

DEATH AND DYING

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INTRODUCTION

The cultivation of awareness of death is a central buddhist practice, which continues throughout the three yanas. There is no one right way to die, as there is no one right way to live. Death is real. It comes without warning. All of us will eventually be corpses. In relating with dying persons, it is important to maintain the perspective that we are all dying persons. By making friends with our own mortality, we may be able to be of some benefit to others undergoing this most simple and profound transition. Likewise, through looking at the practicalities of death and dying, we may be able to approach our own death with equanimity. It is important to remember that until we are dead, we are all alive. In that way we will not fall into the mistake of viewing terminally ill people, ourselves and others, as less than fully alive.

The point at which a person is labeled "a dying person" is somewhat arbitrary. A person who has been diagnosed with an incurable illness may fall into this category, although they may exhibit no severe symptoms for months or even years. For the purposes of this manual, we are using the term to refer to people who seem to have, at most, a few months to live. Of course, in predictions of this nature, mistakes are common.

There are some common pitfalls it would be good to be aware of in dealing with dying persons:

- being judgmental, imposing on people the "right" way to relate to their death
- viewing the terminally ill as a special category or project
- becoming a "death junkie," attached to the atmosphere surrounding the death process
- being religious and dogmatic
- losing one's sense of humour

In general, we should aspire to relate with dying persons, as we do with any other living being, in the sanest way possible – as we would aspire to do good meditation instruction. It is important to take one's cues from the dying person.

Although we have presented a number of guidelines in this section of the manual, the Vidyadhara's instructions have varied depending on the situation. Given the unpredictable and very personal nature of the death process, openness and flexibility are essential. Cultivating an attitude of maitri is helpful when one is dying and in relating to others' deaths.

This information is a compendium of what several of the Vidyadhara's students understand to have been his instructions over the course of many deaths of sangha members. In this version of the Manual, we have included more practical information on the death and dying process,

particularly the physicality of dying. This information comes from a variety of sources, primarily from hospice care manuals. Where we have used extensive material from these sources, they are quoted and cited in the body of the manual; otherwise, they are listed among the sources in the appendices. The common elements are maintaining an atmosphere of practice and acting with common sense. Some articles on death and dying and a short list of suggested further reading are also included.

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RELATING WITH DYING

Mutual acknowledgment that a person is dying creates an atmosphere of trust and openness where a meeting of minds can take place. Although the dying person is going to lose their habitual surroundings, at the same time there is a continuity, which has nothing to do with ego. One's positive relationship to friends and to the teachings continues.

In relating to one's own death, it is useful to be aware of one's physical condition, and have an understanding of the progressive changes that take place in the dying and dead body. It is helpful if people around a dying person are able to relate with their bodily condition, identifying the subtle deterioration of their senses, bodily functions, facial expressions, and ability to communicate. As the physical body and consciousness deteriorate, a heightened sensitivity to the whole environment develops. The state of mind of the sangha friends and caregivers surrounding the dying person actually becomes beneficial ground for him or her, providing qualities of simplicity, stability, warmth, and acceptance of the dying process.

Practice

The Vidyadhara advised students who were terminally ill to continue with their usual practice until near death. The practice could be modified or simplified to fit the situation. If someone has received many practices, they will naturally gravitate to those with which there is a strong connection – like old friends. Each situation will evolve in its own way with unique conditions; there is no formula to apply, but we should exercise common sense and simplicity as fundamental guidelines throughout.

Do not hesitate to seek advice from your local practice centre or the Vajradhatu Office of Practice and Study about practice questions or how to simplify the practices. Sometimes practicing shamatha and having someone read aloud dharma texts such as *The Rain Of Wisdom* are most appropriate activities, particularly when a person is very weak or comatose. Someone else may wish to concentrate on a guru yoga, a yidam practice, tonglen, the Shambhala teachings, or other practices. When close to death, the forms gradually and naturally dissolve into formlessness.

It is meaningful to share people's death time, from the preceding days and hours to the moment of death, and during the three days following death, when, according to our understanding, the consciousness is releasing its attachment to the body. The Vidyadhara emphasized that the atmosphere during this time be simple and awake, helping the dying person to be in the present, and as much as possible to relax from fear. The Venerable Thrangu Rinpoche recently gave a most helpful interview (printed later in this section) including specific ways of assisting with the dying process. Generally, he stressed the importance of (1) not generating aggression in the atmosphere surrounding a dying person; (2) reminding them of their root guru, his blessings, and the practices he has transmitted to them; and (3) encouraging them not to be frightened. He also said that those closest to the dying person should gather around his or her head, attracting the consciousness to exit the body through an upper passageway.

In most cases, dying is a gradual dissolution of one's existence. Toward the end, when the elements begin to dissolve, companion practitioners should dissolve any visualizations and rest in shamatha or sampannakrama. By resting your mind in space you help the dying person to rest and to relax fear. You begin to relate to the journey that the dying person takes as their elements dissolve.

At the Time of Death

The Tibetans describe the process of death as a dissolving of the elements one into the other: earth into water, water into fire, fire into wind, and wind into space. The stage of earth dissolving into water is characterized by a feeling of heaviness and a loss of strength. As water dissolves into fire, there is a kind of mental instability and haziness, and the mouth becomes dry. Fire into wind is the sensation of dissolving; the body cools from the extremities and heat centralizes in the heart. As wind dissolves into space, we experience gap, a slackening of intensity; exhalations become shallow, eyes turn upward and there may be a death rattle. At that point, breathing stops and body colour fades. The cessation of the breath is not the final stage; further dissolving, including dissolving of the three root kleshas, is still taking place. Therefore, continuing to practice for a short time beyond the final breath makes sense, rather than saying, "She's gone" and immediately leaving the room or calling the authorities.

At the time of death, it is best to keep things very simple and to be particularly mindful of the environment. It is said that, in the dissolving of the senses, the sense of hearing is the last to go. Furthermore, at this time the dying person's environmental awareness is heightened. No complications should be introduced at this point, if at all possible. Simply try to be fully present and aware.

The Tibetan Book Of The Dead

The study of *The Tibetan Book Of The Dead* is a way to cultivate understanding of death and rebirth. According to the Vidyadhara, however, reading the text of *The Tibetan Book Of The Dead* aloud to the deceased is probably not helpful unless you fully understand the text and

related practices and can relay it in your own words. If the dying person was familiar with the *Book Of The Dead* and had requested that it be read after they died, or a teacher suggested that this be done, it is best to honor that wish or instruction.

PREPARING FOR ONE'S OWN DEATH AND DYING

Wills: Some Uses Pertinent to the Sangha

Living Wills/ Advanced Health Care Directives

Advanced health care directives (often called "living wills") are a relatively recent development. Because of advances in medical technologies, there are treatments that can radically prolong your life in situations of serious injury or illness. Advance directives indicate your wishes in the event that you are no longer able to communicate, or name someone to act as spokesperson on your behalf in such circumstances. You can express your wishes about being kept alive on life-support systems, in a coma, autopsy, and organ donations in an advance directive. A living will allows you to set out your wishes for medical care in a situation in which you are unable to consent to or reject treatment.

Living wills are often executed by family members, or by someone you have appointed as your proxy; they are not legally binding, but are helpful the people who are making care decisions on your behalf. The legalities of health care directives vary depending on your province, state, or country. Government bodies generally have information on what is required for a living will to be valid, and on how to appoint a proxy. A sample living will is appended to this section, as Appendix III.

Wills

In order to provide directions for the disposition of one's personal effects, the care of one's children, and funeral/cremation according to buddhist tradition, it is helpful to have a will specifying your wishes. A will can be drawn up with or without the help of a lawyer, though it is helpful to have your will checked by a lawyer, who can verify that it is legal in your area.

Making plans for your estate will clarify what you wish to have happen with your assets and liabilities. You can make a list of your accounts, investments, pensions, insurance, loans, mortgages and related matters. It is helpful to identify beneficiaries (family, friends, charities, Shambhala International) with names and contact information, and to keep this list up to date.

Without some expression in a will as to how your body should be treated after death, buddhist relatives and friends may have a difficult time preventing the local authorities or non-buddhist relatives from complying with the local policies. The authorities are often sympathetic and willing to work with our practices to the extent possible. This is greatly facilitated if one's wishes are specified in a will. A copy of the will should be put where it can be easily located--not, for instance, in a safe deposit box to which it may take days to gain access.

Because often wills are not read until some time after a funeral has taken place, it is important to have a copy of your funeral wishes in another form, perhaps with the person who is most likely to arrange your funeral when you die. It is also a good idea to talk to your local Shambhala Centre about the costs and procedures for the sukhavati ceremony. This is particularly helpful if your family is not part of the Shambhala community, as you can include detailed instructions for your funeral wishes.

The following is a suggested statement to be included in a will or statement of one's wishes:

"It is my strongest desire that my funeral exercises and the disposal of my body be conducted in strict accordance with the practices and rituals of the Vajradhatu Buddhist Church, including, without limitation, that my body shall remain undisturbed and unembalmed in state, for three days after my death or until otherwise directed by a qualified representative of the Vajradhatu Buddhist Church and shall thereafter be cremated. I further desire that after the passage of 49 days from the date of my death, or such duration as may be directed by a qualified representative of the Vajradhatu Buddhist Church, my ashes shall be buried at (RMSC, KCL, Gampo Abbey...) or, if that is impractical, then at a dharma centre or site of the Vajradhatu Buddhist Church or the Karma Kagyü lineage of Tibetan buddhism". --Prepared by Alex Halpern and Jason Newman

OR

"Upon my death, I direct my personal representative to arrange for funeral services to be conducted in accordance with the Buddhist religion, as taught and practiced by Vajradhatu, a Buddhist church and association of Buddhist churches based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, and Boulder, Colorado, USA, and Marburg, Germany; and then for cremation of my physical body without first embalming my body to the extent possible under law. My direction as expressed in this Article is of the strongest possible nature and shall be observed under all circumstances."--Prepared by John Cobb

To Direct the Disposition of One's Practice Materials and Texts

This clause is important to the proper disposition of practice texts, shrine and practice implements, as it prevents them being sold (for example) to used bookstores and knick-knack stores. You can direct that specific people, your local Shambhala Centre, or the Vajradhatu Office of Practice and Study receive your practice materials and texts. For example:

"Upon my death, my Vajradhatu Seminary vajrayana transcripts, Kalapa Assembly transcripts and Shambhala texts are to be returned to Vajradhatu Buddhist Church in Halifax, Nova Scotia, or given to so and so."

One could add that one's practice implements be given to, for example, RMSC or Karma Dzong, or to so and so.

Organ Donation

Dr. Mitchell Levy, personal physician to the Vidyadhara, gave an Amara seminar titled *Guidelines in Buddhist Health Care* in 1989, in which he presented guidelines and teachings he had received from the Vidyadhara on death and dying. In it, he notes:

"The Vidyadhara said that, if during your lifetime you decide to donate your organs, and you make that decision while you are alive and able to think about it, then that is an act of generosity. It is bodhisattva activity, which is acceptable from a buddhist point of view. According to the Vidyadhara, although there may be confusion regarding your body after death, you will be prepared for the shock of organ removal. The key point is that you make that contract to donate your kidneys, your corneas, your heart or liver or whatever it might be. You need to visualize that almost, think about that, and merge that with the concept of bodhichitta. It is not acceptable for family members to decide for you after your death."

Thrangu Rinpoche repeats this advice in his talk on death (printed at the end of this section)

WORKING WITH OTHER'S DEATH AND DYING

Relating with nowness is extremely powerful, because at this point for the dying person there is some uncertainty between body and mind, how to relate to those two situations...

It seems that actually relating with the dying person is very important, to provide the whole ground of dying. Death is no longer a myth at that point. It is actually happening: 'You are dying. We are watching you dying. But we are your friends, therefore we watch your dying. We believe in your rugged quality of leaving your body and turning into a corpse. That is beautiful. That's the finest and best example of friendship that you could demonstrate to us: that you know you are dying and we know that you are going to die. That's really beautiful. We are really meeting together properly and beautifully, exactly at the point. It is fantastic communication.' That in itself is such a beautiful and rich quality of communication that it really presents a tremendous further inspiration, as far as the dying person is concerned.

Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, September 1971

(Printed in the Shambhala Sun, September, 1991)

Bereavement

Grief and bereavement are appropriate reactions to loss. Even when death is expected – as when a person has been quite sick for some time – people often feel that they have had something taken from them suddenly. The loss of a person has an impact on a number of areas of a person's life. Bereavement is usually more than a feeling of sadness; it comes entwined with a range of emotions that might include sadness, fear, anger, resentment, guilt, relief, numbness, and so on. Grief can affect one's physical state, one's mental and emotional state, and how one relates to others. There is sometimes a tendency to feel that we should be working with impermanence better than we are, or that we shouldn't feel a sense of attachment to the person who has died. Generally, it is important to cultivate maitri as the ground of grieving, to generate some kindness toward yourself in the grieving process. As it took time to develop bonds with the person who has died, it will take time to adapt to a changed situation. Mitchell Levy says:

When a person close to you dies, you usually experience feelings of terrible loss and confusion. Grief can consume much of one's energy for a long time and the bereaved's

tendency towards isolation aggravates the condition. Discussing the impact of the loss with family and friends or with similarly bereaved persons promotes healing. The Committee on Health and Social Well-Being is gathering materials that may help provide perspective.

An unexpected death by accident or violence is most difficult to comprehend and accept. Where there is death by suicide or other brutal circumstance it may be difficult to grieve because it is so hard to understand why that person has died. In such a case, do not hesitate to contact Vajradhatu in Halifax if you would like to talk with other sangha members who have dealt with such a tragedy.

A videotape by Ms. Miriam Tarcov on the topic of bereavement is available from Vajradhatu Recordings and would be helpful to have in your centre's library for the use of your members. It is highly recommended.

Suicide

Serious illness or situations that bring physical or psychological pain are part of one's personal karma. From a buddhist point of view, suicide can cut short the opportunity to work through that karma in this lifetime, and as an act of aggression can complicate one's journey after death. Working with what comes up in response to suicide presents particular challenges to those left behind. A death from suicide brings up all the emotions associated with death, and can bring up feelings of shame, guilt, and confusion far more intensely than other deaths. Regardless of whether the suicide was expected, or that people tried to help the person, those left behind often feel guilty for not having been able to prevent it. This process complicates grieving, and people who are working with a suicide will probably need a great deal of time and support to reach some sort of acceptance.

Assisted Dying and Euthanasia

Thinking about assisted dying and euthanasia is complex, and it is difficult to offer any clear definition of the buddhist view of it. It is important that we have the intention to help the dying person, and work with the situation with that attitude. In many cases, good pain management and palliative care can obviate the need for assisted dying, by facilitating a pain-free and dignified death. In other situations, having a clear advance directive (see Appendix III) is very helpful to caregivers. Many people who have worked with the terminally ill have seen remarkable transformations in people when they actually click to having the opportunity of witnessing their own death, and when they can relax with that, there is a tremendous healing process that occurs in dying.

Even when there is a severe illness that affects the mental faculties, there are lucid moments and non-lucid moments. The idea is that as long as it is an illness in which your mental state oscillates, there are still times when you would be conscious enough to be present with your illness. That becomes a very powerful opportunity to deal with your own karma.

It might well be, however, that dealing with one's own karma and being present with one's illness

at those lucid moments takes the form of consciously asking for help to not prolong one's life if death is certain and imminent.

The fundamental approach, as with most things we do, is to apply skillful means to one's circumstances, based on an attitude of compassion.

Miscarriage

Death through miscarriage or stillbirth often goes unnoticed by anyone other than one's close friends or relations. Even those close to us may not understand the impact of such a death. If there isn't a supportive framework in which to grieve the loss of a child who dies during pregnancy or shortly after birth, the parents may find it difficult to directly acknowledge and work with the emotions that arise. The Sakyaong has said that it is appropriate to conduct a Sukhavati ceremony for stillborn children or after miscarriages, when the mother feels that consciousness had entered the fetus. The ceremony can be adapted and conducted at home with only a few people, or done with the larger community.

Abortion

Being faced with the decision around an unintended or unwanted pregnancy is a significant challenge. Traditionally, the moment of conception is also the moment at which consciousness enters the fetus. Therefore, abortion is considered to be killing. The Vidyadhara shared the tradition's views in this regard. At the same time, he created the space for his students to make their own decisions, and continued to provide guidance and support. If a student decided to terminate a pregnancy, he felt it was important to do it as early in the pregnancy as possible, as the consciousness continues to identify with the growing body as the pregnancy progresses.

The process involved in reaching a decision to terminate a pregnancy by means of abortion includes several steps such as examining the alternatives, consulting with a partner, seeking input from trusted advisors, knowing what the procedure involves, and contemplating the karmic implications of whatever decision is made. In *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche is quoted as saying that because the consciousness of a fetus experiences the same process of entering and passing through the bardo, it is appropriate to perform the same practices after an abortion one might perform after a death. Vajrasattva practice is recommended, as is tonglen.

Resources in the Sangha and the Committee on Health and Social Well-Being

The International Office of Health and Social Well-Being (OHSWB) is a group of people residing in Halifax who are trained in the healing professions, both Western and alternative. They can be used as a resource for instructors if other local resources have been exhausted or if they are unsure how to handle a situation, such as drug or alcohol abuse, child abuse, extreme illness, and so forth. The Office is currently chaired by Mrs. Conner Loomis and Mrs. Donna Hanczaryk. They can be reached through Shambhala/Vajradhatu in Halifax, (902) 425-4275. As

well there are additional committee members for OHSWB available for consultation. It is recommended, especially in larger centers, that someone be appointed to act as a liaison with the Halifax office and to assist instructors locally in determining when outside help is warranted, and how to access it. Many Centers currently have an OSHWB person on their Shambhala Councils who can be consulted. It is preferable to use local talent because they will be more familiar with the various aspects of a situation and with what is available locally. Alternatively, contact Ms. Joan Anderson, Boulder, Colorado, or Ms. Petra Drummer in Marburg. They will refer you to someone who can help answer your questions:

Dying and Palliative care

"Palliative care" is a term for care that aims to mitigate the pain and suffering of dying, but that is no longer aimed at recovery from illness or injury. It is, generally, the care we offer to people who have some time between discovering that they are going to die relatively soon and their death. The goal of palliative care is to enable the dying person to live fully with the best possible quality of life.

The following passage is excerpted from the Karma Dzong (Boulder) Death and Dying Committee mission statement, *The Purpose of the Karma Dzong Death and Dying Committee*, by Bruce Cressman with Cassell Gross and Diane Spearly:

When a person is seriously ill, a mandala usually begins to form organically around him or her. Whenever possible, the dying person should obviously make all of the basic decisions about their care, the environment they want to be in, the network with whom they want to relate, what happens after death with their remains, funeral arrangements, and anything else that arises. All of these things are very personal but we can help to sort them out if that is desired. We attempt to do this both pragmatically and in terms of the teachings we have been given.

Individual preferences vary greatly about the amount of involvement desired from sangha members. Sometimes it works well and is necessary to involve numerous people, and in other cases, an almost retreat-like approach is the preferred style. What the dying person wants in this regard has to be respected. However, the potential for 'burn-out' by caregivers also has to be acknowledged.

In our experiences to date, we have learned that simplicity is a key point, particularly when it comes to communication. If a person who is dying goes through the process of winding up their affairs and letting go of attachments, overly complicated 'helping schemes' can confuse them. On the other hand, there can be the opposite extreme in which, for a variety of reasons, there is not sufficient attention being given or even enough personal caregiving. So in typical buddhist fashion, we search for the middle way that bypasses ignoring or overwhelming the situation.

Approaching Death - Physical signs

Often in our community the people whom a dying person wishes to have provide care have not had much experience with the dying process. It is easy to have a mistaken impression of what happens in the dying process, which can contribute to fears and anxiety in the caregivers. In this section, we give an overview of the physical changes that may manifest in the dying person, and offer suggestions for helpful responses to these changes.

Much of this information is taken from the book Palliative Care for Home Support Workers, a course book for home care workers.

Overview

At a certain point, a dying person's body is unable to support the basic functions of living. Breathing, digesting food, and circulating blood to the tissues become difficult and certain common outward signs manifest. Although each person's dying is a unique process, there are some general physical changes, described below:

Body

As death approaches, the body begins to slow down its digestive processes. This results in a tendency towards disease-related anorexia, constipation, nausea and vomiting, incontinence, decreased levels of strength, and dry-mouth syndrome. For the most part, these are normal results of the dying process, and can be addressed in a variety of ways. For example, a dying person should not be pushed to eat. If, however, they request a special food it should be given to them. Even if food is not wanted, slivers of ice or liquids are often helpful in keeping a dying person's mouth comfortable. Appropriate palliative care procedures and medications can relieve the stress of these symptoms, including symptoms linked to pain medications.

Breath

Most of the time, we breathe without effort; our breath consists of regular periods of inhalation and exhalation. It is common, close to the end of life, that a person's breathing patterns may change. Three common patterns that happen very close to death are: "Cheyne-Stokes respiration", which is a pattern consisting of shallow breaths, increasing in volume and then decreasing in volume, followed by a period of no breathing, which may last from 10 to 30 seconds. This pattern repeats. "Cluster Breathing" is often seen before death. It consists of sudden and deep breaths, decreasing in volume, and also followed by periods of non-breathing. "Ataxic breathing" shows an irregular pattern of breath and periods of non-breathing. There is frequently an increase in mucus production, causing breath to be moist and sometimes rattling.

To help ease breathing difficulties, it may be helpful to relate to the atmosphere around the dying person. Anxiety can make it difficult to breathe; caregivers can pay attention to the stress factors affecting the dying person. Other activities might include activating humidifiers or fans, opening a window as appropriate, making sure that scented products are kept to a minimum, and burning no or only very little incense or juniper. The sitting or sleeping position a person takes will also affect their ease in breathing.

Consciousness

The state of consciousness of a dying person will fluctuate in part in response to their physical state. Oxygen may not reach the brain as well as it should, medications may make the person confused, their blood chemistry may shift, or their disease may progress to a point that changes their perceptions and ability to express themselves. They may manifest confusion, disorientation, and an inability to recognize people around them. They may be very sleepy at times, and very alert at others. An overall approach on the part of caregivers should be to try maintaining a sense of clarity and groundedness in their communication with the dying person, to remind them of their connection with practice and their teacher. It may be important to decrease the number of people in the room and the level of distraction generally. Levels of consciousness are sometimes categorized as ranging from a mild clouding of consciousness through stupor and coma.

At the level of mild clouding of consciousness, the person may manifest minor confusions, be easily distracted, and begin to have difficulty maintaining continuity in their conversation and perceptions.

At the level of advanced confusion, the dying person may begin to sleep longer, have difficulty remembering things, and become increasingly disoriented.

When a person becomes semi-conscious or enters into a stupor, they will manifest little or no awareness of what is happening around them. They may hallucinate, have periods of sudden lucidity and talkativeness, but will generally be close to sleep. They may become difficult to rouse, and will likely fall back asleep as soon as the stimulus that woke them is removed.

A person is considered to be in a coma if they are continuously asleep and do not respond to being spoken to or touched. This state often does not change until the moment of death, though it is not unknown for them to wake just before death, and sometimes to speak. Generally, people who have entered a coma before death should be treated as if awake. The same supportive atmosphere of simplicity and honest communication applies. In many cases, a comatose person's senses, especially hearing, are relatively intact. It is good form to address them as you would if they were conscious, particularly when you enter their room or before beginning any physical care.

After Death

The basic principles are to disturb the body as little as possible and to continue to provide an atmosphere of practice. The following sections are again excerpted from *Guidelines in Buddhist Health Care* by Dr. Mitchell Levy.

Being present at the moment of someone's death is a very powerful experience. It is a time to allow communication and sharing to happen as much as possible. The main point is not so much what we do with the body, but it is our state of mind and the kind of environment we create at the time of death. As buddhists we have been taught what happens at the time of death, and so we respond to that by appreciating it, by making contact with it, and by allowing it to happen properly, not creating any further obstacles to the passage from life to death.

After death the body goes into rigor mortis, that is, it stiffens. It is said that for great lamas, for realized people, that is the period of samadhi and it can last anywhere from a few hours to a few days. During that time, the consciousness is still very closely associated with the body. Anything that is done to the body during that time will interrupt the samadhi. Therefore, the body is undisturbed. According to the Tibetans, this applies not only to great lamas, but also to people who have done a lot of meditation in their life. That is how the Vidyadhara approached his students when they died. He instructed us not to disturb the body if at all possible for three days and to maintain an environment of shamatha practice around the body. In doing this, a sane environment is created for the person entering the pardo.

When rigor mortis is over, the consciousness has left the body. The samadhi, if there was any, is over. At that point it is okay to disturb the body and to proceed with the funeral arrangements.

There is the potential for creating further confusion if the body is violated before rigor mortis is over. For this reason, autopsy and embalming should be avoided, if possible, during rigor mortis. Refrigeration is preferable to embalming, as it disturbs the body less.

Post-Mortem Arrangements

If a person dies at home, you may either keep the body at home or move it to a community shrine room. It is up to the family and/or the sangha, or preferences may have been specified in an advance directive.

You will need to call the attending physician and have the death certificate signed. If a hospice nurse has been involved, it may suffice to call the nurse, who may come to verify the death. Some nurses have been very helpful in setting in motion the necessary arrangements, not only with the signing of the death certificate, but with the mortuary arrangements as well. When you are ready to have the body moved, call the mortuary, asking their staff to handle the body as little as possible.

If a person dies in a hospital you may request time alone with the body after death. Shamatha,

tonglen, and sampannakrama practices are all appropriate at this time. Hospitals are unlikely to leave the body undisturbed for a few hours, but you can sit with the deceased until the body is moved. It may also be possible to stay with the body if it is moved to a refrigerated room, either in the hospital or in a mortuary. You may find that the rules of a hospital or mortuary are surprisingly flexible and that the staff is respectful of your wishes.

When someone dies in an accident or from undetermined causes, ask the coroner to postpone the autopsy until after the funeral. If an individual was known to have a potentially fatal medical disorder, an autopsy may possibly be avoided by having their personal physician sign the death certificate.

There are no specific guidelines about washing or clothing the body. Both will be much easier to do before rigor mortis sets in and the limbs stiffen.

Family and friends may practice continuously (in shifts) with the deceased until the funeral ceremony. Again, formless practice is advised, interspersed with sessions of tonglen. Tonglen is helpful in freeing the atmosphere of attachment and emotionalism. The Vidyadhara encouraged cheerfulness at this time.

If the body is in the shrine room of a practice centre, the usual practice schedule, feasts, nyinthün, etc., may carry on. If there are a significant number of new practitioners attending an event, it may be best to move the body or the event to another room. Classes or discussion groups should perhaps be held in another room. In general, discursive activity around the body should be avoided.

Care of the Body

The onset of rigor mortis is usually within six hours of death. Stiffening of the muscles begins in the face and spreads to the hands and feet, tending to put the body in a fetal position. The rigor can last up to 36 hours, with muscles relaxing in the opposite order they contracted. Within eight to ten hours after death, putrefaction begins and signs of decomposition occur. Decay can be retarded by keeping the body as cool as possible. In the summer, dry ice can be used; it needs replenishing about every 24 hours. In winter, keep the windows open and the heat off. In order to minimize odour, a towel can be dipped in Pinesol, rolled up and placed inside the casket. Activated charcoal can be placed in the casket. If the body is kept in a bed, it is advisable to place a plastic sheet over the mattress.

The Sukhavati should be scheduled for three days after death or at the soonest after rigor mortis has ended. The reason for waiting is to allow the consciousness to fully leave the body before it is cremated. This letting go process may happen quickly or slowly, depending upon the individual.

The following passage is again excerpted from Dr. Levy's comments on death and dying:

Autopsy

The Vidyadhara said that autopsies are to be avoided by buddhists because the consciousness is still very close to the body immediately after death. Thus the consciousness experiences and witnesses what happens to the body. Even when death is anticipated, the confusion and panic that arise because of identification with the body will be heightened by the autopsy experience. For these reasons, autopsies are discouraged. There are situations in which autopsies are required by law. In these instances, it should be made clear to the authorities that autopsy is contrary to your religious beliefs.

Legal Considerations

For the benefit of its members, each centre should obtain legal help to find out what the local laws are regarding the disposition of bodies. These laws vary from one place to another and have a direct bearing on how we proceed with our buddhist funeral arrangements.

A representative from your centre should establish contact with local mortuaries before actually requiring their services. If you have a prior relationship with a mortuary sympathetic to buddhist religious protocols, it is easier to make arrangements at the time of a death.

Often morticians are glad to cooperate, but they may not be aware of the options open to them. Therefore it is important to communicate with the legal authorities as well as the mortician. For instance, the mortuary staff may believe that, legally, a body *must* be embalmed. In fact, this may not be the case. Or, it may be standard practice for the mortuary to take immediate custody of the body; again, law may not require this.

In some places, the law says that a body must be embalmed or refrigerated within 24 hours of death. It is worth noting, however, that in Boulder placing dry ice in the casket constitutes an adequate means of refrigeration. The mortuary supervises refrigeration by taking responsibility for replenishing the ice as needed.

If refrigeration is required by law after 24 hours and dry ice is not an option, then the body can be refrigerated and brought to the shrine room for the ceremony. (Students recall that the Vidyadhara once had a shamatha rota organized with a body in a refrigerated room.)

The Ceremony of Sukhavati

As stated above, the Sukhavati (pronounced with the accent on the second syllable) funeral service is traditionally scheduled for three days after death but could be performed when rigor mortis has passed. The Venerable Thrangu Rinpoche explained that the importance of this interim period is for ordinary people to adjust to or accept their physical death; at first they tend to feel they could get up and walk.

Shrine room preparations:

The body is placed with the head toward the shrine. It can be placed in a casket (open, if possible), on a platform, or simply on a blanket or zabutons on the floor.

On the right hand side of the shrine (shrine left), place a favourite drink of the deceased person. On the left, place some fruit, or other favorite food.

The officiating person (usually a senior practitioner in the area) can sit either in a chair, on a gomden, or in the umdze's position.

Next to the officiant, place a picture of the deceased, which has been attached to a small stick (like a chopstick), into a bowl filled with sand. Place the stick into sand just as a stick of incense would be placed. If there is no picture available, use a card with the deceased's refuge and bodhisattva names on it, or given name.

Set up chairs for relatives and friends in front, off to one side.

Meeting with Relatives

If family members have not seen the body, they may prefer to view it privately upon their arrival. The Vidyadhara said it is also helpful to include children in the funeral ceremony, in order not to hide the realities of death from them.

Before the service begins (while the others are sitting), the officiant meets with family members. This is an opportunity to explain a little about buddhist views on death and about the ceremony itself. If they ask the reason for cremation, and are obviously from a strong theistic tradition, it is all right to use the word "soul," for example, "We cremate the body so the soul will not have anything to cling to and can more readily accept the death of the body."

The shrine attendant shows the relatives to their chairs.

The Order of the Sukhavati Ceremony

An umdze conducts the sitting until the officiant enters (if the body is present).

The officiant makes opening remarks which could include the following themes:

Our relation to death altogether is something natural, constantly occurring, and not an occasion for us to hold back by indulging in sorrow, worry, or ignoring the reality of death.

We can provide a ground of compassion and hospitality to let the person go.

Some reflective appreciation, or eulogy of the deceased. Family or friends may wish to make remarks, read poetry, etc.

Simple explanation of tonglen: "As the dead person's physical existence dissolves, we take on ourselves any fear, confusion, habitual yearnings and neuroses, with the intent that the deceased be freed of these. We send back basic health, sanity and fearlessness." (See *Excerpts from Funeral Service*, included in this section.)

Group tonglen practice for 10 to 20 minutes.

Further remarks concerning the ceremony:

The practitioners, in doing sending and taking, have identified themselves with the enlightened approach of the bodhisattvas: taking on any bewilderment in the world and radiating sanity in return.

Now we go a step further in identifying with Amitabha and the power of his vow to liberate all sentient beings. The merit and wisdom gained from this are reflected by the practitioners and dedicated to the dead person. (See *Excerpts from Funeral Service*.)

Background: In the Kagyü tradition the ways of dealing with death and dying are derived from the Pure Land tradition connected with Amitabha Buddha. The Vidyadhara wrote the particular liturgy we use. In this ceremony, you first invoke Amitabha and make offerings to him; next you identify with his compassion, merit, and wisdom. Then, as much as possible, you join in generating the aspiration for the deceased to journey to Sukhavati, Amitabha's pure realm. It is considered most fortunate to be reborn in this realm where one's mind naturally turns toward enlightenment. (See *A Conversation on the Subject of Death and Dying*, from a meeting with the Venerable Thrangu Rinpoche, included later in this section.)

How to chant the Sukhavati liturgy:

Begin with gong, 1x.

The first paragraph of the chant, "*HRIH...wheel of dharma*," is the invocation and seven-fold offering to Amitabha.

At "*Samaya Tishtuam*," the officiant rings the gong; at that point, the practitioners become identified with Amitabha and his vow to liberate all sentient beings.

At "*(name)*," insert the deceased's given name.

At "*Namo Amitabhaya HRIH*," the officiant burns the deceased's picture, letting the ashes fall into the bowl of sand. Repeat this mantra for perhaps one mala's worth, certainly until the picture has been consumed.

The officiant plays two roll downs and a full stop on the gong to end the ceremony.

Sukhavati Chant

HRIH

In the profundity and brilliance of dharmakaya
The compassion of Avalokiteshvara arises.
In the magnificent and victorious vision
We proclaim the jñāna of Amitabha.
You are in the state of simplicity and you are free from fetters.
You have actually attained the fundamental enlightenment.
Please look upon us.
Forgive us our confusion.
Forgive us that we have been misled by the samsaric world.
I make offerings to you.
I rejoice in your virtues.
I request you to remain in our world and continue to turn the wheel of dharma.

NAMO AMITABHAYA

SAMAYA TISHTUAM

Please accept drinking water, flowers, incense, light, perfume, food and music.
I praise your magnificent wisdom and power.
You can liberate all sentient beings with one glance of your prajña and upaya.
I request you to liberate the sentient beings who have passed and departed from their physical lives.
May they be released from their samsaric fetters and attain liberation at once.
If not so, may they attain a good human birth which is free and well favoured.
If that is not possible, may they be freed from the lower realms.
I aspire to and worship your vision and your vow, so that this particular sentient being, (*name*),
and all other sentient beings may be liberated from the fetters and kleshas, so that they may begin to overcome their mental obstacles and begin to understand the notion of egolessness.

May they be free from the ayatanas.
May they attain a state of liberation.
May the merit of the sangha provide eternal companionship for them.
May the blessings of the teacher lead them on their journey.
May their relatives and companions proceed with them on their journey.

NAMO AMITABHAYA HRIH

Sadhana of Mahamudra Funeral Liturgy

The following text was composed by the Vidyadhara as a funeral liturgy to be used in the context of The Sadhana of Mahamudra. As far as we are aware, it was his first instruction in the West on fire offering.

FIRE OFFERING LITURGY

HUM HUM HUM

The great flame of prajña,
Which possesses the miraculous energy of the dharmakaya,
The self-luminous rainbow sword,
Strikes through the five skandhas of ego.
O the great guru, free from augmenting and decreasing,
Arise from your birthless realm
And consume the fuel of ego
With your wisdom fire.
When the vajra flame rises
Mirrorlike wisdom dances.
When the ratna flame rises
The wisdom of equanimity spreads its richness.
When the padma flame rises
Hayagriva sings with laughter.
When the karma flame rises
Yama is consumed as food.
Arise Karma Pakshi
And arise Dorje Trollö;

Arise gurus of the lineage.
Kindle the fire of self-liberated insight.
Utterly consume the fuels of mind.
My beloved body
I offer to you as food.
Since there is no giver or receiver,
In the flame of simplicity
Guru and disciple are one.
HUM HUM HUM

PRACTICE INSTRUCTIONS FOR FUNERALS

There are various modifications to the sadhana text for using it as a funeral liturgy. The Vidyadhara composed and translated all of these inserts. This fell into disuse after the Vidyadhara introduced the "Ceremony of Sukhavati." All page references refer to the most recent, 1990 edition of the sadhana.

On p. 8, before "In the state of nonmeditation . . ." recite the O_SVABH_VA mantra. After the paragraph ending ". . . like a pile of dust" say: "It is the mandala of the great all-consuming fire, the self-existing flame, which need not be kindled."

On pp. 9-10, replace "This is the personification of the body, speech and mind of all the buddhas" with "He is the fire of dharmadhatu, who transforms the four elements into vajra flame."

On p. 18, after the recitation of the "Four Dharmas of Gampopa," insert the fire offering liturgy, which follows these instructions. During this, the officiant lights the picture of the deceased.

Then skip to "HUM HUM HUM In the cave of . . ." on p. 21.

On p. 23, prior to chanting the triple-HUM mantra, return to "To the crazy-wisdom form of the buddhas of the three times . . ." on pp. 19-20 and chant the section previously omitted. Then do the triple-HUM mantra recitation. Continue with the rest of the sadhana as usual.

Modifications for Feast Practice

Generally, the *Sadhana of Mahamudra* feast offering is only practiced among tantrikas. According to Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche's direction, follow the above instructions up (and not including) the recitation of the triple-HUM mantra. Insert the feast offering after chanting the

"Four Dharmas of Gampopa" at the bottom of p. 20, which is our usual custom. After concluding the feast, return to the sadhana on p. 21, repeating these supplications for a second time. Continue with the mantra recitation and the rest of the practice as usual.

Funeral Service for a Non-Sangha Person

A sangha member may request a funeral ceremony for one of his or her close relatives who was not a practicing buddhist. In this case, as with the death of a sangha member, you would perform the Ceremony of Sukhavati. Your centre may wish to schedule this ceremony at regular intervals or when it seems appropriate. Generally when the ceremony is held, all the names on the shrine are included. It is always appropriate for members to place a card on the shrine for 49 days after someone's death, whether or not a Sukhavati was performed. The card has the person's given name, and birth and death dates.

Cremation

After the ceremony the body is taken to the mortuary, often accompanied by a few close friends and relatives. It is not necessary to chant any liturgy during the cremation, or to stay for the duration, which is usually a few hours.

The ashes may be placed on the shrine until the Forty-Ninth day ceremony. A card with the deceased's given name and the dates of his or her birth and death is also placed on the shrine during this period. This may be done even if there are no ashes. Your centre may want to make a cardholder that stays on the shrine permanently for this purpose.

Forty-Ninth Day Ceremony

Forty-nine days is traditionally regarded as the duration of the transitional state after death, the three pados of death, isness, and becoming. A brief ceremony can be performed to mark the conclusion of the pardo experience. Often, the sangha member closest to the deceased conducts this ceremony.

The shrine room is prepared in the following way: the urn containing the deceased's ashes (if available), their bodhisattva and refuge names (given name for non-sangha) and a picture, are

placed as before on a stick in a bowl of sand on a table before the shrine. As was done for the Ceremony of Sukhavati, a favourite drink and fruit are placed on the shrine. Most often this ceremony is done by a small group of friends and/or relations; it can be done at home at one's personal shrine, or at the local centre's shrine.

Read the following passages from *The Tibetan Book Of The Dead*:

All read together three times with strong devotion, requesting the buddhas to show compassion to the person in the pardo: "Inspiration Prayer Calling on the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for Rescue."

Read by one person (one time): "*The Main Verses of the Six Bardos*." This passage expresses the inspiration to resolve confusion about birth and death, and about samsara and nirvana, by recognizing the continuous presence of the pardo of existence, of dream, of meditation, of the moment of death, of dharmata, and of becoming. Then, the "*Inspiration Prayer for Deliverance from the Dangerous Pathway of the Pardo*." This passage recognizes the wisdom aspect of experience. The practitioner needs fearlessness and a sense of leap to see wisdom, hence the next passage: "*The Pardo Prayer Which Protects from Fear*."

Burn the picture and refuge and bodhisattva (or given) names.

Bury the ashes; some of the ashes may also be spread. This may be done some time after the ceremony itself. The Vidyadhara once directed students to chant the Heart Sutra at this time. Burial grounds exist at the major practice centres.

Excerpts from a Funeral Service

(The following excerpts are taken from remarks made by the Vidyadhara at a Sukhavati ceremony for Kelsey Cambell, November 22, 1975.)

Death is not something that we should just purely emotionally indulge in. We should not neglect or forget about it. It constantly happens.

This death is much connected with our work, practice, and community. We should try not to create unnecessary indulgences in terms of provoking our own neurosis. Rather, we should cultivate a sense of cheerfulness and openness. By doing so, we should provide more encouragement for the dying person rather than holding back. In this case, holding back means worrying about or analyzing the situation.

What we are doing is freeing, giving our hospitality to let the person go. We should reflect our sanity. This is different from professional or business sanity. This is enlightened sanity acquired by our diligent study and practice. Reflect on the lineage, its grace, its power, its blessing. Project this to the dying person. By doing so we are creating further sanity in the community and in the universe.

This ceremony is transcending the physical limitations of death. It uses the image of fire in the liturgy. The fire is ever burning; it comes from compassion, it comes from inside, from fearlessness. So we are not holding back on old habits but opening up to the situation. By identifying with the dead person and ourselves at the same time--by experiencing one death--we can make a further leap and show further fearlessness. The fire kindles and comes out of this openness and sense of fearlessness.

A Conversation with Thrangu Rinpoche on the Subject of Death and Dying

(Notes on a Meeting with the Venerable Thrangu Rinpoche, Halifax, Nova Scotia, April 13, 1992, translated by Jules Levinson, edited by Judith Lief)

QUESTION: As a general guideline we suggest leaving the body undisturbed for a period of three days, after which we do the Sukhavati ceremony the Vidyadhara wrote. Are there any other guidelines for the period immediately after death, the first few days? And how important is it not to disturb the body?

THE VENERABLE THRANGU RINPOCHE: Speaking in a personal way, when somebody dies it's like this: First of all, when the person is actually dying, there is the notion of receiving blessing. The purpose of receiving blessing is so that the person will not suffer physically and not suffer mentally. It is said that this is very helpful for what will follow in the pardo state. It is helpful when a person is dying if they are not in great physical and emotional pain. It is also very helpful to remind the person not to forget their root guru and not to forget the practice that they have done during their lifetime. So we encourage them by speaking this into their ear. Also, when a person is dying they are often frightened and there are various sorts of strange experiences. So we are speaking to them to encourage them to remember the guru, to remember their practice, and not to become frightened and completely confused as they die.

Then, when the person has died, we leave the body undisturbed for three days. There are different reasons for this, but basically there are two. First, there are people who have profound realization and experience. When they die, simultaneous with the severing of the life force of that lifetime, they enter into a deep samadhi. We feel that if the body is moved, it will interfere with that samadhi and therefore we leave the body as it is. For ordinary people the reason is different, but the practice is the same--not disturbing the body for three days. Ordinary people have a certain amount of attachment to their bodies, and they also tend to feel that they could just get up, even though they have died. They think "I could just get up and go," and they feel that this body is extremely important. So if one were to take the body immediately and destroy it--burn it or whatever--it would cause tremendous distress to them. Such a disturbance would create a lot of problems for them. For that reason, so that they don't get upset at the destruction of their body, we leave the body undisturbed for three days.

Q: Typically people do lots of simple things around the body after death. They wash it and clothe

it and sometimes move it from the hospital or home to the shrine room. Is there any problem with that simple level of disturbing?

TR: No, that is no problem.

Q: One more question about disturbing the body. Some people have an interest in doing things like donating organs. What is the appropriate attitude towards that?

TR: I don't see any problem with people donating organs at the time of death. If the person has thought beforehand, "When I die, I will give portions of my body away," then there's no problem in giving something away. Actually, it is a very good thing. If a person has that sort of motivation and has made it clear that he or she wishes to do that, it's a very good thing to do. Because the person has decided beforehand to do so, it is not a problem.

The most important thing is that when the person has died or is dying, we should not do anything that would arouse aggression--not speak badly and not make the person angry. If you did that, that would be harmful. So you have to engage in an upaya that will keep that from coming about. For instance, after a person dies--a father, suppose--who has some wealth and possessions; when the father dies, the children are discussing how to divide up the wealth and are not able to come to an agreement and they start arguing with each other about it. "Nyehe, he got this, nyehe, nyehe, nyehe." This will create problems. It will make the father unhappy and it will create a lot of problems. Don't do things like that.

Q: Rinpoche, is that why tonglen is often recommended for people to practice with someone who is dying, or after someone has died?

TR: It is very helpful if one can do tonglen practice while the person is dying and when the person has died. This is discussed in the book *Introduction to the Pardo*.

When a person dies, their *consciousness* can exit from various parts of the body, various doorways of the senses and so forth. [Translator: That word doesn't translate so well.] It can exit from various parts of the body. It is said that if it exits from lower parts of the body, that's not so good; if it exits from upper parts of the body, that's better. Therefore, when people are gathered around the body, those who love the dying person and those whom the dying person loved should gather around the upper part of the body, because if they gather around the lower part of the body, the person's attention is drawn that way and will exit from lower parts of the body. So it is said in the books that that is not such a good idea.

Q: What about touching the person who is dying?

TR: It doesn't make any difference.

Q: The Vidyadhara would often touch people.

TR: That would be great.

Q: Rinpoche, after death should we use the three days as an arbitrary time period in which not to disturb the body, or are there physical signs of consciousness leaving the body? And another related question is, in order to prevent the body from decomposing too quickly, is it okay to use ice to cool the body, as some people do?

TR: First, if you're talking about a person who has profound realization, then there will be some warmth at the heart area as a sign that they are still there. If at the end of three days they are still warm, you continue to leave the body undisturbed. If you're talking about ordinary people, there are not going to be any signs.

In regard to the decomposition of the body, there is certainly no reason not to use such methods and, in fact, if you are able to keep the body from decomposing rapidly, that is good. It is said that if the body begins decomposing, that will bring about all sorts of disturbing appearances for the person. So these things are helpful.

Q: Rinpoche, the methods used to alleviate pain can affect the person's awareness, make them drowsy or sedated. I was just wondering about the relative merits of relieving pain and affecting awareness.

TR: If you are able to clear away the physical pain that the person is experiencing, that's very good. As for their mind becoming somewhat darkened or drowsy, in that situation it is probably going to happen anyway. I don't think it makes a whole lot of difference.

Q: Rinpoche, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche wrote a short Sukhavati chant, an invocation of Amitabha, which we use for a funeral ceremony. But we have no background and not much understanding of such a pure land. Is there something you can say that we need to know, that would be helpful to know about?

TR: Sukhavati is a buddhafiield. There are a variety of different types of buddhafiields. There are buddhafiields of the sambhogakaya buddhas, there are buddhafiields of the nirmanakaya buddhas, there are pure buddhafiields and there are impure buddhafiields. From among those, Sukhavati is a nirmanakaya buddhafiield. It was established through aspirational prayers, through a sense of wishing for some good result. It was established through the *mönlam*, or aspiration, of Amitabha.

Sukhavati is an unusual sort of buddhafiield in that other buddhafiields are accessible through one's own profound realization. One is able to take birth, if one has some profound realization; if one does not have such profound realization, one cannot be born there. But this particular buddhafiield is different in that you do not have to be someone of deep realization in order to take birth there. Rather, what it requires is that you have a good motivation and you have an aspirational prayer to be reborn there. It also helps if you have developed familiarity with it and the steadiness of mind to imagine it and long for it, to visualize it and so forth.

Sukhavati was established through the compassion of Amitabha. One can make aspirations to take birth there for oneself or others can make them for you. Such aspirations serve as the upaya to be born there. Generally it is a place in which basically there is not much suffering. It is a very delightful, comfortable, pleasant place. It is a place in which it is not difficult to practice the dharma. It is easy to practice the dharma there. It is a place to which very ordinary people can go and it's also a place to which very elevated, superior people can go and take birth.

In any case, it comes about through *mönlam*, or aspirational prayers, together with pure motivation. And it is very helpful if someone who has some sort of steadiness of mind is able to either guide the other person there or, if it's oneself, to serve as your own guide. Basically this comes about through aspirational prayer, which just means thinking, "May so and so be reborn in

a land of Amitabha." What is crucial here is that you are praying in that way and that the other person knows that you are. Then they can sort of join their mind with yours and apply themselves to it. They realize, "Oh this would be a good thing for me to do; these other people are expressing this wish." Then the dying person joins forces in his or her mind with the other people's wish, and so can go there. I'm talking about the time of death itself. Of course, if before that some base is established, some familiarity, that would be helpful too.

Q: What is the relationship between Amitabha and Amitayus? Are they the same or different?

TR: They are one nature, one thing, but there is a difference in terms of the aspect in which they appear and the name by which they are called. *Amitabha* in Tibetan means "limitless light." This is the nirmanakaya aspect we are talking about now. *Amitayus* in Tibetan means "limitless life". That is the sambhogakaya aspect. In their nature, they are the same; however in their aspect of enlightened activity and in the way in which one relies upon them, they are different.

Q: You are saying we make this aspiration at the time of death, whereas we usually wait three days to conduct the Sukhavati.

TR: It's fine to do it three days later, it doesn't make any difference.

Q: Sometimes when you're with somebody who's dying, people who are being left behind are in a very emotional state. There are instructions not to be in such a state, but in reality ordinary people often are. Is that very harmful? Are there instructions on going beyond that?

TR: When someone is dying they are frightened and they have a lot of pain. If there is anything that can be done to pacify their fear and their pain, that will be very helpful; it will enable their mind to become clear and steady. For that reason, if there is not a whole lot of wailing going on around them, it would be very, very helpful. Even if one feels upset, somehow not expressing that in one's face is very helpful. This applies before someone dies, as they are dying, and after they have died. It is the same.

Q: If you feel that way, would it be better to remove yourself from the presence of the dying person?

TR: Yes, it would be better just to go somewhere else.

Q: Rinpoche, how do we find the Vidyadhara in the pardo? Or do we hope that he finds us in time?

TR: If you supplicate him, then he will meet you. If you supplicate him, he will meet you.

Q: So it would not be inappropriate to practice Dharma Sagara up until the time of death, one's own death?

TR: Of course that would be fantastic. Placing a photograph of the Vidyadhara near the dying person would also seem to be very helpful.

Q: When one is working with people who are dying who are not buddhists is it helpful to encourage their faith in their own beliefs and traditions?

TR: It depends upon the person. If the person has some religious tradition about which they feel good, encouraging their faith would be a good thing to do. If they are somebody who doesn't like any religious tradition at all, then it would be a mistake to do so. At that point one can rest in equanimity.

Recommended Further Reading

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Pema Chodron. When Things Fall Apart. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1996

APPENDIX I - SAMPLE CONTACT INFORMATION

(FOR NOVA SCOTIA BUDDHIST COMMUNITY)

As of November 1999:

Shambhala Centre,

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Telephone: 420-1118

Shari Vogler :

at Shambhala Centre 420-1118 extension 30.

Reference folder, binder with further details.

Dry Ice at Praxair 25 hour service.

468-1666, 40 Gurholt Drive, Dartmouth.

(\$75 for 50 lbs. box)

Lawyers as reference to offer advice or referral:

Andrew Munro at 492-3310, and Jason Gavras at 423-5711.

Funeral or Crematorium

There is a wide range of services.

Please consult the *Yellow Pages*

Explore their separate fees for such services as follows:

- the Funeral Director's service for the Certificate of Death and registration;
- the container (casket);
- removal and transport of the body between various sites (may vary by distance);
- cremation;
- washing and dressing the body;
- viewing room;
- box or scattering urn;

and other services or supplies.

Some discussions have happened with the following:

Cruikshanks, Dale Jackson at 423-7295, with a wide range of services;

Dignity Cremation, Jim Delaney 452-4450 with more simplified services;

Halifax Regional Crematorium, at 423-4424 for another simple service.

APPENDIX II - ESTATE PLANNING

This is one example of a personal inventory and executor's checklist Please consider planning and discussing this with a lawyer and perhaps a financial consultant. Inform key people of the location of this key information and give copies to those whom you trust to carry out your wishes. It is helpful to discuss this with them as well.

PERSONAL INVENTORY AND EXECUTOR'S CHECKLIST

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

OUTLINE:

Regarding: NAME

Date of Birth:

Last update:

Information for my Executor

Name:

Date of Birth

Address

Telephone: home

Work: name, address telephone

Social Insurance Number:

NS Health Card Number:

"Health Insurance Company" Number

Safety Deposit Box

Location:

Registered under :

Location of Key:

Will

Original copy of will located:

Date of Will:

By Lawyer:

The Executor(s): name address telephone

if dead then: name address telephone

The Guardian(s) are: name address telephone

if dead then

Certificates

Birth: Safety Deposit box

Marriage / Divorce

Property

Family

Spouse: Name, date of birth, address, phone

Child: ditto

Siblings / parents / etc. ditto

Other Beneficiary: (Eg. Shambhala International at Shambhala Centre, SPCA...)

Information for Guardian(s)

Any specific intentions for child's care, development, special interests, possessions or use of trust money.

Real Estate

Property Location:

Ownership:

Mortgage:

Lawyer for purchase

Life Insurance

Name, Address, Policy numbers, Date of Insurance, Death benefit amount.

(Also may have insurance with mortgage or loans.)

Employment Life Insurance

Group Coverage through my employment:

Registered Retirement Savings Plans

Company, representative, address, telephone, account numbers, beneficiary

Credit Card

Name, number, single or joint

Securities, Investments

Company, representative, address, telephone, account numbers, beneficiary

Loans (personal or guaranteed), and/or Line of Credit

Bank or credit company name address telephone and account number, single or joint.

Pension Funds

CPP

Company

Monies Owed on Chattels or Holdings

Receivables

Valuable Personal Effects and Jewelry

Motor Vehicles

Year, make, description, registration

Insurance company and policy number

Bank Accounts

Bank name address telephone and single or joint chequing / saving account number(s)

Permanent Power of Attorney (including extraordinary measures) or "Living Will"

This requires a specific document, which may be identified here. This includes one's intentions for care if one is incapacitated. See Appendix III "Sample Living Will"

Organ Donations

This requires a specific document, which may be identified here. It is most likely on a driver's license, but if not, then in another document likely in one's wallet.

Autopsy

This requires a specific document, which may be identified here. One might include a statement like: "For religious reasons, I strongly request that if an autopsy is necessary, it be done three days after my death and after the Sukhavati Ceremony."

Funeral Instructions

For example: "It is my strong desire that my funeral exercises and the disposal of my body be conducted in accordance with the practices and rituals of the Vajradhatu Buddhist Church, including, without limitation, that my body shall remain undisturbed and not embalmed in state for approximately three days after my death, or until otherwise directed by a qualified representative of the Vajradhatu Buddhist Church, and shall thereafter be cremated. During that time, I request Vajradhatu practitioners to conduct the appropriate practices near my body, preferably in the shrine room of my home, or if that is not possible, in a similar setting. After the three days, I request that the Sukhavati Ceremony be conducted, preferably in the shrine room at the Shambhala Centre. I further desire that after the passage of 49 days from the date of my death, that the 49 day ceremony occur and my ashes be disposed of in accordance with Vajradhatu practices at Dorje Denma Ling, or at a similar Vajradhatu Buddhist location if so preferred by my survivors."

For direction on this, contact the Shambhala Centre, (902) 420-1118

Disposition

Disposition of one's estate is in the Will.

Solicitor of Estate

APPENDIX III -

ADVANCE DIRECTIVE

APPOINTMENT OF GUARDIAN

POST MORTEM DIRECTIVE AND FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

This document is based on a legal form for advance directives and has been checked by a lawyer; legalities vary by province and state, so please have any living will you create read by a lawyer in your region.

For Kathy Doe

This document, which I, Kathy Doe of Nova Scotia have executed has three parts. This first part is a "living will" or advance directive which records my strong wishes regarding the environment I have chosen in which to spend the last months, weeks, or days of my life in the case of illness before death as well as the manner of medical treatment to be given to me in the serious circumstances the advance directive describes. The advance directive is intended to speak for me and to direct whomever finds himself or herself in the position of making decisions regarding the medical treatment of my body, always supposing that I am not then competent to make such decisions.

The second part is a health care proxy under which I have appointed a medical guardian pursuant to the Medical Consent Act of Nova Scotia and contains my direction to that guardian to be guided by the expression of my wishes in the advance directive in making the decisions he or she may be called upon to make.

The third part is my directive for treatment of my body upon death and for funeral arrangements according with the buddhist and Shambhala traditions. It is my request that the funeral takes place in Nova Scotia.

A. ADVANCE DIRECTIVE

When I am:

a) in a terminal condition: or

b) permanently unconscious; or

c) conscious but have brain damage that is, in all likelihood, irreversible and it is very unlikely that I will ever regain the ability to make decisions and to express my wishes;

I direct that treatment be limited to measures to keep me comfortable and alleviate pain, including any pain that might occur by withholding or withdrawing treatment; and, I direct my attending physician to withhold or withdraw medical treatment that serves only

to prolong the process of my dying, if I should be in an incurable to irreversible mental or physical condition, and it is very unlikely that I will recover.

In particular and as examples, in these circumstances:

- a) I do not want cardiac resuscitation;**
- b) I do not want mechanical respiration;**
- c) I do not want tube feeding or other artificial or invasive feeding or hydration procedures;**
- d) I do not want nutrients given after being taken off a respirator**
- e) I do not want antibiotics; and**
- f) I do want maximum pain relief, even if pain-relieving medication may hasten my death.**

These directions express my legal right to refuse treatment. I intend my instructions to be carried out, unless I have rescinded them in a new writing or by clearly indicating that I have changed my mind.

I direct that in serious sickness, death and postmortem, that the Shambhala Practice Manual based on Trungpa Rinpoche's guidelines on Death and Dying be respected in all ways. In addition, and specifically, I would like to make the following requests whether I am in a coma or not:

Staff:

I direct that I be kept at home as long as possible that the following people is involved with my care:

Environment:

I would like the physical environment to be a...

Practice:

If at all possible, I would like practice periods to take place with me in my room at predictable times -- whatever seems most appropriate: chanting aloud the sadhanas of _____, tonglen, or shamatha.

B. APPOINTMENT OF GUARDIAN

Pursuant to the Medical Consent Act of Nova Scotia I hereby appoint and authorize Jim Doe, as my husband, to act as my guardian during any period during which I lack legal capacity or the ability to consent to or refuse medical treatment, and give him the full authority to consent and refuse or request the withdrawal of such medical treatment as he finds inappropriate. Should Jim not be able to be my guardian, I authorize John Smith to

be the guardian in consultation with my doctor, Jane McHenry.

In determining whether proposed treatment is or is not appropriate, my guardian shall be guided by the expression of my wishes given above in that section of this document titled "Advance Directive"; provided that when that expression is unclear or does not cover the situation he should act as he or she believes to be in my best interests.

C. POST-MORTEM ARRANGEMENTS

It is my strongest desire that my funeral and the disposal of my body be conducted in strict accordance with the practices and rituals of the Vajradhatu Buddhist Church and Shambhala Centre, including, without limitation, that my body will remain undisturbed and un-embalmed in state, for three days after my death in the shrine room of the Shambhala Centre in Halifax or in my home if this is not convenient for the centre, after which I request a traditional buddhist funeral to be conducted by _____. The body shall thereafter be cremated either in Halifax, Nova Scotia or at (practice center). I further desire that after the passage of 49 days from the date of my death, or such duration as may be directed by a qualified representative of the Shambhala Centre, my ashes shall be buried at (practice center).

I wish to avoid autopsy under all circumstances. If the law requires it because of the nature of my death, I request that it try to be avoided by (a Shambhala community doctor) or another physician signing the death certificate. If this does not avoid the autopsy, I request the coroner to wait until after the three days of lying in state and after the funeral. I do not wish to donate any organs.

My direction as expresses in this Article is of the strongest possible nature and shall be observed under all circumstances.

_____ Date: _____

Signed and dated by Kathy Doe in our presence and attested by us in the presence of her and each other.

Witness Address

Witness Address