

SUPPORTING POSITIVE MIND AT DEATH



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for the Practice of Tibetan Buddhism in the Gelugpa Tradition
Affiliated with the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana
Tradition in the lineage of His Holiness the Dalai Lama

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Introduction

Emily Paynter was Kadampa Center's chaplain as well as one of the only Buddhist chaplains in North Carolina. Based on experience working with hospice patients, she headed support for illness, death and dying and the development of a memorial service in Kadampa Center's community. The skills and methods she taught us were helpful to our community when she herself entered hospice and died in 2010.

This book was originally used in workshops on death and dying to help participants think about topics that are often avoided, or only faced on an intellectual level. It also helps provide guidance about what situations you might face during the death and dying process. Originally Emily led the questions as part of a discussion, but the book has been lightly edited so it can be used as a stand-alone tool at home.

Thanks to a group of volunteers, the only hard copy of this book was scanned or typed so it could be made available in this format. None of it would be possible, though, without Emily.

Sarah Brooks, Editor

SETTING YOUR INTENTION

Setting a motivation before beginning is a powerful way to make this reflection deeply meaningful.

Think about the importance of having a positive mind during illness or at death.

Describe what “positive” means to you:

How will having a positive mind during illness or at death help you and the people close to you?

DEATH AS A CULMINATION OF A LIFE

We will engage in our own dying and in others' dying with the habits we have developed up to that time.

Consider times in your life you have encountered difficulties. Use the following exercise to help you look more closely at lifetime habits.

EXERCISE: On the timeline below, log past difficulties you have encountered over your lifetime. Use the questions that follow to look for reactive patterns and courageous efforts to overcome difficulties. Use compassion to try to understand your motivations in the past and what habits, positive and otherwise, reside with you now.

1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010

What reactions do you remember?

What skills did you try to apply?

What insights did you gain?

What changes in habits have you developed since then?

What skills would you like to develop?

Suggestion: Come back to this after reading the last chapter on the five powers. It is helpful to notice that you are doing these. Take time to understand and work on the ones that may take more effort, and notice the ones that come easily.

DEATH AS A TRANSITION

Death most certainly brings change to our circumstances. What does this change presently represent to you?

In what ways do you view death as a transition?

The Buddhist view is that death is not a final state for mind. Death is followed by rebirth unless one has managed to attain liberation from cyclic existence. Death, therefore, is a transition from this life to that which follows as well as an opportunity to transform your mind.

For some highly developed practitioners, death is an opportunity to attain enlightenment or a specific rebirth. In this case, the practitioner engages in specific practices at the time of death to realize these goals. Such practices are usually mastered and perfected long before death and death represents the time for applying these practices skillfully. For most of us, death represents an opportunity to use the skills we have to effect a positive transition from this life to the next for a variety of motivations. Some wish to be free from fear and negative states. Others wish for optimum states. And still others wish to have cause and conditions to continue on the path to enlightenment. It is important to understand your own motivations in order to be compassionate toward yourself and others. At the end of life or a loss, make the intention to go on with a positive motivation.

When first contemplating the reality of our mortality, it is common to be affected by deep awareness of loss. Reflect on this and make a note of losses you would feel; each time you do this, try to follow this awareness with an awareness of the skills you would bring to an encounter with death and what wishes you have for a positive death.

Each time you experience a loss in life even as little as missing out on a desirable parking space, consider what skills you have to acknowledge the loss AND remain positive in your *very next* action, *very next* self-talk, *very next* mental attitude. What past experiences of intentional efforts to make an immediate change from negative to positive can you think of?

All change involves loss. Death as a transition is about change—a shift of focus from this life to what follows this life. Engaging with death as a transition means engaging in many practices of letting go. Think of opportunities where you have had to practice letting go. What helped?

A powerful concept in engaging with life difficulties is the concept of BOTH/AND. This phrase refers to our ability to recognize that something is undesirable yet still be able to accept its reality as well as adopt a position that something is undesirable yet still be able to accept its reality as well as adopt a position that allows something else as well. That is, we don't deny the undesirable aspect and at the same time we are not letting that aspect block out everything else. In other words, we acknowledge the aversion or negative mind but also allow room for positive states of mind to prevent the aversion from filling your whole mind.

Small example: I BOTH hate the taste of my medicine AND I gladly take it for its benefits. More pertinent example: I feel BOTH enormous pain when I think about losing my friend AND still can be present when I am with him. The BOTH/AND practice works when we are able to expand our hearts big enough to make room for the pain and that which is untouched by pain. This practice helps us accept aspects that seem overwhelming by recognizing that our minds are vaster than the attachments and pain we feel.

What Buddhist or other practices do you use to create a sense of vastness?

IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE MIND FOR SELF AND OTHERS

If we are able to let go of the cultural bias of self – reliance, death becomes an opportunity of social interconnectedness, and opportunity to receive and to give. It is important to widen our view and preparing for death to consider others.

In what ways have you considered social interconnectedness as an aspect of your own death?

Being able to abide in mind that is vast and loving is a great gift to others.

At this time, what helps you cultivate and sustain this kind of presence for others? (We don't have to do this for them, we just need to be present for them.) Have you been able to do this in difficult situations?

PREPARING FOR YOUR OWN DEATH

Much about our society is complicated. This fact means much surrounding our death can be complicated. Preparations include legal paperwork, advanced directives, and sharing with friends and family any insights and wishes. Death may occur without warning, through slow or fast decline from disease, or simply through the end of a long life. People differ with respect to numbers of people who are connected to them. You have community traditions that support individuals in the death process. As the time of death is uncertain, it is beneficial to give some deep thought to what supports positive mind for yourself and others. Dying can be eased by positive thought. Positive mind and death can be supported by others. Dying with a positive mind allows positive experiences in the bardo state and future rebirth.

How can you carve out space to develop positive mind to be ready for this opportunity?

A cultural bias that can complicate death preparations is our mindset about self-reliance. It is helpful to consider death and dying in terms of our social connectedness and interdependence. Many of our attitudes are influenced by our social experiences. If these have been negative, we may have unconsciously adopted an adverse attitude towards involving others. Some may view themselves as private persons and be astounded at the need of others to be part of the dying process. If you have ambivalent feelings about engaging with others, it might be helpful to intentionally notice and learn about the variety of ways social interconnectedness plays a role before, during, and after death. For some this may mean volunteering at a hospice, adult daycare, nursing home or hospital. For others this may mean paying closer attention to the dying that occurs all around us, at our work, our neighborhood, our workplace.

What attachments do you have about being self-reliant?

Preparing for death can include some attention to aversions and attachment. Aversions may include fears or dislikes around death itself, aspects of body decay and decline, changes in social status (independence). Many people work to resolve old issues and conflicts and to get closure in order not to worry about what has been left undone. Several commentary texts recommend ways to minimize attachment and clinging at the

time of death. This includes giving away of cherished objects and respectful avoidance of outpourings of grief by family as death draws near.

What is hardest for you at this time to leave behind?

Reliance on Your Own Heart Practices

Heart practice, as used by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, refers to core practices, each of which offers tremendous benefit. In the context of preparing for your own death, it is useful to think of a heart practice as the practice to turn to automatically in times of need. Our refuge prayer is a reminder that we can rely on the Buddhas, Dharma and Sangha to eliminate negative mind and develop positive mind. Yet each of us is on a different path and finds support in quite different methods. It is important to direct some attention to what you actually rely on.

Do you automatically remember a verse that has touched your heart?

Do you find yourself saying a mantra automatically in time of need?

Have some prayer practices touched your mind?

It is important to distinguish between a daily practice to develop skills from those you tend to rely on without effort. These latter practices could be said to be your heart practices and will be ones you rely on when you engage in the dying process. It is also likely that these may increase or change over time.

What heart practices are you aware of now?

There is also a difference between practice and the *results* of practice. Think about a practice you do regularly, maybe a heart practice.

How is it changing you – how are you different as a result of this practice?

Think about how you have changed as a result of practice, and as you continue the practice do it with the intention of even greater change.

It is also important to reflect in the act of reliance. We can rely on something outside ourselves to help us conquer fear and to sustain Faith and Hope. On this basis, we are able to let go of clinging to something we fear to lose. On this basis we are able to let go of expectations about what should or shouldn't happen. On this basis we can abide in equanimity, with an open heart.

On what do you rely at this time to help you?

Whatever helps you, *your mind*, is what is right for you. There are no rules. It's whatever puts you at ease.

CONSIDERING OPTIONS TO PROMOTE POSITIVE MIND

American culture is a consumer culture. The recent surge in end-of-life awareness, unfortunately, is somewhat confounded by a consumer attitude. That is, responsibility for end-of-life-decision-making is currently formulated as defining "what one wants or doesn't want" at the time of death. The upside of this campaign has been attention to options and decisions that might be required. The downside is the promotion of the delusion that identifying preferences causes death to comply accordingly. That is, there is no corresponding development of awareness that circumstances of death may not be as one wishes and that another type of preparatory reflection might be beneficial. The following pages outline some of what these additional preparations might include.

Dying place and circumstance

From a "if wishes could make it so" point of view, what circumstances would you hope for when you die?

Who should be with you?

Where would you be?

What would you like in your environment?

Surveys show that about 80% of Americans want to die at home, but only 20-30% actually do. Dying can be messy, often difficult for caregivers, physically and emotionally. There is no shame in admitting the need for – and allowing – outside help for physical care.

Perhaps due to Bill Moyers wonderful documentary on death and dying in the 90s, many Americans hold a false view that the widespread availability of hospice care means that hospice facilities are available as well. In fact, there are few hospice facilities across the country. Although hospice of Wake County has a facility and there are several nursing homes in the area that have designated hospice beds, there is a marked absence of hospice sites. Hospice, at present, is a limited care surveys offered wherever a dying person is – in the hospital, nursing facility or private home. Although many people desired to die in their homes, a few are able to do so. Often it is that sheer stress

of managing disease that precipitates hospitalization just prior to death. The good news is that hospice is only one small part of a range of services to help.

A useful preparation would be thinking deeply about how you and your family respond to stressful circumstances. Use this realistic analysis to think carefully about your preferences and how these impact others, to uncover assumptions about what might be helpful and how much you might be thinking about external factors. Then reflect on your own inner resources and what kinds of support might help you access them under difficult circumstances. If you are supported in using your inner resources, you may be able to adjust to unexpected and unwished-for circumstances

What helps you turn inward to discover inner resources?

What helps you manage pain?

What helps you manage fretfulness?

What helps you tolerate unpleasant sensations (smells, sounds, sights, tastes, touch)?

What external options open your heart or calm your mind (e.g. images, nature, audio recordings)?

It is important to share with family and friends your understandings about what helps support your inner strength. With this knowledge they can find ways to modify any setting or situation to provide a positive environment for you in order to support your positive mind.

In thinking about those you care about or may be presently helping take time to observe or gently dialogue to discover what small things foster a positive attitude for them. It takes skill and patience to discover these but, for each of us, the simplest of things can be a tremendous help.

Set your intention that no matter how death happens it will be okay.

DYING SUPPORT

Dying support can be envisioned in terms of daily care, spiritual care and social support for the person dying as well as their family and friends. Support can be envisioned in terms of preparations, physical decline, dying process, and following death.

Daily care

Daily care includes nutrition, mobility, hygiene, rest, medications and comfort care. Depending on personal resources and circumstances, positive mind is enhanced when care is provided with minimal stress. The goal of daily care is to minimize everyone's stress, including yours – it adds to the stress of the dying person to know you are stressed. Take time to restore yourself.

Spiritual care can be offered directly or indirectly

Direct care can be provided by Sangha and Kadampa Center members who want to function as a dharma friend. Arrangements can be made for Sangha and senior students to visit with dying persons to say prayers with them (or on their behalf if they are too ill), and just after death to offer prayers.

Indirect spiritual care can be provided by dedication prayers at the center and members who offer prayers for others in their daily practice, through pujas and special services. Sponsorship of pujas at Kadampa Center, Geshe-la's monastery, FPMT Centers, and for prayers by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Lama Zopa Rinpoche are options that can bring great benefit.

Social Support

Volunteer dharma friends at Kadampa Center can visit dying persons to listen, to read requested texts, practices or prayers to persons facing death, to share laughter and tears, Dharma friends can support family members in creating a peaceful environment.

Contact information for spiritual support from Kadampa Center:

Chaplain: support@kadampa-center.org

Prayers by Sera Jey Monastery: Your donation must be wired through Western Union Email our Chaplain at support@kadampa-center.org for the suggested donation amount [\$200 in 2011] and the details for Western Union. Western Union will give you a confirmation number. Your telegram should include

- 1) Information about the person for whom prayer request is made.
- 2) Circumstances.
- 3) If death, date of death (with time zone) is important.

Afterwards email support@kadampa-center.org the Western Union # and a copy of the above information provided in the telegram so that Geshe-la can alert Sera Jey Monastery.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche/FPMT Support: FPMT offers a prayer service for persons who have died within 49 days of request. Go to the following website to make request:

www.fpmt.org/pfd

FPMT will also forward your request and donation to His Holiness the Dalai Lama for any student of an FPMT Center. For more information, email

prayersforthedead@fpmt.org

Disposition of the Body

Although traditional practice holds three days as the optimum period for allowing completion of the subtle body death dissolution, this is difficult to provide for in our culture. To compensate for this, it would be good to set an intention and aspiration for your dying process to be completed in a positive manner under any circumstance. In fact, when persons die suddenly, the death dissolution process occurs and completes quite rapidly. Optimal in our circumstances would be to allow peaceful handling of a body as much as possible and lying in state with minimal disturbance for at least 24 hours, some up to 36 hours. This may involve returning the body to a cool area when you are not there. If you are trying to allow for a lying in state at your home, you can pack dry ice around the body to keep some coolness. Should the tissues start to decay, this is a sign that the dissolution has completed and there is no need to keep a body in state any longer.

It is important to understand the time period that health laws and facility policies require removal of a body. Early conversations with facility staff at a hospital, hospice or nursing home will help you find out norms and possible variation. Below are some general guidelines that will vary according to specific place. In most settings a chaplain is on staff and is a good person to contact when making preliminary plans, and they will function as an intermediary for you. You can make a preliminary request with the chaplain and nursing staff that they write into the hospital orders. Your request can state that immediately following the last breath, before any medical examination of handling of the body occurs, a crown blessing be performed. This involves a close person of the deceased, or a staff member if no family is nearby, to first touch the crown of the head and state a simple positive blessing. Geshe-la suggests the following:

After the final expiration, touch the crown of the head with a good heart. You should say a simple prayer of your choosing that wishes something good for the deceased.

You can print out this paragraph to request and give it to the floor nurse to put in your chart. All facilities make requests about and honor spiritual traditions as much as they are able. Remember to request chaplain help with this.

Emergency Room Responders

These persons are trained to take 'life support' measures until a physician declares that death has occurred. If DNR is desired, make sure you have large DNR signs posted on all doors and that you say this when you make a call for assistance. You can request staff to allow you place your hand on the crown of the persons' head and do a simple blessing prayer for their positive mind. You can even ask the first responders to do that if you are not on the scene.

Operating Room

Death in the operating room is traumatic to the staff and they generally want the body removed immediately. You can ask that someone on staff do a hand-on-crown prayer before doing post-op body prep. You can also ask staff if they can put the body in a temporary room to allow family to gather for prayer.

Hospitals

If you know someone is near death, you can inquire about a single room as time is near. Nurses generally know the signs of impending death and can make this happen. Again, it is important to talk to the Chaplain and staff about post-death options. Usually hospitals allow a body to stay in a room after death for only two hours. If you have made arrangements with a funeral home or cremation organization, you can explain your needs for minimal disturbance of the body.

Nursing Homes

It is very important to make arrangements with nursing home staff about your wishes around handling of the body. Sometimes they will set aside a room for dying patients to allow family in without disturbing other residents. Nursing home staff tends to be uncomfortable once a person has died and it may take some assistance from hospice to explore options for allowing a period for prayer after death has occurred. It is important to know how quickly they want you to remove the body and to have made prior arrangements with funeral home/cremation service.

Private home

It is important to consider the needs of other family members when planning a death at home. Family, friends and neighbors generally visit at the time of death and ways to manage this and keep a peaceful environment may be difficult. Further, all members of a family may not be comfortable with this, causing negative mind that is not helpful to the person undergoing transition.

Funeral home/cremation service

One excellent resource is the Funeral Consumer Alliance, a nonprofit organization that helps people understand options and prices. <http://www.fcat-nc.org/> It is best to explore possibilities ahead of time. A critical arrangement to make is transportation of the body. You can explain the need for minimal disturbance of the body and possible options that include using a body board. Cremation services can include transport, gathering room for service, prayers, and ashes in any container of your choice. Funeral homes can keep a body in state without embalming 24-36 hours and can provide a room for prayers at any time. Room fees are charged. Funeral homes in the Triangle area are very receptive to Buddhist variations

Donating Body or Body Parts

Choosing to donate organs or give your body for science can be done as an act of generosity. It is important to learn about what these processes entail at death: how long the body may remain undisturbed before being hooked up to procure organs, options for transporting and allowing bodies to lie in state before being used as cadavers. Once you have some information, you can prepare for positive transition by setting a positive intention for this act of generosity and dedicate it to benefit yourself and others.

Memorial Services

Members can sponsor a memorial service for someone who has died. The Center service occurs approximately two weeks after a death. This time marks the close of the period of identifying with the former life. Family and friends sponsoring the service have an opportunity to send special reminders to the deceased to provide positive support for the bardo journey. This part of the service is based on the *Reminders of Five Powers*. Practice meditations on the five powers are given at the close of this booklet. Although the service itself is quite formal, sponsors can personalize the program following the formal service.

In addition to a service at the center that has a very specific intent, you could also have a more traditional service for the public. Under certain circumstances, Kadampa Center's Chaplain and ordained Sangha may be able to participate in a more traditional service, if you wish.

Family Traditions

Critical to supporting positive mind at death is fostering a peaceful environment. It is important to be respectful of family traditions and diversity in belief among close friends and family. Sometimes you need to consider several options around memorial services or disposition of the body, in order to meet other family member needs and concerns. A valuable practice can be letting go of the external aspects of the dying process and imagining that any situation that unfolds, no matter how far from what you would want, is okay.

How do you practice letting go when things don't go as you would like?

How easily can you shift from focusing on external circumstances to watching how your mind is relating to the external? Can you notice tenseness in mind? Ease?

SUPPORTING OTHERS

Helping others in the dying process involves attention to motivations, tolerance for stress and unpredictability, ability to find and regain a sense of peace and centeredness, willingness to throw out conceptions about what is needed, and recognition that you, yourself, must be supported. The following section gives some suggestions about aspects to consider when engaging in these practices.

Attitudes

The focus of a dying person and that of support persons differ. A dying person is engaged with the reality of his or her mortality. A support person is attempting to offer anything that might be helpful. Both may struggle with uncertainty, a desire to act compassionately, and use time wisely. By accepting each is operating out of different view, it may be easier to set aside expectations for any encounter. Setting aside expectations relieves each person of a burden to affirm one another's intentions. A better perspective might be engaging as if each spoke a different language but with a belief that communication will somehow occur.

It is important for support persons to understand the weight they bear as caregivers and get support for that. Kadampa Center has a resource center on caregiver support and dying. Further resources are found at http://www.kadampa-center.org/death_dying.php. It is also useful to rely on others who have played this part as they can help you understand how to develop compassion for your own needs.

How do you create balance in helping others?

How do you recognize when you need to restore yourself in order to be able to benefit others?

Useful to understanding the needs of someone engaged in the acceptance of their own mortality and death process is the common hospital wisdom that it is the housekeepers who tend to provide the truest sounding boards for seriously ill patients. The housekeeper makes a regular round and attends to a regular and quiet task. The patient comes to rely on this shared time with different focus. Often a patient will ask the housekeeper very profound questions about what they're been contemplating. Their voicing is not so much for an answer but just to know whether the other knows this place of deepness. It is the sense of shared respect about the gravity of the patient's situation and the steadiness of the task that allows this sacred space to open and a true exchange to occur. If you are a caregiver, you may want to find a way to do a quiet routine around the person in the early days of terminal illness. A creation of quiet routine may allow deep, simple contact later. If you are a dying person, you may want

to be more receptive and inviting of being near someone engaged in routine tasks. Learning to be with someone without need to talk is a skill and it is a great gift.

To support a dying person, provide an environment that allows them to go inward. Take time to notice what is or is not helpful to them because they may not know how to ask and try to arrange for those things. This could be anything – certain prayers, movies, music, posters, special people, etc.

However much we wish that others be free of pain and suffering, we must begin with our own mind. When we worry about others, we can work on removing that worry from our mind. We can work to find peace in our heart, to create room enough for all that does not go as expected, for discomfort and yet have that be okay.

As you see yourself able to remember, use, or not use what you have, you can develop compassionate awareness toward your own attempts. The compassionate sensitivity can develop humor and openhearted acceptance of who you are. This compassionate sensitivity can be a great gift to someone who is dying and may expect more of themselves and feel discouraged.

Just as the dying person may be relying on their personal heart practices, you have an opportunity to see which of yours arise spontaneously for you in the effort to being supportive. You can practice with dharma friends at the center and can ask Sangha and Geshe Gelek for specific practices that might help you. Even if you are not a Buddhist practitioner or are new to Buddhism, you can ask for practices that are simple and understandable to you. Benefits from any practice are realized through the power of intention. It is important to engage in any sort of practice with clear intention. This means you must understand, and take to heart, what you are doing. Buddhist practices are not magical. The practices that are right and effective for you will be the ones you understand can take to heart. It is very important to get advice from Sangha and Geshe Gelek before attempting to do a practice or ritual because it is your heart-based connection that gives it power, not the words or actions.

Just as the dying person may turn to a favorite prayer, mantra or passage that has touched his or her heart, you may also find yourself wanting to do this. When something has touched your heart, it is good to ask Sangha or Geshe-la to help you understand that and support your use of that as a practice. Always feel free to ask for spiritual support to find practices that help you.

Opportunities

Kadampa Center is trying to grow itself as a strong support community for its members during the lifetime changes of its members. This means members must strive to educate themselves on the means and tools for caring for one another.

Educating yourself on death and dying care can occur through formal hospice, nursing home, and hospital volunteering. Members who have had this training can let others know about their skills and willingness to share with others. Reading books on the caring aspect of dying support, as well as books about grief and loss, joy and celebration, are also helpful. Suggested readings are found at http://www.kadampa-center.org/death_dying.php.

Practices

Tibetan Buddhism offers many great practices around death. Every practice has a purpose in terms of accepting death's reality and what can be gained from that particular acceptance. For example, the eight point mind-training death meditation is enormously helpful in motivating a practitioner to recognize that life can be short and that the time to develop skills is when your health remains. The death dissolution practice is enormously helpful in depicting stages of death. For some it serves as a preview, orientation and may lessen fear of death. For others it is a concentrated practice to make optimum use of opportunities in the dying process. Both of these, however, are practices best learned long before death approaches.

In any contemplation of death practice, it is important to recognize where you truly are and what tools you have to manage fear, attain a sense of peacefulness and open-heartedness. A checking in of what you have right now parallels somewhat the task of a dying person. That supportive of a dying person is to check out your own current tools.

What are your current tools?

Signing up for the prayer group email to get names to dedicate at the end of your personal practices in your home is a good way to remain actively aware of death and illness. It is also a way to practice helping in a small but meaningful way. Email dedications@kadampa-center.org to be added to the group.

Doing home visits, providing transportation, meals, etc. are ways to help a family where someone is dying. An effort to develop Kadampa Neighborhoods has begun to provide a basis for establishing person-to-person networks and social interconnectedness that can be relied on when persons are dying. Please find out how to join or start a neighborhood near you.

Offering to do prayers and practices that are familiar to you or ones you would like to practice more is a great gift to someone who is dying. You can offer this in their home, at the Center or even on their behalf. Doing prayer practices with someone else creates enormous benefit for all persons.

Have you engaged in any of these opportunities yet?

CONTEMPLATING THE BENEFITS OF THE FIVE POWERS REMINDERS TO THE DECEASED

The five powers (white seed, familiarity, regret/repudiation, determination/resolve, and prayer/aspiration) are the heart of lifelong practice. The instructions on these powers (see *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* by Pabongka Rinpoche and at http://www.amitabhahospice.org/public/spiritual_support/five_powers.php) are closely tied to Mahayana Buddhist practices. Practiced during a lifetime, one engages with them slightly differently when preparing for death. Kadampa Center incorporates into its memorial program a reminder to the deceased that he/she has practiced some aspect of these powers during life. During the service, family and/or close friends remind the deceased about these habits to help them rely on them during the bardo passageway. Each of these powers represents an intentional force that allows positive arisings, thus reminding the deceased at a critical juncture in the bardo experience of those powerful positive forces already available to them is a great gift.

Because Buddhist practitioners differ widely in where they are on the stages of the path, and because many westerners drawn to Buddhism may not fully embrace all of the Buddhist views, our memorial program allows the expression of a conventional view of the five powers to permit families to offer this blessing in a simple, pure-hearted way. To help us grow as a support community, the following meditation is offered. The purpose of this meditation is to help you practice insight into how we all recognize these positive forces. With this recognition we may be able to see more deeply into the positive habits of a loved one's life and of these reminders to help them move toward a positive rebirth while they are in the bardo.

The following meditations are intended to help you recognize these five powers from ordinary appearance.

The Power of the White Seed

In Buddhist practice the power of the white seed is the power of the life effort to develop virtue through purification of negativity and accumulation of virtuous body, speech and mind. Take a moment to think back to when you were a child or much younger than you are now. Think back to someone in your life who, at that time, you recognized as a virtuous person.

Who was that person?

What was the nature of their virtue?

What did their virtue allow you?

The Power of Familiarity

All of us have positive habits. And these positive habits create benefits for ourselves and others. Take a moment- to think about positive actions that come easily to you. What are these?

Which have these have others mentioned they see in you?

How comfortable are you in rejoicing about what comes easily to you?

The Power of Regret (or Repudiation)

Regret is not guilt. Regret is the ownership and recognition of harm done with a genuine wish not to repeat this harm. Repudiation is the rejection of future actions that would cause this harm. Regret is the positive aspect or recognizing that one has done harm. It is the motivation that brings about the wish to cease that harm and thus it has tremendous positive power

Think of someone who offered a genuine apology to you.

What did that allow?

What was the storyline that you held before the apology? How did the apology make the storyline seem meaningless?

Think of a small negativity you may have done today or recently. Can you feel compassion for yourself? Understanding that we all act negatively on the basis of ignorance, aversion or attachment can help us activate regret and not guilt.

We choose to repudiate the basis of our negative action —we regret acting out of that basis because that basis always leads to suffering. Our regret motivates us to act next time with compassion or equanimity.

Think about a situation where you witnessed someone exercising restraint. Perhaps that skill of restraint was developed as a result of regret.

Power of Determination (Resolve)

As a Buddhist practice, this power refers to our determination to complete the path to enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. As a conventional force, this power refers to strong intention. At the beginning of every conscious act we engage in, it is wonderful to be clear about intention. Setting positive intention directs the action to positive ends.

The power of conventional determination is found in sincere commitment to see something through to fruition. For this to be positive, the intention to benefit is necessary

Think of friends and family. Each person may engage with life with determination to bring about some positive benefit. What different kinds of positive benefits do you see those around you striving to realize?

The Power of Prayer (Aspiration)

In Buddhist practice we engage our efforts in order to follow the path to enlightenment. The gap between where we are now and where we hope to go may be big or small. Until we attain enlightenment, we engage in practices based on differing kinds of faith. The power of prayer is wishing the positive potential created manifests in the most beneficial manner. Sometimes people see the results of prayer, sometimes not. Dedications at the end of every positive practice are prayers for benefit.

From a conventional perspective, think of actions you engage in that are dedicated to the benefit of others.

Are there some you do on faith alone?

Are these some you've done and actually seen the benefit?

Take a moment to recognize how powerful and positive are our wishes that others realize happiness.

REJOICING

Think about the time you have spent reflecting on illness, death and dying, and how to develop a positive mind. Consider how meaningful the work you have done is to your life and the people who care about you. Stop and take time now to rejoice in the efforts you have made and the time well-spent.

Also rejoice in the efforts of the many people who contributed to this book – the writer, volunteers and staff of Kadampa Center, Buddhist masters such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama who gave teachings on this subject, Lama Zopa Rinpoche and the FPMT which makes this all possible, the people who financially support the organizations...keep going! The list is endless!