

# Create a Conducive Environment for a Peaceful Death

Lama Zopa Rinpoche, in his book *How to Enjoy Death*, gives sound advice about exactly how to create an environment that will encourage the dying person to feel peaceful and at rest. The editor of the book, Robina Courtin, has pulled together tips given by Lama Zopa during forty years of teachings.

In short, here are the things you can do:

- Make the place beautiful
- Display Holy Objects
- Adopt the appropriate body posture and bed direction
- No smoking
- No pets or animal skins at the end
- Emotions calm and peaceful; don't cry or plead
- Pictures and statues of your spiritual teachers and gurus to look at
- Holy mantras and prayers to look at or read
- A small stupa to touch
- Holy objects like blessed cords or prayer wheels to touch

**The Room:** You should make the room as beautiful as possible: a calm, serene, peaceful environment is so important. There should be beautiful views, beautiful art, flowers – flowers give a very spiritual feeling. The point is to put positive imprints on your loved one's mind. If their mind is elevated, they will not be afraid of dying.

**Display Holy Images:** Display images of the buddhas and your loved one's gurus. If they're not Buddhist, you could have images from their own religion, such as Mary or Jesus or Shiva. Put things around nicely.

**Posture and bed direction:** If possible, your loved one should be lying with their head facing towards the north, which means they are facing west, which is where Amitabha Buddha's pure land is. Again, adapt the position to whatever is recommended in the religion of the dying person.

For Buddhists, it is good to practise sleeping in the 'lion posture' in preparation for dying in this position, which is how Buddha himself passed away. Lying in this position reminds the dying person of the Buddha, that they are following in his footsteps.

**No smoking:** Do not allow anyone to smoke anywhere near the dying person. Besides causing physical problems, without question smoking is harmful spiritually.

**No pets or animal skins:** You should not allow any cats or dogs in the room with your loved one, especially cats – it's said that their fur is polluted. It is said in some texts that pets and skins make the transference of consciousness to a pure land more difficult.

**Emotional calm:** You must not create a situation that disturbs your loved one's mind or makes them angry or upset. Don't have anyone emotional in the room, especially when death is close. It is best if people don't cry within hearing distance of your loved one, as this creates clinging to this life in their mind.

And you should not hold onto them. Crying or pleading with them not to die will not keep them alive and will only agitate them and make their death more difficult.

**What to see and touch:** It might be that you won't be able to follow all of the advice here if your loved one is not at home or is not in a private room in a hospital or hospice. Understand the essential points and do the best you can.

Make sure the various images of your loved one's guru, the buddhas etc, are close to their bed where they can see them easily. Merely looking at them helps purify negative karma and sows the seeds for enlightenment. It is also good to write a message, some advice and have that put in a frame. Seeing that, too, purifies their mind and helps them collect merit equal to the sky.

**The Tibetan Buddhist Tradition:** In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition there are 'Ten Powerful Mantras' and 'Five Great Mantras' that are very beneficial for the dying person to see and/or hear at the time of death. One of these is the mantra of the Buddha Akshobhya or Mitrukpa (also spelt Mitrugpa) in Tibetan. Mitrukpa is the 'patron saint' of the Pure Land of the Indestructible Buddha.

*Mantra of the Buddha Mitrugpa: The Indestructible Buddha*

**NAMO RATNA TRAYAYA,  
OM KAMKANI KAMKANI,  
ROTSANI ROTSANI,  
TROTANI TROTANI,  
TRASANI TRASANI,  
TRATIHANA TRATIHANA,  
SARWA KARMA PARAM PARANI,  
ME SARWA SATTVA NENTSA SOHA.**

Lama Zopa Rinpoche says that if you have a precious holy text near you or touching you when you are dying you will get blessings and won't need someone to perform 'phowa'.

You can also use a small stupa to bless a dying person, in particular a stupa that contains powerful mantras. From time to time place the stupa on your loved one's chest or let them hold it. Every time the stupa touches them their negative karma is purified. To a non-Buddhist, you can say that the stupa is for peace, healing or purification.

A blessed cord, usually a piece of thin dressmaker's cord, can be put on the body or around the neck, wrist or arm. The cord can purify much negative karma.

Having a prayer wheel near your loved one is another powerful way of ensuring a good death and a better rebirth.

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