.

At the same time you think that inside your skull, in your brain, are actually present the fifty-eight wrathful deities in the form of brilliant light and drops of light, which are found within the various channels of the brain.

Also you think that in the center of your throat, inside the various channels of the throat, are the ten male and ten female vidyadharas, in appearance neither particularly wrathful nor particularly peaceful, and, therefore, referred to as semi-wrathful. You visualize these in the throat of yourself in the form of Vajrasattva. The vidyadharas are also found in the midst of an expanse of rainbow light and drops or spheres of rainbow light.

By visualizing these deities with their individual colors, costumes, scepters, and so on, inside your body, as clearly as possible, then, through the habit of doing so, when they come to actually appear before you in the bardo, you will not be terrified by them, but through having the habit of considering them to be your own natural display, you will recognize them as not being external to you.

Now, the method that has just been presented uses the visualization of the peaceful and wrathful deities within your body in order to prepare you

for the experience of the bardo. But, of course, when you actually die and go through the bardo, what you are experiencing is something that is just spontaneously present; it is not a visualization that you are creating. So, therefore, there is another method for preparing for this phase of the bardo, which is called the practice of taking the bardo on the path or of taking the bardo as the

## There is another method for preparing for this phase of the bardo, which is called the practice of taking the bardo on the path

path. This method is connected with the fact that because you are dead and do not have a body, the appearances which arise in the bardo are unobstructed by physical embodiment and are, therefore, free to arise. While we are alive these appearances do not ordinarily appear in the way they do in the bardo. Nevertheless, there is a way to work with them using your physical body while you are still alive. Essen-

tially the technique consists of sitting up in a good posture, with your back straight and so forth, and then closing your eyes extremely tightly, closing your eyes so tightly that the skin and muscles of the eyelids actually press on the orbs of the eyes. At the same time, you clamp your teeth together tight enough to create a certain effect.

Now, first, with regard to what you are doing with your eyes, when you do this, initially you will see nothing; you will just see darkness. But if you keep your eyes tightly shut, and if you keep looking directly at what arises before your visual perception, you will start to see some light arising. It could be green or blue or yellow or red or a mixture of any of these. Now, if you look at this light that is arising with a relaxed mind, then this light becomes clearer and clearer and brighter and brighter. And as you look at it, what you are experiencing is an appearance of light that has no physical source of manifestation. Therefore, it is called the empty light of dharmata itself. Looking at this light, you can experience directly the fact that what you are seeing is free of coming from somewhere, of going anywhere, and so on. As you develop certainty of this, then the light itself starts to dissolve. This aspect of the practice is

called taking light on the path.

As for what you are doing with your teeth, by clamping your teeth or your jaws together and listening very carefully to what you hear, initially you will hear nothing. But if you prolong this exercise, then gradually you will start to hear a ringing hum, and this ringing hum will slowly get louder and louder and louder. Now, this sound does not particularly come from anywhere, and therefore it is called the empty sound of dharmata itself. Working with this sound, and recognizing it as your own display, is called taking sound on the path.

These two techniques of taking light on the path and taking sound on the path are ways to prepare for this phase of the bardo experience and are, therefore, called taking the bardo on the path.

Nevertheless, the main method of preparation for this phase of the bardo, as for all phases of the bardo, is to learn to rest your mind in the experience of its own nature. The nature of your mind is emptiness itself, which is experienced directly when you rest in the nature of your mind. And if you can do that, then you will automatically be able to recognize the various sounds, lights, and appearances which arise in this phase of the bardo as your own display.

Now, this phase of the bardo is characterized not only by the three-fold appearance of sound, light, and rays, but also by various emotional states of joy and misery, by some feelings of physical discomfort or pain, and by various kleshas. Therefore, in this system of instructions, as well as in the aforementioned practice of taking the bardo on the path, there is a connected practice which is called taking pain on the path. The basic idea of taking pain on the path is that, rather than running away from the pain, you look directly at it; you look right into its midst or at its essence. By doing so, the solidity of the pain dissolves. However, a beginner cannot do this with real or serious pain; you have to begin by working with extremely small, extremely mild or controlled

situations of pain. So the technique is to pinch yourself. You take one of your hands and you pinch the skin on the back of the other hand. When you do this, it really hurts, and at first it will be perceived as unpleasant to the point of being intolerable. But if you can keep pinching yourself and looking at the essence or nature of the experience of the discomfort or pain, then what will happen is that, while the sensation itself will not diminish and will still be there, the suffering attendant upon the sensation will vanish. And being trained in this leads to the ability to do the same thing with involuntary situations of sickness or pain. Initially, only very mild or slight suffering, but gradually, as you become trained, then greater and greater degrees of discomfort can be dealt with in this way. This also is an excellent preparation for the bardo, and is the second practice, called taking pain or sickness on the path.

The third technique connected with taking the bardo on the path is called taking joy and misery on the path. This is a way of working with the fact that in our minds we experience a constant fluctuation or oscillation between being extremely happy, almost intoxicated with happiness, and extremely miserable. The problem with being extremely happy and extremely miserable is that becoming intoxicated with happiness is the root of samsara,

**Becoming  
intoxicated with  
happiness is the  
root of samsara,  
and becoming  
extremely  
miserable and  
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root of samsara**

and becoming extremely miserable and intoxicated with misery is also the root of samsara. Now, both of these poles will arise in the bardo, but of the two, by far the more common is the misery aspect. Both of them can also arise during any phase of the bardo experience—the bardo of the time of death, the bardo of dharmata, and so on. Nonetheless, the way that they are dealt with or the way that they are taken on the path is essentially the same.

The way that you practice with these states is that, when you find yourself in a state of extreme

joy or pleasure, you look for the joy itself, for that intoxicating joy or pleasure itself; you look to see exactly what it is, exactly where it is, and exactly who it is that is experiencing it; you look to see exactly what the experience of it is, how it is experienced, and so on. Now, if you pursue this search in an inferential way, using logical analysis to determine the nature of the joy, you will probably come to the conclusion that it exists, because it will seem to as long as you maintain the distance that that inference produces. But if you look at it directly—based on what you are actually experiencing, using your direct experience of the joy—then you will not find it anywhere. It will be seen to have no substantial existence, characteristics, or location whatsoever.

The same technique is applied in exactly the same way to misery. When you find that you are miserable, look directly at the misery; look to see where it is. Of course, you are miserable, and you are still going to be miserable, but exactly what does that mean? Where is it? Who is miserable? What is misery? Does misery have an essence? Does it have substantial characteristics? Is it somewhere in your body, and if so, where? How much space does it occupy? In this way you scrutinize both of these conditions—joy and misery—in the same way.

The fourth technique is called taking kleshas on the path, which is always helpful and appropriate. Normally, we try to relate to the kleshas in one of two ways: either we try to run away from them, or we try to throw them away from us, or somehow to get them out of us. But a third possibility is to take kleshas on the path. In this approach you do not attempt to abandon them or to run away from them, which is helpful in general to your practice of meditation, and is particularly helpful in the bardo states.

We experience kleshas all the time in our present bardo, the bardo between birth and death,

and we certainly will experience them in the bardo of dying, the bardo of the moment of death. There is not much experience of klesha in the bardo of dharmata, for the reasons that we have seen, but there are the kleshas that arise in the bardo of becoming, the next bardo. In the bardo of becoming, kleshas will arise because you will perceive those people you knew in your previous life, and you will tend to react negatively to what you see. For example, when you see those to whom you were attached, you will experience the pain of attachment to them and a sense of loss; in particular, when you see your family, your friends, and so forth, they will be going on with their lives without you,

and you will feel abandoned or rejected, and you will think, “Well, they do not love me at all.” And then you will see what they are doing with your possessions and your money, and you will think, “They just wanted my money; they just wanted my stuff,” and you could become extremely angry. If you become angry, then this becoming angry will make your experience of the bardo of becoming very dangerous and extremely unpleasant. Therefore, some technique for taking kleshas on the path is extremely necessary at that time.

This technique for taking kleshas on the path works with any of the kleshas. It works with

the klesha of attachment, which is being attached either to external things, such as possessions, or to people, or to experiences of pleasure, and so on. It works with aversion, such as the aversion that manifests as anger and aggression and so on towards enemies, and also with the basic aversion of wanting to avoid that which we want to avoid. It works with arrogance, the feeling of being proud or of being superior to others. And it works with competitiveness, jealousy, and envy. It also works with that basic bewilderment which is an ignorance of what is to be accepted and what is to be rejected. So whether you categorize the kleshas as the three poisons or the five poisons or the 84,000

**Normally, we try to relate to the kleshas in one of two ways: either we try to run away from them, or we try to throw them away from us. . . . A third possibility is to take kleshas on the path**



poisons, they all have the same fundamental quality of being a disturbance or mental affliction, and, therefore, they are all dealt with in the same way.

Now this is the technique: when a klesha first arises, as soon as possible you recognize that it has arisen. After recognizing that it has arisen, you look directly at it and try to see or experience directly how this klesha has arisen, exactly how this klesha is, what it means to say that the klesha is present in you, how it abides, where it came from and where it is, what the actual nature of it is. For example, if it is anger, exactly where did the anger come from; what is the anger? Of course, we all know what it is to be angry, but exactly what is this anger? Where does it stay? Where is it seated in our minds? And if you look right at the klesha with your mind, then you will discover that it is without any kind of substantial existence, and is only present in what it leads to when it is unrecognized. This is true of aversion, this is true of attachment, and this is true of bewilderment. When the nature of the klesha is recognized, at that very moment the klesha will subside or dissolve. This has been spoken of by the great mahasiddhas when they have said things like, “The angry mind is a clear awareness; and when that clear awareness is brought to look at itself, its aspect of anger or disturbance simply, naturally dissolves into itself.” This approach of looking directly at the kleshas and recognizing them for what they are, and through this recognition of the kleshas, their dissolving into themselves, is called taking the kleshas on the path.

Now, the techniques which have been presented this evening, which are used as specific preparations for this phase of the bardo, for the phase in which there are the appearances of the peaceful and wrathful deities and so forth, are vajrayana techniques which come from this lineage and bear the blessings of the lineage. These techniques—such as the meditation on the deities, the recitation of mantra, and these four ways of

taking the bardo on the path—are not techniques that one would simply stumble upon or figure out for oneself. Therefore, in order to receive the blessing of the lineage, so that you can effectively practice these techniques, it is traditional to receive an empowerment connected with them. That is why tomorrow afternoon I am going to offer you the empowerment of the forty-two peaceful and fifty-eight wrathful deities [Tib: *zhi kro*], which is an empowerment of this lineage that empowers you to perform these various techniques and is designed to aid you in the experience of the bardo.

If you do not attain liberation in the bardo of dharmata, then you will go on to wander in the next bardo, which is called the bardo of becoming. Now, as for what arises in the bardo of becoming and what the methods are for preparing yourself for that bardo, I would like to leave those until the next session, after the empowerment. But if you have any questions about what we have gone over this evening, please go ahead.

## If you do not attain liberation in the bardo of dharmata, then you will go on to wander in the next bardo, which is called the bardo of becoming

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

Rinpoche: Not only pigs, but even small insects, bugs, and slugs would experience the same appearances in the bardo, because a being can be born with any one of a large variety of physical bodies, but the nature of the mind of each and every sentient being remains the same. The nature of the mind of any being at any time is always emptiness, and that emptiness is at the same time buddha nature, the potential for the attainment of buddhahood. Because the basic nature of every being is the potential of full awakening, then, when the bardo of dharmata occurs in the process after death, that potential or inherent quality is displayed as these appearances of spontaneous presence. Therefore, they will arise for any being, regardless of what their previous body was and re-

ardless of what their future body will be. The special situation of human beings, however, is that in our present bardo, the bardo between birth and death, as human beings we possess the eighteen freedoms and resources of a precious human existence, which means that in our present situation we can prepare ourselves, using methods that will enable us to bring the experience of dying and death on the path. We can prepare ourselves for the bardo and attain liberation there, whereas an animal of any type does not possess the circumstances necessary to do this.

Question: When we are all small children or babies, our minds are comparatively unclear or immature. Regardless of who you are, even if you are the rebirth of a very highly realized being, some type of learning process, some reacquisition of knowledge, and some ripening of the intelligence appears to be necessary. And there also seems to be a natural process of the growing clarity of intelligence that seems to coincide with the development of physical maturity. Why is this so?

Rinpoche: While it is the case that the continuum of the mind of a given being has continued over a long series of lifetimes, in between each lifetime there has been and is a withdrawal or dissolution of all of the confusion of the immediate past lifetime into the basic nature or ground during that phase of the bardo called the bardo of dharmata. Therefore, the confusion and the appearances of any given lifetime in the history of a particular being, all of those confused appearances or projections, have arisen from the basic ground in the periods of the bardo following after the bardo of dharmata. So there is a gap or space in the confusion of a given being in between each lifetime, and in that space, all of the knowledge of most beings will tend to be lost or disappear. As the confusion and all of the projections associated with a particular lifetime are temporarily exhausted in the appearance of the luminosity of the ground, then, when that being arises from that luminosity and moves towards their next life, they will tend to have to learn all over again, even things that they knew very well in their previous

life. The exception to this is that the most highly realized individuals might be able to bring some of this knowledge with them, even through the bardo of dharmata. But other than such rare individuals, the newly born child will need to relearn everything, regardless of how many times it has been born previously in a similar situation. That is why newly born children have to be taught how to eat, even how to urinate, and so on.

Question: Humans appear to be much more intelligent than animals; and even those animals that seem in certain respects almost indistinguishable from humans—namely, the various other forms of primates and ape-like monkeys and so on, which are very similar to us in many ways—do appear to be somewhat less intelligent. What is the actual cause for the difference in intelligence between humans and the various species of animals on this planet?

Rinpoche: Well, the long-term cause of the particular intelligence of a being born as a member of a given species is the particular karma that being has accumulated. If a being has accumulated a great deal of karma connected with bewilderment, then they will be born as a being afflicted by great bewilderment. If they have accumulated the karma of a great deal of particular types of virtue, then they will be reborn as a being with a very sharp intelligence. The short-term cause is that, because a being has accumulated a particular type of karma, they will be reborn with a particular type of body. Because they are born with a particular type of body, the channels within that body will take a particular shape, or form themselves in a certain way. Based on the formation of those channels, the winds within those channels will move in certain ways, which will cause the mind of that being to function in certain ways. Now, if, because of the being's karma, they were born in a body that has a disposition towards a certain kind of bewilderment, the way this is brought about is that the body structures the channels so that the winds move in a torpid way, causing the mind of that being to be particularly torpid and unclear. And if, through positive karma, a being is going to

be reborn as extremely intelligent, then, because of their karma, they are reborn with a certain type of body, which structures their channels in a certain way, which causes their winds to move in a certain way, which causes their mind to be particularly clear.

Question: It is said that in the bardo the one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities appear as though external to us, although during our lives they are present within our bodies. Why then in the bardo do they appear external to us, and is it possible that during our lives they might appear as external to us as well, for example, when awaking from sleep and so on?

Rinpoche: The reason that the deities appear as external to you in the bardo is that they arise as an unimpeded display of dharmata. These deities are the actual natural display of dharmata; they are the embodiment or display of the basic nature itself. And they are spontaneously present within you all the time. It is not that they actually leave you and appear in front of you in the bardo. The question is not so much why they appear then; it is why they do not appear now. They appear then because they are always there and because there is nothing preventing them from appearing. They do not appear now because their appearance is obscured by the appearances of coarse confusion, which obscure them and prevent us from seeing them as our natural display. When you die, the elements, the basis of coarse confusion, dissolve—earth into water, water into fire, fire into air, air into space. Then, finally, immediately thereafter, during the dissolution of the subtle elements, which is the last stage of the painful bardo of death, all the eighty varieties of thought or conceptuality dissolve and disappear, at which point there is nothing obscuring the direct experience of the nature itself and its most fundamental display. Therefore, in the bardo of dharmata, there is the vision or appearance of

these peaceful and wrathful deities. At that point, when we do not recognize them, as we usually do not, these appearances are again obscured by the next kind of confusion, which is the bardo of becoming.

It is as though, for example, the sun were always in the sky, but that there were usually clouds obscuring it. The clouds in the sky are like the coarse appearances which we experience at this time. It is not that the sun is not there; the sun is there. It is a natural part of the sky, but we do not see it. But if, at a certain point, a strong wind were to come up and blow all the clouds away, then the appearance of the sun in the sky at that time would be like the appearance of the peaceful and wrathful deities in the bardo of dharmata. It is not that the sun would be newly present; it is just that it would be unobscured temporarily at that time. Similarly, it is not that the peaceful and wrathful deities are newly present in the bardo of dharmata; it is just that they are unobscured temporarily.

**When you die, the elements, the basis of coarse confusion, dissolve—earth into water, water into fire, fire into air, air into space**

As for whether they can be seen in this life, they can definitely be seen if you put into practice the instructions for the path of leapover or thögal [Tib: *thod rgal*], the practice of spontaneous presence, which leads to the actual direct experience of these visions and appearances in this life. But for this to happen, having received the instructions, you have to put them into practice, and the practice has to be pursued intensively. Initially what you will see is rainbow light, and then within

that you will see spheres of light, and then within the spheres of light you will see deities, and then finally the entire mandalas of the peaceful and wrathful deities.

Question: It seems that we make the mistake of solidifying and objectifying the kleshas as well as making the parallel mistake of viewing appearances, including the appearances of the peaceful and wrathful deities, as external to ourselves.

Would you speak of a way in which we can remedy this basic flaw or basic tendency? And secondly, would you compare the technique of taking the bardo on the path with the technique of thögal?

Rinpoche: With regard to your first question, it is true that the basic fabric of our confusion is this false dualistic imputation of an existent perceived or grasped object and of a grasping or perceiving subject. The basic quality of that imputation is bewilderment, and the only remedy for that bewilderment is to recognize the truth, the absence of which recognition makes up that bewilderment. So the truth here is that the imputed apprehended and the imputed apprehending have no true existence; their true nature is emptiness of true existence. And through the recognition of that true nature, then the imputation of these dualistic polarities ceases, having been eradicated by the recognition of their true nature.

With regard to your second question, about the relationship between the technique of taking the bardo on the path and thögal, one couldn't actually say that the former is or is not a practice of thögal, because it is a kind of branch or a corner of thögal practice. The mainstream thögal practice is quite demanding and very dangerous. It can only be done under the constant supervision and guidance of not only a qualified but a fully realized guru, because the technique involves things like remaining for an extended period of time in total darkness or using as the basis for the practice of thögal looking not directly but almost directly at the sun. If you do not know what you are doing and if you have insufficient guidance, then by doing the technique of using the light of the sun you could go blind. And if you do not know what you are doing or if you have insufficient guidance, then by using the technique of sitting in total darkness you could go crazy. So what is presented this evening is a kind of gentle and easily applied technique for experiencing these appearances of dharmata.

Question: Rinpoche, at what point does the consciousness actually enter the body? Is it at conception or at birth? And also, is there a maximum period of time between lifetimes or between death

and rebirth?

Rinpoche: With regard to your first question, as it is explained in the traditional texts, there are three necessary factors or causes for gestation to begin, and these are the combining of the sperm, the ovum, and the consciousness of the bardo being. If all three are not present, then a fetus will not be formed. So, if there is no consciousness present from the very beginning, simply the combination of a sperm and the ovum will not, according to the texts, produce a fetus. The consciousness is held to be there from the very beginning.

With regard to your second question, generally speaking it is said that, for most beings, no longer than forty-nine days will elapse after death before they are drawn into the next rebirth. However, this is not an absolute rule. It is said, for example, that beings who are particularly attached to the circumstances of their previous life may, through that condition, wander around in the bardo in extreme misery for some time.

Question: Although it is taught that a precious human body is ideal and more or less essential for spiritual growth and awakening, is it therefore absolutely impossible for a being in one of the other realms—for example, the hell realms or the god realms—to attain some degree of awakening? And is there not, in fact, any presence of awakened beings and their activity in these various realms? We find, for example, in the Jataka stories, the instance of the Buddha, in a previous life, having been reborn in the hells, helping another hell being, and, thereby, being immediately liberated from the hells, and so forth.

Rinpoche: There is a basic difference between the human situation and that of other sentient beings. Of course, a being in any realm can be virtuous, can perform acts of virtue, and, therefore, can accumulate merit or virtue, because a being in any realm could, at some point, generate a pure intention or altruistic intention, as we see in the Jataka story that you've referred to, in which, in that hell realm, the Buddha is said to have

generated bodhicitta for the first time. And we see examples of this all the time. For example, in the animal realm, it often happens that an animal will do something completely altruistic, such as when dolphins or other animals save the lives of humans or other beings. So any being in any realm can accumulate virtue and can, by the same token, accumulate wrong-doing. What distinguishes the human situation from the others is that human beings have the opportunity—given that they have what is called precious human existence—to go through a complete training in dharma, beginning with hearing the dharma, proceeding with contemplating it and coming to understand it, and finally engaging in the practice of meditation and, thereby, realizing its meaning. And it is only in the human situation of having these eighteen factors of freedom and resources that this complete process can be gone through.

Question: Would you be so kind as to further describe, even more specifically describe, the opportunities for liberation that arise in the bardo of dharmata?

Rinpoche: Well, I have already been pretty specific, but to go on with it, the point of all of this is that there are, as we know, two aspects to truth or reality. There is what is called relative truth or deceptive truth and what is called absolute or ultimate truth. Now, relative truth is what we normally refer to as things, and absolute truth is what is called dharmata, or the nature of things. These two are, of course, inseparable. But, in the way we experience, normally, what we experience is only relative truth. And experiencing relative truth in that way obscures its nature—and, therefore, obscures the absolute truth of dharmata.

We cling to and fixate on the characteristics of relative truth. Now, what makes the situation of

the bardo of dharmata distinct from this is that, after you die, you are in a process of changing appearances. You are changing from the appearances of the previous life to the appearances of the next life, and the change is not without a gap or space in between them. That space or gap in between these two sets of confusion is the bardo of dharmata. At that point, because the appearances of relative truth connected with one life have vanished and the appearances of relative truth connected with the next life have not yet arisen, there

**Because the appearances of relative truth connected with one life have vanished and the appearances of relative truth connected with the next life have not yet arisen, there is a direct experience of the absolute truth, or dharmata**

is a direct experience of the absolute truth or dharmata, the nature of things. Everyone experiences this. The problem is that, unless you have previously trained—specifically, unless you have already recognized this absolute truth or dharmata in your life—you will not recognize it at that point, in spite of the fact that you will experience it. For what is called the meeting of mother and child—the merging of a previous recognition of dharmata with the direct experience of dharmata in the bardo—there has to have been a previous experience or recognition of it. If, through your previous training, you do recognize the dharmata fully in the bardo of dharmata, then you will be liberated into the dharmakaya during the bardo of

dharmata, and subsequently as the sambhogakaya. If you do not have sufficient realization to produce this degree of recognition, however, even some degree of familiarization with the dharmata during your life will be beneficial, because even some degree of recognition during that bardo will dispel enough of your confusion that, although you will not necessarily be fully liberated, you will have a good rebirth that will continue to be relatively free of coarse confusion.

Question: Last night, in the discussion of phowa, Rinpoche presented what's called the guru phowa


or phowa of the guru, and remarked that this was something that was not commonly practiced nowadays. Nevertheless, if the student has great devotion, is it possible or appropriate for them to approach their teacher and request his or her permission to perform this transference or ejection into the teacher him- or herself?

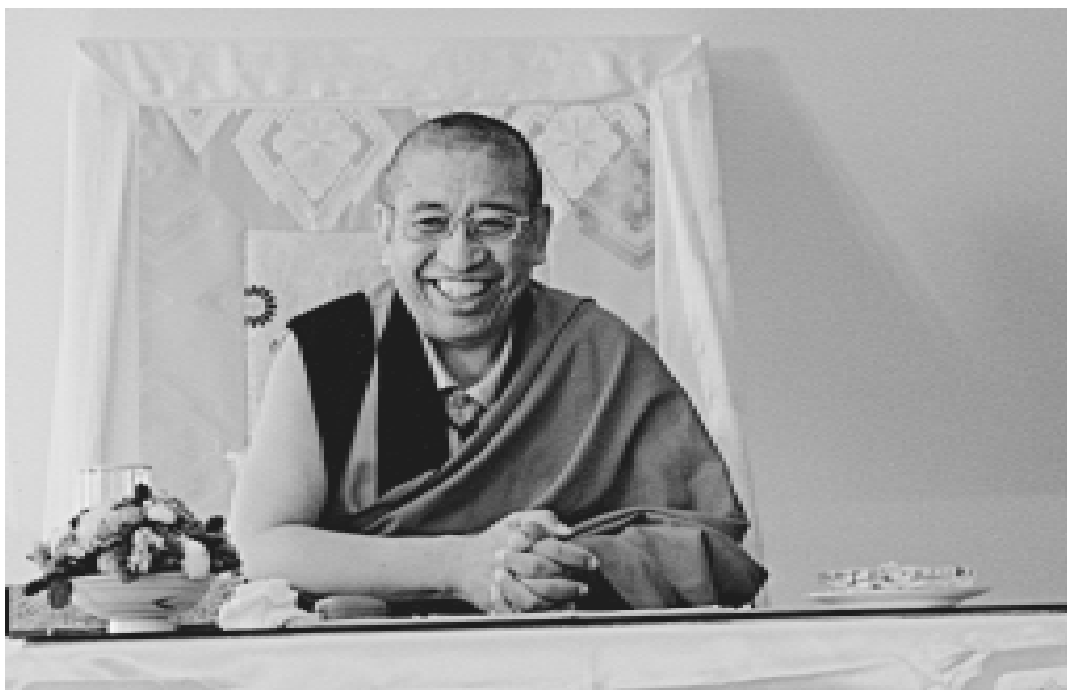
Rinpoche: Well, in general, of course, there is nothing wrong with a student who has great devotion dissolving their consciousness into their guru, but there is a larger issue that needs to be addressed here about practice and lineage. For instructions for a specific practice to be transmitted from a teacher to a student, then both the teacher and the student need to be absolutely certain, absolutely confident, that what is being transmitted is authentic and reliable—in short, that it works. This means that for a teacher, in good faith, to transmit a technique of practice of any kind to a student, that teacher needs to be able to say, “I know from my own experience that this works, and that, if this person does this, they will achieve this result.” Based on the teacher’s assurance, the student then can receive the transmission of the technique and put it into practice with the confidence that comes from knowing that, “Having received this from someone who, having practiced it, gained this result, I know that if I practice it, I will gain the same result.” If there is that kind of confidence in the technique, based on actual practical experience from generation to generation without any break, then the technique is definitely going to remain reliable, and there will be no mistake in the way it is transmitted, because the transmitting person themselves will have practiced it to the point of achieving the result of the technique.

This is called the lineage of practical experience or sometimes the lineage of the blessing of

practical experience. It is absolutely essential. There exist some techniques of meditation which have died out as ones that are actually practiced; and while the lineage for these techniques theoretically exists—the reading transmissions and empowerments and so forth—the lineage of experiential application of them does not. If someone were to teach such a technique to someone else, then, because the person teaching it would have had no practical experience of it, and in particular would not have pursued the technique to its conclusion or final result, then they would not be absolutely confident that they were teaching it in a correct manner, and, therefore, they would not be absolutely confident that it would work and benefit the student practitioner. In short, what would be going on would be the transmission of a technique based entirely upon reading about it in a book. For that reason it is customary to practice techniques that have been practiced up to the present day. Therefore, when we practice phowa, we practice what is called the nirmanakaya phowa, because people have been practicing that technique of phowa up to and including the present day. Because there is no experiential lineage for this transference to

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the guru, for this guru phowa, then, although it was done by a few mahasiddhas in the distant past, if you were, through great devotion, to request these instructions from your teacher and they were to give them to you, because of your great devotion, of course, they might work, and it might be really beneficial. But, because there is no experiential lineage for this type of phowa, it might not work at all, in which case the whole thing would be a complete waste of time. 



*Journey of the Mind:*  
**Reawakening Into the  
Bardo of Becoming**

**A**gain, I would like to welcome you this evening to this seminar on the bardos. I thank you for coming. As on the previous evenings, we will begin by chanting the lineage supplication. Please recite it with one-pointed devotion.

Last time, we looked at the bardo of dharmata, and we saw that the basic preparation for this experience is the practice of shamatha and vipashyana, of tranquility and insight. Through the integrated practice of these, one attempts to gain the facility to recognize the dharmata, the nature of things, when it arises in one's direct experience in this bardo.

If you do not recognize the fundamental nature when it arises, you will then continue to the next stage within the bardo of dharmata, during which there will arise various appearances, principally the appearances of the peaceful and wrathful deities. In preparation for this phase we attempt, through our practice, to prepare ourselves to be able to traverse the bardo in which these deities appear without becoming terrified by them and without generating kleshas in reaction to their appearance. The essential point is to be able to recognize these deities as our own display, and by doing so, rather than becoming afraid of them, to receive their blessing. Preparation for being able to do this consists of meditating on them during one's life so that one familiarizes oneself with them as much as possible. To the degree that you become familiar with the appearance of these deities, to a corresponding degree

you will traverse that phase of the bardo without any difficulty.

In particular, when the wrathful deities appear, someone who has no experience of meditation and who is unfamiliar with the appearance of these deities will be terrified and will suffer tremendously. So meditation on the wrathful deities, in particular, during one's life is recommended. These deities are not merely wrathful; they are actually terrifying in appearance. Many of them have, for example, three faces and six arms and so on. But the more you become accustomed to their appearance, the more you get to know them as you would get to know another person, for example, the less difficulty you will have in this phase of the bardo. All of what we have been talking about here concerns the bardo of dharmata.

Now, someone who has received these instructions, who practices them with diligence, and who comes to be able to cultivate a samadhi or meditative absorption within the recognition of the essence of this practice, will come to be able to recognize the dharmata—to realize the nature of things—in this very life. And therefore, when, after death, in the initial period of the bardo of dharmata, the dharmata arises in their full and direct experience, then their previous recognition will mix with their subsequent identification of it like a mother and child meeting,\*and at that point they will attain liberation.

But even if your practice is insufficient to produce that best result, it is by no means the case that receiving these instructions will have done you no good. The most fortunate type of person, who has the greatest kind of diligence, will practice until they attain liberation, and, of course,

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\*Editor's note: The mother clear light is the luminosity of the ground, which is subsequently recognized; the child clear light is the experience of dharmata or the basic nature, which one previously recognized and cultivated.

**If you practice these instructions, they will bring liberation especially swiftly; even just hearing them without being able to practice them will benefit you**

that is best. But even someone who is unable, for whatever reason, to practice intensively, or who is even unable to practice at all, will still gain great benefit from having received these instructions.

This is why this system of instruction is called *The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo*. It is called that because, while, of course, if you practice these instructions, they will bring liberation especially swiftly, even just hearing them without being able to practice them will benefit you. Having heard these instructions will have placed a certain habit or imprint in your mind. And you will recall this imprint when you reach that phase of the bardo. For example, when you find yourself in the bardo of becoming, you will notice what is happening and you will think, “Oh, wait a second, I have heard about this;

let's see, I'm supposed to do such and such when such and such happens.” And that will obviously benefit you tremendously.

The benefit of having heard these teachings is that it will greatly reduce the amount of suffering you will undergo in samsara in the future, and, therefore, will greatly increase your happiness. The benefit of merely hearing these teachings is not something small or minor; it is something tremendous. Because these instructions are genuine and correct in their description of the bardo states, they are particularly helpful to you at that time when you are in the most danger and are undergoing the most stress and terror—in other words, when you need them the most.

These instructions are beneficial both in the bardo of dharmata and in the bardo of becoming, the fourth of the four bardos. The bardo of becoming follows immediately after the bardo of dharmata. As you will remember, the bardo of the time of death consists of a gradual dissolution of the coarse and subtle elements, and culminates in the dissolution of space into luminosity, at which point the ground luminosity arises. If that is not recognized, then you will go on to the second part



of the bardo of dharmata, which is the appearance of sound, light, and rays of light, as well as the peaceful and wrathful deities. Now, if these appearances are not recognized for what they are, then these too will vanish. After they have subsided, then confused appearances and projections will re-arise.

The reason for the re-arising of these confused appearances is as follows. If you have not recognized the ground luminosity, then you will have experienced it as a state of unconsciousness, like fainting, and you will wake up from that state of unconsciousness in the bardo of becoming. Now, you will remember that at the end of the bardo of the time of death, the eighty types of conceptuality connected with the kleshas of attachment, aversion, and bewilderment subside and cease to be present. At the beginning of the bardo of becoming they start up again; from the beginning of the bardo of becoming onward, thoughts of attachment, aversion, and bewilderment, the eighty different types of conceptuality, become present or active once again.

You will also remember that during the bardo of the time of death, there is a dissolution process, with earth dissolving into water and water dissolving into fire and so on, culminating in the dissolution into the ground clear light itself, into ground luminosity itself. At this point, this dissolution process is reversed, and you re-arise from the unrecognized luminosity, which you perceived as a state of unconsciousness, in an experience of full confusion. What re-arises is your consciousness. Now, at this point you are no longer an inhabitant of a physical body as you are during your life, because, as we saw earlier, at the time of death the connection between your mind and body is severed. However, you generally reawaken at this time *inside* your body, although you do not perceive it in the same way you did when it and you were living. You perceive your body at this point as a wrecked house or a caved-in house, and

you perceive yourself as someone trapped inside it. Then you experience a wish to escape from it, and you escape from whichever of the nine openings is appropriate to your karmic disposition. It is at this point, reawakening from your faint, that your consciousness actually leaves the body by means of one of these nine gates or doors. At the time of death, the mind and body are separated, but the mind does not necessarily leave the body then. Now it does.

The bardo of becoming begins with the bardo being's reawakening from what was perceived as a state of unconsciousness, and continues with the bardo being's undergoing of a variety of appear-

ances and experiences that gradually becomes the search for a birthplace, for a womb. The final experience of the bardo of becoming is the moment at which you identify with the sperm and ovum, which will be the physical factors in your subsequent birth. Up to that point you are still in the bardo of becoming.

Now, someone who has had no training whatsoever in dharma practice will undergo a variety of hallucinations and experiences, in the bardo of becoming, that will produce a tremendous amount of

fear and a great deal of sadness, as well as the arising of their kleshas. Through the arising of the kleshas, they will tend to make mistakes in their choice of where they go in this bardo. They will also tend to make mistakes based on fear, on panic, and on ignorance about what is going on. So the basic preparation for this bardo consists of cultivating now, while you are still alive, the ability to rest your mind at will and, within that state of tranquil mind, the ability to make choices mindfully. This needs to be cultivated during one's life; and if it is cultivated, it will be of great benefit during the bardo of becoming.

During the bardo of becoming, you will initially perceive your body as basically identical to the one you had during your immediately past life. But there are some differences. The first is that,

## The bardo of becoming begins with the bardo being's reawakening from what was perceived as a state of unconsciousness

even if some of your sense faculties were impaired during the previous life—for example, if you were entirely or partially sightless, or if your hearing was impaired, or if some other part of your body had been damaged in such a way that it impeded movement or sense function, and so on—they will be restored. You will experience this replica of your previous body as having perfect vision, hearing, and so forth. The second difference is that this body, which is, in fact, a mental body and not a physical or corporeal body, can go basically anywhere, because it has what is called karmically produced miraculous ability. Karmically produced miraculous ability means that it is not true miraculous ability. It is the ability to do things that we consider miraculous from our corporeal point of view, but it is still a product of that being's karma, so it is not an undefiled ability. The bardo being at this point can travel through solid objects, can go through houses, can go through mountains, can fly through space, and so on. But the only reason it can do so is that it is not a corporeal body, and so there is no reason that it should be impeded by these things. The bardo being at this point also has what is called karmically produced extrasensory perception. This is not the type of extrasensory perception that arises from meditative stabilization, but is simply a result of being in this phase of existence, in this phase of the bardo. What this means is that in some instances, the bardo being can be aware of the thoughts and states of mind of others. Since the bardo being will tend to be attracted to relatives and loved ones from the previous life, the being may be aware of what is actually going on in their minds. So, for example, if, upon returning to their relatives, they perceive the relatives to be loving and compassionate and thinking of them fondly and so on, then they will be delighted and their state of mind will improve accordingly. If, on the other hand, on returning to their relatives, they find them to be deceitful, dishonest, stingy,

**Taking delight in those things that you are most familiar with and used to, you will then proceed on the wrong path and will return to hang around in this world**

greedy, and only interested in the money and possessions that they left behind, then they may be aware of this and may be correspondingly sad and angry. So when someone close to you has passed away, it is important, for this reason, among others, to be refined in your conduct in general and especially, when thinking of the deceased, to think of them only with love.

During the bardo of becoming, you will experience a mixture of pure and impure appearances. You will have fleeting visions of pure realms and fleeting perceptions of the six impure realms of samsara as well. Now, if you are trained in working with pure appearances, then you will respond to these visions of pure realms with delight and enthusiasm, and that will enable you to take birth in one of these pure realms. If you are not familiar with the pure appearances of deities, pure realms, and so on, and are not trained in working with them,

then you will find the appearances of these pure realms in the bardo uninteresting, possibly even threatening. They will seem to be a long way off and not worth seeking out. So you will return to your great attachment to the familiar things of this world and this life, to which you are used. And, taking delight in those things that you are most familiar with and used to, you will then proceed on the wrong path and will return to hang around in this world.

Now, whether or not you engage in the formal practice of meditation, at least it is important to cultivate some kind of familiarity with and enthusiasm for the true nature of things—dharmata—and for pure realms and pure appearances, such as the appearances of yidam deities and so forth. For it is only to the extent that you have enthusiasm and delight for these pure appearances in this life that you will respond with enthusiasm to their appearance in the bardo and will be correspondingly less attached to the accompanying impure appearances.

Together with cultivating in this life an enthusiasm for pure appearances, it is equally important to lessen your attachment to and enthusiasm for impure appearances—to lessen your attachment to your possessions, your wealth, your property, and so on, principally by continually bringing to mind their utter impermanence. The more careful you are in this way to cultivate enthusiasm for pure appearances and to let go of attachments to impure appearances, the better your experience of the bardo of becoming will be. If you have no enthusiasm for pure appearances and you have an undiminished, strong attachment to the things of this world—and especially to your personal possessions, your friends and loved ones, and so on—then you will naturally come back to circle around or haunt the things of this life. Now, this bifurcated experience is spoken of in *The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo* as the experiences of two different types of light paths: the brilliant light paths are the paths to the pure realms, and the dull but familiar light paths are the paths back into samsara. The way to prepare yourself for this—and this is extremely important—is to lessen your attachment to the familiar world of impure appearances, which will be experienced as the dull light paths in the bardo, and to increase your familiarity with and enthusiasm for pure appearances in general and the appearances of yidam deities in particular, which will be experienced as brilliant light paths in the bardo.

In the bardo of becoming, your consciousness is extremely unstable. Although you have the appearance of a physical body, because this physical body is not really a physical body, the appearance of it is extremely unstable. During our physical lives, our mind is seated in the body, in connection with the channels, winds, and drops [Sanskrit: *nadi*, *prana*, and *bindu*; Tibetan: *rtsa*, *rlung*, *thig le*]; and we have a vast variety of thoughts which flit about. These thoughts can move our minds but they cannot really affect, immediately, the existence of our

## The brilliant light paths are the paths to the pure realms, and the dull but familiar light paths are the paths back to samsara

physical body. The body is a physical limit on how far the mind can go on the basis of wild thoughts. But in the bardo the body is merely an appearance that embodies the state of mind of the bardo being at that particular moment; therefore, there is no physical limitation on what the instability of the consciousness can bring about. For example, in the bardo of becoming, if the mind of the bardo being thinks of a place, all of a sudden that being will find itself there; and then, thinking of another place, it will be in that other place. The mind of the being in the bardo of becoming has a very hard time coming to rest at all. Therefore, the hallucinations are extremely intense, and there are very many of them. The mind is so bewildered by

all of this that it cannot control its thoughts of good and bad and so on. Therefore, the most important preparation for this state is to develop stability of mind through the practice of shamatha or tranquility meditation. To the degree that you can control your mind now, you will be able to control it in the bardo, and to the same degree the hallucinations of the bardo of becoming will be somewhat less intense, and you will be better able to withstand the onslaught of your own thoughts.

Furthermore, if you cultivate useful habits of mind now, then your mind will be much more powerful in the bardo than it is now. When we practice dharma, when we cultivate virtuous states of mind such as devotion, loving kindness, compassion, and so on, all of these states of mind oftentimes seem somewhat weak, because they are inhibited by the limitations of our physical body and by the movement of our karmic winds. All of these things inhibit freedom of mind while we are alive. In the bardo, you have no corporeal body, so your mind is the most powerful thing in your experience; therefore, virtuous states of mind and states of meditative absorption and so on have much more power in the bardo than in our ordinary lives. This is true of states of shamatha, states of vipashyana, as well as for the practice of

the generation stage, the visualization of deities, and so on. All of these types of meditation will have much more power and be much clearer in the bardo, if you can remember to do them.

For example, even though you might visualize yourself as a deity during your life, you will still be conscious of the physical sensations and appearance of your ordinary body, and that will somewhat inhibit the clarity and confidence of your visualization. But when you are in the bardo, the visualization of yourself as a deity will cause the cessation of the ordinary appearance of the ordinary mental body and, therefore, your deity visualization will be extremely clear and vivid. Also, when you practice shamatha during your life, there are limits placed upon it by the disturbances which your body produces. In the bardo these disturbances will not be present, so when you place your mind firmly enough in a state of shamatha in the bardo, it will stay put. When you practice vipashyana during your life, your glimpses of the nature [the true nature of mind/the true nature of reality] tend to be quite fleeting and also quite weak or indistinct; whereas in the bardo, when you do the same practice, these experiences will be much more vivid and much clearer.

Whether or not you will be able to do these meditations in the bardo of becoming depends upon the degree to which you have created the habit of doing them during this life and the degree to which you have created the momentum of strong intention to generate these states in the bardo. It has been said by many mahasiddhas that what happens in the dream state and the bardo state depends primarily upon the momentum of one's habits and upon one's resolve or resolution. For example, if before I go to sleep I say to myself, "I must wake up at 3 a.m.," and if I really mean it and I really want to, then I will probably wake up at 3 a.m. Somehow the momentum of the

intention is carried through the unconsciousness and the dream state and so on. As another example, if I resolve that I very much want to have lucid dreams, and I say to myself before I go to sleep, "Tonight I will recognize a dream as a dream while I am dreaming it," then I probably will. On the other hand, even though you may say these things to yourself, if you really are apathetic, if you think, "Well, okay, if I wake up, okay; if I do not, okay," or if you think, "Who really cares if I recognize dreams or not," then, of course, it will not have any effect. The preparation for the bardo of becoming is the same. To the extent that you generate the earnest and strong intention to recognize and to cultivate states of meditation in the bardo of becoming, to that same extent will you have the possibility of doing so.

**The way to deal [with fear and attachment] is to recollect the fact that everything that appears to you in the bardo of becoming is your own display and not in any way external to you**

**I**n the bardo of becoming, you will experience a variety of hallucinations and appearances, and you will react to some of them with attachment and to others with fear. The way to deal with this is to recollect the fact that everything that appears to you in the bardo of

becoming is your own display and not in any way external to you, no matter how it might appear, no matter whether it is pleasant or unpleasant. If you know this in the bardo, then whatever you see or experience will not cause you to suffer.

The way to prepare for this recognition is to cultivate, during this life, from now on, a certainty that the nature of all things that appear is emptiness, and that the nature of all appearances and all beings is selflessness, the absence of true existence. And if the certainty of that is stable enough, it will cause that attitude to emerge or to arise in the bardo, and will very much help you to deal with the various appearances that you will experience. Through recognizing what you see as your own display and as your own hallucinations, you will not regard them as being really threatening. If you have an undiminished attachment to and

fixation on the things of this life, if you fixate on appearances as being substantially existent, if you fixate on appearances in general as having true reality as they appear, then in the bardo you will not experience your own display and your own hallucinations for what they are, but instead will mistake them to be external to you and, therefore, very threatening.

So from now on you need to cultivate the recognition that the nature of all things, all dharmas [i.e., all phenomena], is emptiness, as is taught in the Prajnaparamita sutras: “No eyes, no ears, no nose,” and so on. The recognition that all things are like what appears in dreams, that all things are like magically created illusions, and that all things lack inherent existence, is very important. Whether or not you practice formal meditation, the continual reinforcement of this view or attitude is extremely important, because the habit of this attitude can be of great help to you in the bardo of becoming.

Also, performing the visualization of yourself as a deity, as a yidam, again and again regularly during your life—whether or not you generate clarity of appearance—will be very helpful in the bardo, because the habit of visualizing yourself regularly in this form will then arise again in the bardo. At that time, when you generate this thought of yourself in that way, it will arise with some degree of clarity. Therefore, practices such as those of the bodhisattva Chenrezig or of the bodhisattva Arya Tara are extremely important and beneficial for this period of the bardo.

Now, eventually, if you continue in the bardo of becoming, if you cannot choose a brilliant light path to a pure realm—which means if you cannot achieve birth in a pure realm—then you will start to become more and more panicky and bewildered. The experience of this bardo and the types of appearances which arise for you become more and more threatening and more and more bewildering

and agitating. You start to wish very strongly, almost overpoweringly, for some kind of sanctuary from all of this, and you start to actively seek birth.

It is at this point that it is of the utmost importance that you apply stable mindfulness and alertness in order to be able to choose your way correctly, to choose correctly where you take rebirth. There are two methods for making this choice and for preventing unfortunate rebirth. One of them is called blocking the womb and the other one is called choosing the womb. Now, what is going on at this point is that, through the force of very powerful karma, you are being impelled or propelled

**Through the force of very powerful karma, you are being impelled or propelled into such a state of agitation that you will be extremely tempted to take rebirth in the first place of birth you perceive**

into a state of such agitation that you will be extremely tempted to take rebirth in the first place of birth you perceive. And if you just go along with the flow or impulse of your karma, then you are apt to take birth mistakenly in extremely unfortunate circumstances; but if you can hold back with mindfulness and alertness, and be very careful, then you can choose a fortunate rebirth. At this point you have become extremely agitated, and if you give in to the agitation and the panic, then you will have no control whatsoever over your subsequent birth. Therefore, you need to be very careful here.

The way to stop being born in a place where you do not wish to be reborn is by seeing the appearances which you are undergoing at that point in the bardo as completely pure, and by perceiving any individuals you perceive as deities. This will stop the force that is propelling you into the rebirth that you wish to avoid. So at this point it is very important to have the faculties of mindfulness, alertness, and carefulness. In order to have these qualities then in the bardo, it is absolutely essential that you cultivate these faculties during this life. Therefore, the most important preparation for this phase of the bardo is always, under all circumstances, to cultivate mindfulness, alert-

ness, and carefulness, and to not let your mind flop about sloppily.

So if you are using the technique of blocking the womb, you stop rebirth in a specific set of circumstances by changing how you perceive the area, by changing the perception of impurity into purity.

The second technique is choosing a place of rebirth or choosing a womb. Now, the actual conditions that force you into the actual place of rebirth are the combination of desire and attachment to one of the parents, on the one hand, and aversion, dislike or disgust towards the other one. It is generally said that if you are going to be reborn as a male, then you will be attracted to the mother and feel aversion for the father; and if you are going to be reborn as a female, you will feel attraction for the father and aversion for the mother. In any case, the combination of these two kleshas is what propels you into the womb, so if you can prevent yourself from allowing these two reactions to become overpowering, then you can prevent yourself from being drawn into the womb and can, therefore, consciously choose the place of rebirth.

Now, whether or not you will be able to withstand these kleshas depends upon your habits from this life. One of the best ways to prevent these kleshas from taking you over in the bardo is through cultivating the moral discipline either of celibacy or of sexual morality. If you can abandon sexual conduct altogether and cultivate a state of celibacy, either permanently during this life or at least for periods of time, by taking the vows of a celibate upasaka or upasika [male or female lay disciple], then this would be extremely beneficial. These vows can be taken, for example, for seven days or one month at a time; and even by taking them for these short periods of time, you cultivate a habit that will lead to some degree of mindfulness, alertness, and carefulness in the bardo. If

you cannot take this level of ordination, then at least you should commit yourself to abandoning— [Translator: it is rather hard to know how to translate this. Promiscuity, I think, is probably the best word.]—careless promiscuity. By abandoning promiscuity, you also cultivate a state of mindfulness and alertness and carefulness that will be very helpful at this point in the bardo.

The point here is to cultivate a state of mind which is habitually mindful and spacious enough to deal with the conditions which cause rebirth in this phase of the bardo. In this regard, the result of these kinds of ordination—either in celibate or non-celibate form—is that when you are tending to be drawn into the womb, you will have the necessary mindfulness to see clearly the advantages and disadvantages of various birth-places and to be able to choose consciously where you are reborn.

That completes the presentation of instructions for the four bardos. Tomorrow night, I will

give the empowerment and the reading transmission for the practice of the peaceful and wrathful deities. If you have any questions tonight or any doubts, hesitation, or confusion, please express them.

Question: Rinpoche, with regard to the appearances in the second part of the bardo of dharmata, there has been some discussion that perhaps the form in which the peaceful and wrathful deities might appear to people of varying cultures might not necessarily be the form in which they are depicted traditionally in the Tibetan iconography. Would you comment on this?

Rinpoche: The appearances of the deities in vajrayana iconography have, in the case of the peaceful and wrathful deities, nothing whatsoever to do with the Tibetan tradition. The appearances

**The actual conditions that force you into the actual place of rebirth are the combination of desire and attachment to one of the parents, on the one hand, and aversion, dislike, or disgust towards the other one**

of these deities are as described in the tantras, which were taught by the Buddha in India. However, the question remains, because some scholars, such as the noted twentieth century scholar Gendun Chöpel, have said that there is something cultural about the way we depict and imagine deities. He said that the ornamentation and appearance of our deities are Indian because the Buddha was Indian. Had the Buddha appeared in another country—for example, China or Tibet—we would visualize the deities possibly with long wispy beards or something like that, and that, he said, was at least partly cultural. However, I think that Gendun Chöpel was a speculative philosopher more than a practitioner, and that this particular statement of his can be disregarded for the following reason.

There is a practice that was mentioned the other day called thögal or leapover, and the result of this practice, which makes use of either the light of the sun or of utter darkness as a part of the method, is that you actually see, physically and directly, the appearances which arise in the bardo of dharmata. It begins with seeing multi-colored light and then continues with seeing drops of multi-colored light. These appearances are not imaginary. They are not produced by an act of visualization. They are actually seen, because they are inherent or spontaneously present in your [subtle] body. Now, when someone practices thögal intensely and long enough, then eventually inside these drops or spheres of light they actually see the peaceful and wrathful deities. They are not imagining them, and it is not something that is produced by habit, information, education, or belief. These things are simply present within us, and, therefore, the iconography really reflects a basic reality and not tradition of any kind.

Question: It has been said that the peaceful and wrathful deities are inherent within my body. If

that is true, then are the peaceful and wrathful deities who abide within my body different from or the same as the peaceful and wrathful deities abiding within the body of another person? And furthermore, are those peaceful and wrathful deities who abide within my body identical to or different from myself?

Rinpoche: If we look at the ultimate nature of our physical body, we see that ultimately it is a mental appearance. The peaceful and wrathful deities abide in that body which is ultimately a mental appearance. Therefore, the peaceful and wrathful deities are the pure embodiment residing or abiding within the body of characteristics of the

**[The peaceful and wrathful deities] are simply present within us, and, therefore, the iconography really reflects a basic reality and not tradition of any kind**

appearance of mind. So, for example, what in the impure state are the fifty-one samskaras or fifty-one types of mental formations, in their pure nature are the fifty-one blazing, blood-drinking, wrathful deities. What in the impure state are the eight types of consciousness, in the pure state are the eight bodhisattvas. What we experience in their impurity as the five aggregates are the five male buddhas. And what we experience as the natural lucidity of the nature of the expanse of all phenomena—the natural lucidity of the nature of dharmadhatu—is the dharmakaya Samantabhadra

[male], and the essential emptiness of that nature is the dharmakaya Samantabhadri [female]. All of this is self-appearance arising to an individual, present within his or her body, but appearing, when it is perceived, as external to them.

Now, as for whether or not these deities are of the same nature as yourself or of a different nature, we would have to say they are inseparable from and are of the same nature as yourself, since what we conventionally call yourself is in fact made up of these eight types of consciousness, fifty-one samskaras, and so on. Therefore, since these are the embodiments of the true nature of those things, we have to say that these are the as-

pects or appearances of the true nature of what conventionally we call yourself.

As for whether the peaceful and wrathful deities within one person are identical to those of another person, each person has their own, just as each person has their own samskaras, their own consciousnesses, and so on.

Question: In the *Mahabharata*, Vishnu says that he emanated Krishna, and that Krishna is inherent or present in all phenomena. This notion of the immanence of the divine seems identical to the view expounded in the *Guhyasamaja Tantra*.

In the *Pramana Shastra*, Dharmakirti refuted the existence of an immanent basic nature pervading all phenomena, and yet, nevertheless, we find an idea of the immanent divine in the view of the *Guhyasamaja Tantra*. Could you please explain the difference between the presentation of the nature of deity in the *Guhyasamaja Tantra* and the externalist presentation in the *Mahabharata*, as refuted by Dharmakirti?

And also, what about the statement in the *Mahayana Uttara Tantra Shastra* that buddha nature is all-pervasive and pervades each and every being? Is that not the same thing as the proposal of this primal nature, which is proposed by externalists?

Rinpoche: The notion of a buddha nature in Buddhism is not the same as the notion of pervasion in the Vaishnavite notion of Krishna, because buddha nature pervades all individuals in the sense that each and every individual possesses or is characterized by buddha nature. It is not the case that there is one buddha nature that pervades and contains all individuals. For example, if I were to say, “Trees and forests all over the world are pervaded by wood,” I would mean that wherever you find a tree, inside it you will find wood. It is not the same thing as saying that there is one great chunk of wood that is somehow pervading

and joining all the little trees all over the world. Now, what is refuted by the master Dharmakirti in his *Pramana Shastra* is the substantialism of the idea of one pervasive primal substance or creator. This is very different from the notion of a buddha nature. Buddha nature is endorsed because it is the way we refer to that which makes it appropriate to aspire to buddhahood. It is fitting for me to say, “If I enter the path, I will attain buddhahood.” Why? Because I have the potential or basic nature which makes that possible, which I call buddha nature. And it is true of anyone else. If I point to any other person, if that person enters the path, they will attain buddhahood, because they have buddha nature. So buddha nature refers to a potential fittingness, which makes it possible for the actual result of buddhahood to be attained. This is very different from the idea of Krishna which is presented in the *Mahabharata* and other texts, because Krishna is presented as a primal creator and a truly or inherently existent being who contains within him all phenomena, all of the world or universe. This is very different from the peaceful and wrathful deities, who are not held to be one set of peaceful and wrathful deities who contain the entire universe within them, but are inherent individually within each and every being.

Question: Rinpoche said that in the bardo of becoming, the condition which accompanies rebirth as a female, for example, is to be attracted to the father and feel aversion for the mother. But is this certain or definite? Because I, for one, do not feel these particular reactions.

Rinpoche: Well, actually, this refers to what happens in the bardo and not to what happens in the ensuing life. At the moment at which you generate this particular attachment and aversion, you are not perceiving these two individuals as parents.

**Buddha nature refers to a potential fittingness, which makes it possible for the actual result of buddhahood to be attained**



They are not yet your parents. In fact, you do not see the individuals themselves. What you are reacting to is the perception of the sperm and the ovum. The actual emotional state that is generated is a desire for sexual intercourse, in which you generate a state of sexual arousal in connection with being drawn into the two substances of the sperm and the ovum. You perceive the sperm as male and the ovum as female, and you react one way or the other to them on that basis. The emotions of attachment and aversion are not actually directed at the persons of your future parents but at the substances which will make up your body.

Question: I can understand the appearance of the peaceful and wrathful deities as a purified aspect of our nature, but did Rinpoche say that someone who had never heard of buddhas and had never heard of the appearances of these deities would still see them in the bardo in the same form?

Rinpoche: Yes, because they are innate or inherent. Now, if someone has practiced meditation, then the peaceful and wrathful deities will appear for a longer time, because the meditation days in the bardo will be longer. But even to someone who has never practiced any meditation, they will still appear exactly as they are depicted, but perhaps very briefly. This is, at least, my belief; and I believe this because, when you practice the path of spontaneous presence, thögal or leapover, then these deities actually appear, physically, to you, as they are depicted. In that practice you are not imagining them at all; you are actually seeing them. And since they appear without being imagined, then clearly they are spontaneously present and not something that we have imagined or made up.

Question: And would this include the specific

scepters which they are holding and the numbers and varieties of heads and so on?

Rinpoche: Yes.

Question: Would you please explain the difference between karmically produced clairvoyance and clairvoyance produced by meditation?

Rinpoche: In the case of clairvoyance or other extrasensory perception produced by meditation, what has happened is that through the cultivation of meditative absorption the mind has become extremely stable and, therefore, very different from what we ordinarily think of as how our mind is.

Through the incredible stability of that mind, it is also extremely clear. Therefore, the person in that state of absorption is capable of knowing and seeing things that ordinarily we cannot. This is very different from karmically produced clairvoyance, in which the mind is not necessarily particularly clear or particularly stable. But still there can and will arise images of things, which might be imprecise. For example, in the case of a karmically produced extrasensory perception, you might just get the thought, “Oh, that person is probably thinking about such and such,” which is very different from actually knowing that the person is

thinking such and such. In the latter case, there is actual knowledge which is extraordinary, and in the first case, it is an image of what might be going on.

Question: In some Western religions there is the concept “soul,” which is ascribed to human beings but not to animals. It is said that soul is something that humans have and animals do not. Now, while in other respects, soul seems to refer to mind, it clearly cannot refer to mind, because evidence of the senses proves that animals have minds. So what exactly is meant by this notion of

**The emotions of attachment and aversion are not actually directed at the persons of your future parents but at the substances which will make up your body**

a soul that seems to be mind but isn't mind, and is possessed supposedly only by human beings?

Rinpoche: I think that maybe the concept of soul has something to do with what we call the god at your shoulder, which means the various types of forces that, for some reason, protect human beings and not animals. In Tibet these are traditionally classified as the gods of the mother's family, the gods of the father's family, the gods of the hearth, many different ones. And it seems to be these, which are attracted to human beings distinct from animals, which may be what is identified in these other traditions as the soul that is unique to human beings. This somehow seems to be connected with the aura, which is spoken of commonly in the West, and which can be photographed using certain techniques, leading people to talk about, "You have a nice aura," "You have a funky aura," and so on. I had my aura photographed in Bangkok. And it seems that, perhaps, the color and splendor of your aura has something to do with the number of gods at your shoulder that are protecting you.

Question: It seems, from what you have said, that the consciousness actually remains within the former body until one enters the bardo of becoming. If this is true, then for how many days does it remain in the body after death; and if this is a definite period, is this period made up of meditation days or solar days? And furthermore, are the forty-nine days of which the bardo period is made up counted in total meditation days or solar days?

Rinpoche: The period of the bardo of dharmata, which is the period in between death and the point in time when the consciousness actually exits the body, is made up of meditation days, and depends

entirely, therefore, upon the stability of mind of each particular person. But the forty-nine-day period is made up of forty-nine common or solar days.

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

Rinpoche: The period of time in between death and the beginning of the bardo of becoming is, in common time [solar time], indefinite, because it is made up of meditation days, so it depends entirely upon the stability of mind of the individual. For example, when the forty-two peaceful deities arise, there is said to be one meditation day devoted to the appearance of each of the five families. But if the person has had no experience in meditation, then each of

these meditation days may last just an instant. So the whole thing could flash by very quickly, and the bardo of becoming might begin almost immediately. In the case of someone whose mind was very stable through the practice of meditation, each of these meditation days could last for a long period of time. So it varies tremendously.

Question: When we are with someone who is dying, what of these teachings are we able to share, and what are we expected not to share?

Rinpoche: It depends on the individual person. If the dying person has no reservations about the validity of this, if they have no antipathy towards dharma and towards this aspect of dharma, and if it would not in any way upset them or make them angry, then you can tell them absolutely everything. If, on the other hand, the person, because of

**The period of time between death and the beginning of the bardo of becoming is, in common time [solar time], indefinite, because it is made up of meditation days, so it depends entirely upon the stability of mind of the individual**

an adopted view of some kind, or for other reasons, is unreceptive to it and will react with antipathy, then you really cannot say very much.

Question: Rinpoche, you have mentioned the benefits of coming to recognize the emptiness of all phenomena, the benefits of achieving a state of mental stability, and the benefits of coming to learn that the deities which will appear are not external to ourselves. But what are the benefits in the bardo from learning to rest the mind in rigpa, whether through the practice of mahamudra or through a technique from the dzogchen tradition, and so forth?

Rinpoche: Well, if you can rest your mind in awareness, in rigpa, then during the bardo of dharmata you will recognize the ground luminosity. Depending upon the intensity or fullness of the recognition, you will either attain liberation at that moment or at the very least attain a good rebirth. The bardo of becoming only arises if you fail to recognize the ground luminosity during the bardo of dharmata. So if the bardo of becoming has begun to happen, then you have already failed to rest in rigpa and have failed, therefore, to recognize the luminosity of the ground and so on. Therefore, in the bardo of becoming, you need to apply the methods of tranquility and the generation stage of deities and so forth.

Question: Rinpoche, could you tell me how I will recognize favorable circumstances to take rebirth in?

Rinpoche: Well, the basic point at that point in the bardo is not to come under the power of your own sexual desire, because what happens, what propels you into the womb—into any kind of womb—is the desire for sexual intercourse. And if you come under the power of that, so that you just cannot control yourself, then you would not have

the time to look at what kind of parents you were getting involved with, and you would just be overpowered by it and find yourself in the womb. If you are not overpowered by sexual desire, then your mind will become stable, and the whole thing will slow down somewhat so that you can examine the situation that you are moving towards. You can say, “Well, who are these people? What kind of parents are they going to be? What kind of life am I going to have?” And it is up to you what you want to be reborn as. For example, if you are completely under the power of sexual desire, you would not even notice the species. So if you can slow down a little bit, then you will be able to recognize whose substances it is you are getting combined with, and you will say, “Wait a second; these are pigs!” or “Wait a second; these are dogs,” or “This is a human being,” and so on.

## What happens, what propels you into the womb—into any kind of womb—is the desire for sexual intercourse

Question: In the *Prajñāparamita* literature, it identifies the actual form of craving which causes one to take or accept rebirth not so much as a sexual desire but as a desire for a habitation. In this literature it describes the basic perception of the womb or birthplace as a house or dwelling. And it seems that this is distinct from

the characterization of it as an actual desire for sexual intercourse. What exactly is the focus of the desire, the emotional state which impels one to mix one’s consciousness with the sperm and ovum? Is it the desire for a dwelling, and the perception of the birth, whether good or bad, as a good or bad dwelling place; or is it the desire for sexual intercourse?

Rinpoche: The difference between these two presentations—the *Prajñāparamita* treatment of interdependence and the discussion of the bardos—is that in the presentation of interdependence the scope is somewhat wider. Here four different types of birth are being spoken of, and in some of these types of birth, the birth place is perceived as a place or as a dwelling or house. For example, if

one's birth is what is called instantaneous birth, then one will perceive the place of birth as a dwelling, and the process of birth will not be connected particularly with sexual desire. The presentation in the bardo teachings is more concerned with the process that leads to womb birth or egg birth. In both of these cases, because conception is produced through sexual intercourse, then the motivating force, when you get close to entering the womb, is sexual desire. Here, this particular presentation basically describes what precedes a womb birth; that is why it is called entering into a womb, and so on.


In some texts it is said that when you approach the birth place from a distance, it appears to be a dwelling. Depending upon the birth place, it could be something very elegant like a palace, or it might be perceived as a kind of hovel. But in any case, as you get closer to it, the force that impels you is the desire for sexual intercourse, and you start to perceive the substances as male and female.

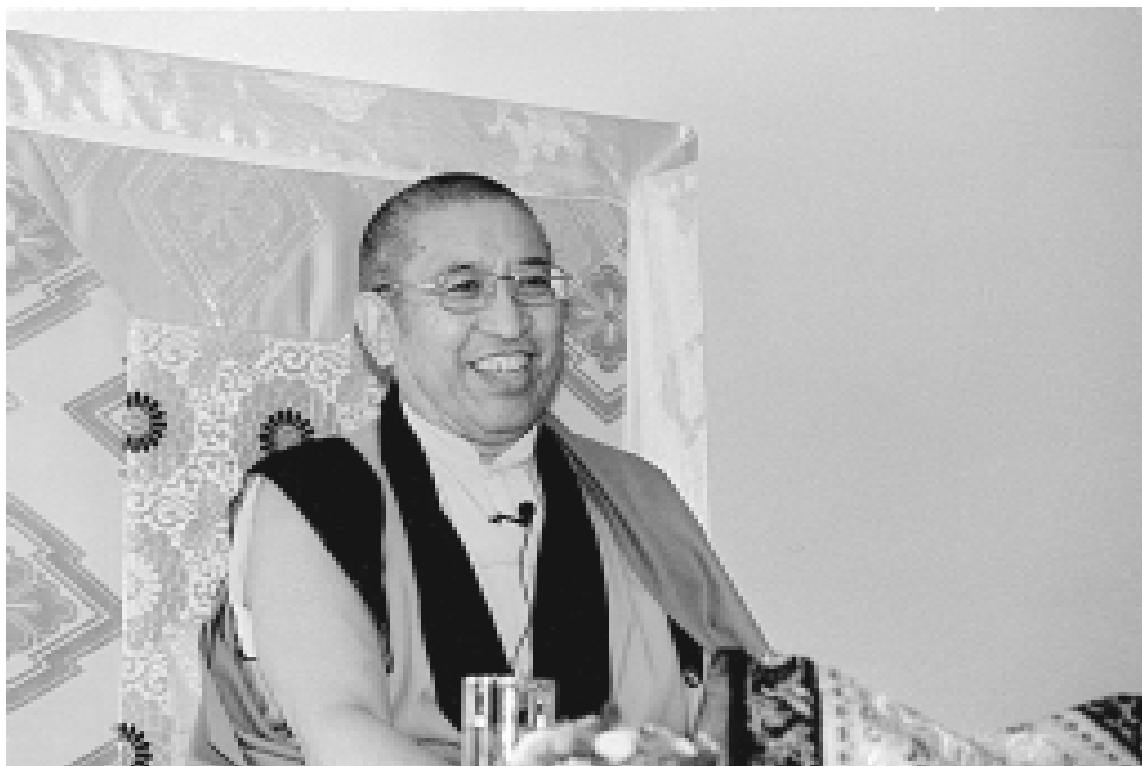
Question: If someone dies under heavy pain-killing medication, how will this affect their experi-

ence of the bardo?

Rinpoche: Well, the medication would probably prevent a recognition of the stages of dissolution in the bardo of dying, but at the culmination of those, the mind and body will have separated, even though the mind is still in some way inhabiting the body. So from that point onward, the mind would no longer be affected by the medication.

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

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





# A Rare Opportunity Next June for a Medicine Buddha Retreat

**T**he Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche will teach a Medicine Buddha Retreat at Buck Creek Camp near Crystal Mountain outside of Seattle, Washington, June 9-16, 1999. During this time Rinpoche will teach the Medicine Buddha Sutra, taught by the Buddha Shakyamuni, and will bestow the Medicine Buddha abhisheka (empowerment) along with detailed instructions in the practice of the Medicine Buddha sadhana.

The retreat is being designed for health care providers and other dharma practitioners who would like to be able to employ the extraordinary skillful means of the Vajrayana to increase their healing power.

This is a very rare, perhaps unique, opportunity to hear a high reincarnate Tibetan lama transmit and teach both the Medicine Buddha Sutra and the Medicine Buddha empowerment and practice at the same time.

During the retreat Rinpoche will teach both in the morning and in the afternoon, and will give discussion group audiences and individual interviews. Participants will also engage in a variety of daily meditations—the Medicine Buddha sadhana and shamatha/vipashyana each twice—and discussion groups, and there will be ample time for leisure and relaxation. Both vegetarian and non-vegetarian meals will be provided.

According to the teachings of the Buddha, there are four categories of illness: 1) those that essentially cure themselves whether or not one takes medicine; 2) those that can be cured with medicine; 3) those which medicine cannot cure but the practice of dharma (meditation) can cure; 4) those which are incurable and for

which medical treatment often only increases suffering. The practice of the Medicine Buddha meditation is helpful with respect to all four of these classes of illness. In the first two categories such practice will speed the healing process, and in the fourth category its practice is one of the most skillful ways of preparing for death, since it removes the fear of being born in the lower realms.

But it is most helpful in curing illnesses that only the practice of dharma and the practice of meditation can cure. Inasmuch as the root of these kinds of illnesses is negative karma accumulated (engaged in) in past lives or earlier in this life, only a spiritual practice which purifies these negative karmic roots of illness will serve to cure these kinds of illnesses when they arise and ultimately prevent their occurrence in the first place.

Therefore, to receive teachings on the Medicine Buddha, to study these teachings, to receive the empowerment of the Medicine Buddha, to receive instructions in the practice of the Medicine Buddha sadhanas and meditations, and, in turn, to practice them, individually and collectively increase the powers of healing both in people who are ill and in the health care providers who endeavor to assist in their healing.

Inasmuch as all physical and psychological illnesses are based on negative actions and vari-

ous forms of mental affliction, and since the practice of the Medicine Buddha purifies both negative karma and mental afflictions (kleshas, conflicting emotions), its study and practice is beneficial not only to those who are physically afflicted, but also to those who suffer fear and other types of mental suffering.

The Medicine Buddha Retreat is open to all who have taken refuge or are willing to take refuge during the retreat. Charter bus transportation will be provided from Seatac (Seattle-Tacoma) Airport to Buck Creek Camp on Crystal Mountain and back again at the end of the retreat. Accommodations at the retreat are clean and comfortable and generally three or four to a room, though a few double rooms may be available on a first come, first served basis.

Buck Creek Camp is a beautiful, isolated and quiet, wooded mountain environment with beautiful meadows.

The cost of the retreat for those who register before April 15, 1999, will be \$395, and \$450 for those who register thereafter.

Deferred payments, where necessary can be arranged. To register and to receive additional information, please send check or money order along with your name and address, dharma center affiliation, telephone number and e-mail address to Kagyu Shenpen Ösel Chöling (KSOC), 4322 Burke Ave. North, Seattle, WA 98103.

<b>Daily Schedule For the Medicine Buddha Retreat</b>	6 a.m.	Wake up
	6:30	Morning Meditation
	7:30	Breakfast
	8:30	Medicine Buddha Sadhana
	9:45	Short Break
	10	Morning Teaching with Rinpoche
	11:45	Discussion Groups
	12:30 p.m.	Lunch
	1:30	Free Time
	2	Afternoon Meditation
	3	Afternoon Teaching with Rinpoche
	4:30	Tea Break
	5	Discussion Groups and Audiences
	5:45	Short Break
6	Dinner	
7	Evening Meditation	
8	Medicine Buddha Sadhana	
9	Bedtime	

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We have received many requests for back issues of Shenpen Ösel, and we are happy to send them, except, since we have to photocopy them when we don't have any left in print, and because we have to send them first class, they are relatively expensive to send. So, if you would like back issues and can afford it, please enclose a contribution of \$5.00 for the first copy, and at least \$3.00 for each additional copy. Also, please feel free to make your own copies, if you like. Thank you very much.

### New KSOC Meditation and Class Schedule

#### SATURDAYS

9-10:30 a.m.

Chenrezig practice

11 a.m.-1 p.m.

Mahamudra verses recitation and meditation as taught by The Very Venerable Khempo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche at KSOC in August of 1998, led by Lama Tashi Namgyal; question and answer session at end of meditation

#### SUNDAYS

10 a.m.-noon

Formless meditation

## IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF SHENPEN ÖSEL

**Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche on Mind, Karma,  
Ego-formation and Liberation in  
Tibetan Buddhism**

**Tenga Rinpoche on Chöd and The  
Relationship between the Seven Point  
Meditation Posture of Vairocana and  
Tsa-Lung (nadi and prana) Meditation**

**Biographical Sketch of Khenpo Tsultrim  
Gyamtso Rinpoche**

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**‘Just as the appearances of this life are produced by states of mind, so are the appearances in the bardo and the appearances in one’s future lives produced by states of mind. Positive states of mind produce positive experiences, and negative states of mind produce negative appearances or experiences. Therefore, if you cultivate a positive state of mind in this life, the appearances or experiences of this life, of future lives, and of the bardo will become more and more positive.’**

**—The Very Venerable  
Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche  
from *Journey of the Mind***

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