

What Will Happen to Me After I Die?

A Tibetan Buddhist Perspective ^[1]

Introduction

The Tibetan Book of the Dead is probably 'The most celebrated and widely read work of Tibetan literature outside of Tibet', an 'Extraordinary guide to the experiences of living, dying, death and rebirth'.

It gives a detailed account of the many and varied visions we may experience when our consciousness leaves our body and we enter the intermediate state or bardo between this life and the next one. According to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, we remain in this bardo for up to 49 days by which time we have found a rebirth.

Below there are some excerpts from Graham Coleman's wonderful book called *Meditations on Living, Dying and Loss – The Essential Tibetan Book of the Dead*. In the bardo, we start by experiencing vivid 'dreams', that initially involve what we might call 'peaceful deities'. If we do not recognize these dreams as projections of our own mind, but instead believe them to be real, we are then confronted with 'wrathful deities' who try to wake us up to the reality of what might happen to us.

Apparently, for many people, the bardo can be a frightening experience. For others it can be blissful and transforming. It is well to be prepared beforehand for what one might encounter. It is good to remember that what we experience in the bardo are karmic imprints on our mindstream. When we practice mindfulness now, and try to live ethically with a good heart, we are training our mind in practices that will help us through the bardo, without falling into the animal, anguished spirit, or hell realms.

Here is a taste of the text that follows in the other sections below:

O Child of Buddha Nature, when your mind and body separate, the pure luminous apparitions of reality itself will arise: subtle and clear, radiant and dazzling, naturally bright and awesome, shimmering like a mirage on a plain in summer.

Do not fear them! Do not be terrified! Do not be awed!

They are the natural luminosities of your own actual reality. Therefore recognize them as they are!

Apparently our own fundamental 'buddha-nature' is so bright and so pure that when it arises at the moment of death, we will be frightened of it.

The 'near-death experiences' that have been documented elsewhere often speak of an encounter with a blissful white light, very similar to what the yogis and enlightened beings say will occur in the after-death state. However, all the lamas caution us against reading too much into near-death experiences: evidently they are not the same as the after-death experiences.

If you first want to get a brief idea of what is presented in the full text of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, then read the three summary sections below first:

- **Extracts from the Characteristics of the After-Death State** (pages 3 to 7)
- **Extracts from Balancing Light and Dark in the Bardo** (pages 8 to 12)
- **Extracts from Moving Towards a New Birth** (pages 13 to 24)

^[1] Contents by Len Warren of *Pure Land of the Indestructible Buddha*, Hayagriva Buddhist Centre, 64 Banksia Terrace, Kensington 6151 Western Australia, July 2017. Quotes from:

- *Meditations on Living, Dying and Loss: The Essential Tibetan Book of the Dead* by Graham Coleman, Viking, 2009 and
- *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: First Complete Translation* by Graham Coleman, Penguin Classics, 2005

Extracts from the Characteristics of the After-Death State [2]

The Tibetan Book of the Dead explains: “O Child of Buddha Nature, when your mind and body separate, the pure, luminous apparitions of reality itself will arise: subtle and clear, radiant and dazzling, naturally bright and awesome, shimmering like a mirage on a plain in summer. Do not fear them! Do not be terrified! Do not be awed! They are the natural luminosities of your own actual reality. Therefore recognize them as they are!

From within these lights, the natural sound of reality will resound, clear and thunderous, reverberating like a thousand peals of thunder. This is the natural sound of your own actual reality. So, do not be afraid! Do not be terrified! Do not be awed!

The body that you now have is called a ‘mental body’, it is the product of subtle propensities and not a solid corporeal body of flesh and blood. This body is described in the *tantras*:

*Having the bodily form of one’s past and emergent existences,
Complete with all sense faculties, and the power of unobstructed movement,
Endowed with miraculous abilities derived from past actions,
Visible to those similar in kind and through pure clairvoyance.*

Here, ‘past and emergent’ means that your present body, which is a product of past habitual tendencies, will resemble a body of flesh and blood, but, like a body of the auspicious eon, it will also be radiant and possess certain of the major and minor marks. Since this state is an apparitional experience of the mental body, it is called the ‘apparitional experience of the mental body in the intermediate state’.

At this time, if you are to be born as a god, you will come to experience the apparitional field of the realm of the gods. Depending on whichever of the realms you are to take birth in, whether that of the anti-gods, humans, animals, anguished spirits, or hell beings, you will come to experience its particular apparitional field.

Therefore, ‘past’ means that for three and a half days you will possess the bodily form that is a product of your past habitual tendencies and existences. And ‘emergent’ means that, after three and a half days, the apparitional field of the next realm into which you are to be born will emerge. Hence the expression ‘past and emergent’ existences.

<i>The Six Classes of Sentient Beings</i>	
1.	God realm
2.	Anti-god realm
3.	Human realm
4.	Animal realm
5.	Realm of anguished spirits or hungry ghosts
6.	Hell realm

Whatever apparitional fields emerge at this time, do not be drawn by them! Do not become attached to them! Do not cling to them! If you cling to them and become attached, you will continue to roam among **The Six Classes of Sentient Beings** and be turning toward suffering.

O Child of Buddha Nature, with a body having qualities such as these just described, you will once again see your homeland and your relatives, as if in a dream. Yet even though you call out to your relatives, they will not reply. You will see your family and relatives crying and realize: "I am dead. What should I do now?" Thinking this, you will be overwhelmed by intense suffering – you will feel like a fish expelled from the water, writhing on hot sand. Although you will suffer on realizing that you are dead, this is not helpful to you now. If you have a spiritual teacher, pray to your spiritual teacher!

At this stage, in the case of those individuals who have gathered the accumulations of merit and pristine cognition and have sincerely practiced the teachings, one will be welcomed by visions of abundant riches and one will experience manifold blissful and happy states. In the case of those individuals who are indifferent or deluded, who have been neither virtuous nor negative, one will experience neither pleasure nor pain, but only an apathetic delusion. Whichever of these happens, O Child of Buddha Nature, whatever objects of desire or blissful or happy states appear before you, do not be attached to them. Do not cling to them! Be free from attachment and clinging and mentally offer these experiences to your spiritual teacher and to the Three Precious Jewels.

You will feel deeply saddened by your existence in a mental body and wish, "O that I might obtain a physical body!" Consequently, you will experience roaming here and there in search of a body. You might even attempt, many times, to re-enter your own body, but a long time has already elapsed in the previous intermediate state of reality. In winter your body will have frozen, in summer it will have decayed. Alternatively, your relatives will have cremated it, buried it in a grave, or offered it to the birds and wild animals. Not finding a way back, you will feel utterly distressed, and you will certainly feel yourself trying to squeeze into the crevices between stones and rocks."

More Detail On...Characteristics of the After-Death State ^[6]

O Child of Buddha Nature, when your mind and body separate, the pure luminous apparitions of reality itself will arise: subtle and clear, radiant and dazzling, naturally bright and awesome, shimmering like a mirage on a plain in summer. Do not fear them! Do not be terrified! Do not be awed! They are the natural luminosities of your own actual reality. Therefore recognize them as they are!

From within these lights, the natural sound of reality will resound, clear and thunderous, reverberating like a thousand simultaneous peals of thunder. This is the natural sound of your own actual reality. So, do not be afraid! Do not be terrified! Do not be awed!

The body that you now have is called “a mental body”, it is the product of subtle propensities and not a solid corporeal body of flesh and blood. This “body” is described in the *tantras*:

*Having the bodily form of one's past and emergent existences,
Complete with all sense faculties, and the power of unobstructed movement,
Endowed with miraculous abilities derived from past actions,
Visible to those similar in kind and through pure clairvoyance.*

Here, “past and emergent” means that your present body, which is a product of your past habitual tendencies, will resemble a body of flesh and blood, but, like a body of the auspicious aeon, it will also be radiant and possess certain of the major and minor marks. Since this state is an apparitional experience of the mental body, it is called “the mental body of apparitional experience in the intermediate state.”

At this time, if you are to be born as a god, you will come to experience the apparitional field of the realm of the gods. Depending on whichever of the realms you are to take birth in, whether that of the anti-gods, humans, animals, anguished spirits, or hell beings, you will come to experience its particular apparitional field. Therefore, “past” means that for three and half days you will possess the bodily form that is a product of your past habitual tendencies and existences. And “emergent” means that, after three and a half days, the apparitional field of the next realm into which you are born will emerge. Hence the expression, “past and emergent” existences.

Whatever apparitional fields emerge at this time, do not be drawn by them! Do not become attached to them! Do not cling to them! If you cling to them and become attached, you will continue to roam among the six classes of beings and be turning toward suffering. Although, until yesterday, the intermediate state of reality arose within you, you did not recognize it. As a result you have been compelled to wander here.

Now, just as was formerly introduced by your spiritual teacher, if you are able to cultivate, undistractedly, a recognition of the essential nature of reality, if you can rest and abide without grasping and without activity, directly, in the unwavering, naked awareness that is radiance and emptiness conjoined, you can attain liberation and avoid wandering yet further towards the womb entrances. If you are not able to achieve this recognition, then visualize your meditational deity, whichever it may be, or your spiritual teacher, as being seated on the crown of your head and be intensely and fervently devoted. This is most important. Again and again, do not be distracted.

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If the deceased does indeed recognize this essential nature of reality, he or she will attain liberation and avoid roaming further among the six classes of beings. But, on account of negative past actions, recognition is not easy to achieve, and therefore one should reiterate the introduction in the following words:

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O Child of Buddha Nature, listen carefully yet again! The phrase, “Complete with all sense faculties, and the power of unobstructed movement” means that, even though you may have been blind, deaf, or lame while you were alive, now, in the intermediate state, your eyes see forms, your ears hear sounds, and all your sense faculties are faultless, clear, and complete. Hence the tantra says, “Complete with all sense faculties.” Recognize this sensory clarity, for it is a sign that you have died and are wandering in the intermediate state. Remember this oral instruction!

O Child of Buddha nature, “unobstructed” means that the body which you now have is a mental body. Your awareness is now separated from its physical support. Therefore, this is not a body of solid form. Accordingly, you now have the ability to move unobstructedly; penetrating to the core of all forms, you can pass through Mount Sumeru and through dwellings, the earth, stones, boulders, and mountains. Indeed, other than your mother’s womb and the “indestructible seat,” you can pass back and forth even through Mount Sumeru itself. Remember the advice of your spiritual teacher – for this ability is a sign that you are wandering in the intermediate state of rebirth. Recognize this and pray to the meditational deity Mahakarunika [also called Avalokiteshvara (Sanskrit) or Chenrezig (Tibetan), the Buddha of Compassion].

O child of Buddha Nature, the phrase “endowed with miraculous ability derived from past actions” does not mean that you necessarily possess any enlightened attributes, or any miraculous ability in meditative stability, but that you have a miraculous ability that results from your past actions and accords with your past actions. Consequently, you will have the ability to circumambulate Mount Sumeru and the four continents in the instant. Merely in the time it takes to withdraw or hold out an arm, you can travel instantly anywhere you wish, just by thinking of your desired destination. Do not be fascinated by these diverse and haphazard miraculous abilities. Do not indulge in them. Of all the things you have the ability to recall, there is not one that you cannot make manifest. You have the ability now to manifest any aspect of your past, unimpededly. Therefore recognize this and pray to your spiritual teacher.

O Child of Buddha Nature, as for the phrase “visible to those similar in kind and through pure clairvoyance,” the words “similar in kind” mean that in the intermediate state those of a similar kind of birth will come to perceive one another. Thus, in the case of those “similar in kind” who are to be born as gods, the gods-to-be perceive one another. Similarly, those that are “similar in kind” to any of the six classes of beings will come to perceive one another. Do not become attached at the sight of these beings! Meditate on the meditational deity Mahakarunika.

The words “visible through pure clairvoyance” do not refer to the clairvoyance that results from the meritorious qualities of the gods and so forth, but they do refer to the pure clairvoyance with which those of genuine meditative concentration perceive. However, this is not a clairvoyance that can perceive the beings of the intermediate state at all times. If you are intent on seeing beings of like nature in this intermediate state, then they will be perceived. If you are not so intent, they will not be perceived. This clairvoyance will dissolve as soon as your concentration is distracted.

O Child of Buddha Nature, with a body having qualities such as these just described, you will once again see your homeland and your relatives, as if in a dream. Yet even though you call out to your relatives, they will not reply. You will see your family and relatives crying and realize: “I am dead. What should I do now?” Thinking this, you will be overwhelmed by intense suffering – you will feel like a fish expelled from the water, writhing on hot sand. Although you will suffer on realizing that you are dead, this is not helpful to you now. If you have a spiritual teacher, pray to your spiritual teacher! Pray to the meditational deity Mahakarunika! Although you will feel attached to your relatives, this is not helpful to you now. Do not be attached! Pray to Mahakarunika, and be free of suffering, awe, and fear.

O Child of Buddha Nature, your present awareness, freed from its physical support, is being blown by the coursing vital energy of past actions. Choicelessly, riding the horse of breath, it drifts directionless, like a feather on the wind. To all those who are crying, you will call out "I am here! Do not cry!" But they will not hear you. Yet again, you will realize "I am dead" and experience a very profound despair. Do not be absorbed by this suffering!

Continuously there will be greyness, like autumn twilight, with neither day nor night. The intermediate states between death and birth will last for one week or two, or three, or four, or five, or six, or seven weeks – up to forty-nine days in all. It is said that suffering in the intermediate state of rebirth will last, generally speaking, for twenty-one days. However, since the duration of this state is based on past actions, a specific number of days is not certain.

O Child of Buddha Nature, at this time the fierce, turbulent, utterly unbearable hurricane of past actions will be swirling behind you, driving you on. Do not be afraid! This is your own bewildered perception. Before you, there will be terrifying, dense, and unfathomable darkness, echoing with the cries of "Strike!" and "Kill!" Do not be afraid! Moreover, in the case of very negative beings, a swarm of carnivorous ogres will arise, executors of the unfailing law of cause and effect, brandishing an array of weapons, and screaming out aggressively "Strike!" and "Kill!" You will imagine that you are being pursued by terrifying wild animals. You will imagine that you are being pursued by hordes of people, and that you are struggling through snow, through rain, through blizzards, and through darkness. There will be the sound of mountains crumbling, of lakes flooding, of fire spreading, and the roar of fierce winds springing up.

Terrified, you will try to flee wherever you can, but your path ahead will suddenly be cut off by three precipices: one white, one red, and one black, all three awesomely frightening; you will feel as if on the verge of falling.

O Child of Buddha Nature, these are not truly precipices. They are aversion, attachment, and delusion, respectively. Know now that this is the intermediate state of rebirth, and call to the meditational deity Mahakarunika by name, and pray: "O Lord Mahakarunika, Spiritual Teacher and Precious Jewel, save me (say your name) from falling into lower existences." Pray with deep commitment in this way; do not forget!

At this stage, in the case of those individuals who have gathered the accumulations of merit and pristine cognition and have sincerely practiced the teachings, one will be welcomed by visions of abundant riches and one will experience manifold blissful and happy states.

In the case of those individuals who are indifferent or deluded, who have been neither virtuous nor negative, one will experience neither pleasure nor pain, but only an apathetic delusion. Whichever of these happens, O Child of Buddha Nature, whatever objects of desire or blissful or happy states appear before you, do not be attached to them. Do not cling to them! Be free from attachment and clinging and mentally offer these experiences to your spiritual teacher and to the Three Precious Jewels.

In particular, if these visions are of indifference, devoid of happiness or pain, abide in the experience of **The Great Seal**, where awareness is naturally present, without meditation and without distraction. This is very important.

O Child of Buddha Nature, at this time you will try to find shelter from the hurricane of past actions below bridges, in mansions, in temples or grass huts, or beside stupas and so forth, but this shelter will be momentary, it will not last. Your awareness, now separated from your body, will not rest and you will feel

reckless, angry, and afraid. Your consciousness will be faltering, superficial, and nebulous. Again you will realize: “Alas! I am dead, what should I do now?”

Reflecting on this, your consciousness will grow sad, your heart will be chilled, and you will feel intense and boundless misery. Your mind is being compelled to move on, without settling in one place. Do not indulge in all kinds of memories! Let your awareness rest in an undistracted state!

The time will come when you will realize that you have no food, except that which has been dedicated to you. As for companionship, here, similarly, there will be no certainty. These are both indications that the mental body is wandering in the intermediate state of rebirth. Your present feelings of happiness and sorrow are now driven by your past actions.

Once again, seeing your homeland, circle of friends, relatives, and even your own corpse, you will realize: “I am dead! What should I do now?” You will feel deeply saddened by your existence in a mental body and wish, “O that I might obtain a physical body!” Consequently, you will experience roaming here and there in search of a body. You might even attempt, many times, to re-enter your own body, but a long time has already elapsed in the previous intermediate state of reality. In winter your body will have frozen, in summer it will have decayed. Alternatively, your relatives will have cremated it, buried it in a grave, or offered it to the birds and wild animals. Not finding a way back, you will feel utterly distressed, and you will certainly feel yourself trying to squeeze into the crevices between stones and rocks. Torments such as these will enfold you. This being the intermediate state of rebirth, so long as you search for a body you will experience nothing but suffering. Therefore give up your clinging to a body and rest in a state of non-activity, undistractedly.

^[6] From *Meditations on Living, Dying and Loss: The Essential Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Graham Coleman, Viking, 2009, pages 107-115

^[2] From *Meditations on Living, Dying and Loss: The Essential Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Graham Coleman, Viking, 2009, page 107

Extracts from *Balancing Light and Dark in the Bardo* [3]

If you have not by this stage realized that the visions you are having are from your own mind, and do not exist independent of your mind, then the hallucinations will become more frightening as the wrathful deities appear. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* says:

“Liberation can be obtained in the intermediate state as a result of the above introduction. However, even though this introduction is given, due to negative past actions, recognition may not occur. So again, you should *call to the deceased by name* and say the following words:

<i>The Great Seal or the Four Seals of Buddhism</i>	
1.	All compounded things are impermanent
2.	All contaminated phenomena are in the nature of suffering
3.	All things have no inherent existence
4.	Nirvana is peace

O Child of Buddha Nature, (*call to the deceased by name*), listen to me. It is due to your own past actions that you are now suffering in this way. No one else is responsible – this is solely the result of your own past actions. Pray ardently now to the Three Precious Jewels [Buddha, Dharma and Sangha]. They will protect you. If you do not pray intensely now, especially if you do not know how to meditate on **The Great Seal**, or if you cannot meditate on a meditational deity, the “innate good conscience” within you will now gather together all your virtuous actions, counting them out with white pebbles, and the “innate bad conscience” within you will gather together all your non-virtuous actions, counting them out with black pebbles.

At this moment you will tremble with extreme fear, awe, and terror. You will tell lies, saying “I have not committed non-virtuous actions!” But at this, Yama [the Lord of Death] will say: “I shall consult the mirror of past actions.” In the mirror of past actions, all your virtues and non-virtues will be reflected vividly and precisely. Your attempts at deceit will be of no use. Tying a rope around your neck, Yama will drag you forward. He will sever your head at the neck, extract your heart, pull out your entrails, lick your brains, drink your blood, eat your flesh, and suck your bones. Despite this, you will not die. Even as your body is repeatedly cut into pieces, it will be continuously revived. Experiencing being cut into pieces in this way, time after time, will cause enormous suffering.

From the moment the counting of the pebbles begins, do not be afraid! Do not be terrified! Do not lie, and do not be afraid of Yama. The body you now have is a mental body; therefore, even though you experience being slain and cut into pieces, you cannot die.

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Alternatively, your mind may grow attached to your wealth and possessions, now left behind, or else, knowing that your wealth and possessions are being enjoyed and owned by others, you may become both attached to those worldly goods and also hateful toward those left behind who are using your possessions. As a result of this, a connecting link will certainly be formed to a birth among the hell beings or among the anguished spirits, even though you may have been at the point of attaining birth in one of the higher realms. However attached you may be to the wealth now left behind, you do not have the ability to enjoy it. Since it is absolutely of no use to you, abandon your attachment and yearning for the wealth that you have left behind. Let it go! Be decisive! Let it go! Cultivate devotion, and imagine that you are offering

these worldly possessions to your spiritual teacher and to the Three Precious Jewels. Rest in a state free from attachment and free from clinging.

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O Child of Buddha Nature, in short, since your awareness during this intermediate state lacks any material support, it is light and volatile, and therefore, whatever virtuous or non-virtuous perceptions arise, these are very powerful. Do not be absorbed by non-virtuous thoughts! Call to mind the virtuous practices of your past! Even if you did not engage in virtuous practices during your life, maintain purity of perception and deep devotion!

More Detail On...Balancing Light and Dark ^[7]

Liberation can be obtained in the intermediate state as a result of the above introduction. However, even though this introduction is given, due to negative past actions, recognition may not occur. So again, you should *call to the deceased by name* and say the following words:

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O Child of Buddha Nature, (*call to the deceased by name*), listen to me. It is due to your own past actions that you are now suffering in this way. No one else is responsible – this is solely the result of your own past actions. Pray ardently now to the Three Precious Jewels. They will protect you.

Comparing Your Virtuous and Non-Virtuous Actions

If you do not pray intensely now, especially if you do not know how to meditate on **The Great Seal**, or if you cannot meditate on a meditational deity, the “innate good conscience” within you will now gather together all your virtuous actions, counting them out with white pebbles, and the “innate bad conscience” within you will gather together all your non-virtuous actions, counting them out with black pebbles. At this moment you will tremble with extreme fear, awe, and terror. You will tell lies, saying “I have not committed non-virtuous actions!”

But at this, Yama [Lord of Death] will say: “I shall consult the mirror of past actions.” In the mirror of past actions, all your virtues and non-virtues will be reflected vividly and precisely. Your attempts at deceit will be of no use. Tying a rope around your neck, Yama will drag you forward. He will sever your head at the neck, extract your heart, pull out your entrails, lick your brains, drink your blood, eat your flesh, and suck your bones. Despite this, you will not die. Even as your body is repeatedly cut into pieces, it will be continuously revived. Experiencing being cut into pieces in this way, time after time, will cause enormous suffering.

From the moment the counting of the pebbles begins, do not be afraid! Do not be terrified! Do not lie, and do not be afraid of Yama. The body you now have is a mental body; therefore, even though you experience being slain and cut into pieces, you cannot die. Recognize now that, in reality, you need have no fear, because, in truth, your body is a natural form of emptiness. The acolytes of Yama, are also, in reality, natural forms of emptiness – these are your own bewildered perceptions. Your body, formed of mental propensities, is a natural form of emptiness. Emptiness cannot harm emptiness. Signlessness cannot harm signlessness. Outside, and distinct from your own bewildering perceptions, Yama, gods, malevolent forces,

the bull-headed Raksa, and so on, do not substantially exist. Recognize this! Recognize, now, that this is the intermediate state! Place your mind in the meditative stability of **The Great Seal!**

The Four Buddha Bodies

If you do not know how to meditate, directly examine the essence of that which is producing your fear and terror. This essence is a stark emptiness, completely without inherent existence in any respect whatsoever! This stark emptiness is the Buddha-body of Reality [Dharmakaya]. Yet, this emptiness is not a vacuous or nihilistic emptiness. The essential nature of this emptiness is an awesome, direct, and radiant awareness, which is the enlightened intention of the Buddha-body of Perfect Resource [Sambhogakaya]. Indeed, emptiness is radiance and the essential nature of radiance is emptiness. This indivisible, naked, unclouded, and exposed awareness, present as it is right now in a natural uncontrived state, is the Buddha-body of Essentiality [emptiness of the Dharmakaya]. Furthermore, the natural expressive power of this Buddha-body of Essentiality is the compassionate Buddha-body of Emanation [Nirmanakaya], which arises everywhere without obstruction.

O Child of Buddha Nature, listen to me now, and do not be distracted. By merely recognizing the essential nature of your experience in the above way, you will attain perfect Buddhahood, endowed with these four buddha-bodies. Do not be distracted! The division between buddhas and sentient beings is determined by this recognition. If you are distracted at this critical moment, the opportunity to escape from the swamp of suffering will be lost. It is said of this very moment:

In an instant, penetrating analysis is made.

In an instant, perfect Buddhahood is attained.

Until yesterday, because you were distracted, even though so many aspects of the intermediate states have arisen, you did not attain recognition. Up to this time, you have experienced so much fear and terror. Now, if you continue to be distracted, the lifeline of compassion, extended to you, will be cut off and you will move on to a place where there is no immediate prospect of liberation. So be careful.

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Pray to the Three Jewels and Mahakarunika

Through this introduction, even though the deceased may have failed to attain recognition previously, he or she will be able to do so at this stage and consequently attain liberation.

If, however, the deceased is a layperson, who does not know how to meditate, you should say the following words:

O Child of Buddha Nature, if you do know how to meditate you should call to mind the Buddha, the sacred teachings, the sublime assembly of monks and nuns, and the meditational deity Mahakarunika and pray to them. Meditate on all the fearful and terrifying appearances as being forms of Mahakarunika, or your meditational deity. Remember your spiritual teacher and remember the name that you received during empowerment ceremonies in the human world. Say this name to Yama Dharmaraja and do not be afraid of him. Know, now, that even if you were to plunge down over the precipices, you would not be harmed. So, abandon your fear and your terror.

Even though liberation may not have been achieved previously, if the above introduction is accepted, the deceased will attain liberation at this juncture.

Yet since there is the possibility that the deceased will not achieve recognition, even though the introduction has been given, it is very important to persevere. Therefore, once again, one should *call to the deceased by name* and say the following words:

Avoid Attachment and Aversion

O Child of Buddha Nature, your present perceptions can, like a catapult, in an instant cast you into the most awesome states, either blissful or full of suffering. Therefore, now, it is critical that your perceptions are not coloured by either attachment or aversion.

It may be that you are about to take birth in the higher realms, yet at the time when the perceptions of the higher realms occur, your living relatives, now left behind, are sacrificing and offering many animals on your behalf, dedicating this activity to you, the deceased. Corrupted perceptions will thus arise and consequently an intense aversion may well up within you, and this will form a connecting link to a birth in the hell realms. Therefore, whatever activities occur in the place that you have left behind, meditate on loving kindness, and ensure that aversion does not arise!

Alternatively, your mind may grow attached to your wealth and possessions, now left behind, or else, knowing that your wealth and possessions are being enjoyed and owned by others, you may become both attached to those worldly goods and also hateful toward those left behind who are using your possessions. As a result of this, a connecting link will certainly be formed to a birth among the hell beings or among the anguished spirits, even though you may have been at the point of attaining birth in one of the higher realms. However attached you may be to the wealth now left behind, you do not have the ability to enjoy it. Since it is absolutely of no use to you, abandon your attachment and yearning for the wealth that you have left behind. Let it go! Be decisive! Let it go! Cultivate devotion, and imagine that you are offering these worldly possessions to your spiritual teacher and to the Three Precious Jewels. Rest in a state free from attachment and free from clinging.

Maintain Purity of Perception

Once again, even when the Kankanidharani incantation for the dead is being recited for you and the "Purification of the Lower Realms" is being recited on your behalf, you may perceive, with your present subtle cognitive ability, that these rites are being performed impurely and distractedly, and that those who are performing these rituals are impure in both their commitments and vows and are careless in their conduct. As a result, you may have no confidence in them, you may form a bad opinion of them, and you may become fearfully and horribly aware of their negative past actions, etc, as well as of their impure practice of the sacred teachings and the rituals. Feeling this, you will experience the utmost sadness, and think: "Alas, they have betrayed me! They have truly betrayed me!"

As a consequence of your profound disenchantment, instead of maintaining purity of perceptions and feelings of respect, negative opinions and loss of confidence will arise within you. Thus, these perceptions and feelings will form a connecting link that will certainly propel you into the lower existences, and, in this

way, your subtle cognitive ability and the rituals recited on your behalf will not have been of benefit, but rather of great harm.

However impure may be the practice of the sacred teachings by your friends now left behind, you must maintain respect and purity of perception from the depths of your heart. Think to yourself: "My own perception is so polluted! How could the speech of the buddhas be impure! These impure perspectives have arisen as a consequence of my own impure perception, and will appear to me just as the flaws on my face will be reflected in a mirror. As for these individuals performing the rituals, in reality their bodies are the sublime community of monks and nuns, their speech is the genuine sacred teaching, and their minds are the essence of the buddhas. Therefore, I take refuge in them." Thinking thus, whatever activities occur in the place that you left behind, they will certainly be beneficial to you. It is extremely important to maintain this purity of perception. Do not forget this!

Even if you are about to be born into the lower existences, if you maintain purity of perception, and you perceive the relatives that you have left behind practicing the virtuous teachings, unstained by negativity, and you see your spiritual teachers and masters purely practicing the rituals with virtuous body, speech, and mind, you will feel great joy. Simply through this experience of great joy, even though you were about to fall into lower existences, this joy will form a connecting link, which will certainly turn you back towards the higher realms. Since there is such manifold benefit, do not now lapse into impure perception. It is extremely important to maintain purity of perception and to be unbiasedly devoted. So, be careful!

O Child of Buddha Nature, in short, since your awareness during this intermediate state lacks any material support, it is light and volatile, and therefore, whatever virtuous or non-virtuous perceptions arise, these are very powerful. Do not be absorbed by non-virtuous thoughts! Call to mind the virtuous practices of your past! Even if you did not engage in virtuous practices during your life, maintain purity of perception and deep devotion!

Prayer to Mahakarunika

Pray to your meditational deity or to Mahakarunika, and with a powerful longing repeat the following aspirational prayer:

*Now when I roam alone, separated from loved ones,
And myriad images of emptiness arise, naturally manifesting,
May the buddhas quickly release the power of their compassion,
And may the fear of the awesome and terrifying intermediate state be annulled.*

*When I experience suffering, as the result of negative past actions,
May the meditational deity Mahakarunika dispel all such misery,
And as the natural sound of reality reverberates like a thousand peals of thunder,
May all sounds be transformed into the resonance of the Six Syllables [Om ma-ni pad-me hum].*

*When I am driven on by past actions, unable to find a refuge,
May the Great Compassionate One, Mahakarunika, protect me,
And as I experience the suffering of habitual tendencies and past actions,
May the meditative stabilities of inner radiance and bliss naturally arise.*

Say this aspirational prayer with ardent longing; it will certainly lead you on to the path. Be absolutely certain that this aspirational prayer will not deceive you. This is most important!

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Through these words, the deceased will regain his or her focus, and recognition will occur. Then, liberation will be attained.

^[7] From *Meditations on Living, Dying and Loss: The Essential Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Graham Coleman, Viking, 2009, pages 107-123

^[3] From *Meditations on Living, Dying and Loss: The Essential Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Graham Coleman, Viking, 2009, page 115

Extracts from Moving Towards a New Birth [4]

O Child of Buddha Nature, if you have taken to heart the introduction that has gone before, from now on the body of your past life will grow more faint and the body of your next life will grow more vivid. At this, you will be dismayed, and you will think: "I am experiencing such misery! Now I will look for whatever kind of body I can find."

Thinking in this way, you will move haphazardly and randomly toward whatever might appear and consequently the six lights indicative of the six realms of living beings will dawn; and, according to your past actions, the light of the realm into which you are to be born will shine the most of all.

Colour of the light that dawns in the bardo	Realm of cyclic existence that the colour indicates
Dull white	God (sura)
Dull red	Anti-god (asura)
Dull blue	Human
Dull green	Animal
Dull yellow	Anguished spirit or hungry ghost (preta)
Dull smokey	Hell being (narak)

O Child of Buddha Nature, listen! What are these six lights, you may ask? A dull white light indicative of the realm of the gods will arise. A dull red light indicative of the realm of the anti-gods will arise. A dull blue light indicative of the human realm will arise. A dull green light indicative of the animal realm will arise. A dull yellow light indicative of the realm of the anguished spirits will arise, and a dull smoky light indicative of the realm of the hell beings will arise. These six lights will emerge. And at this time, your present body will take on the colour of the light of the realm into which you are to be born. O Child of Buddha Nature, at this juncture, the essential points of the oral instructions are extremely important.

Meditate now on the light that dawns as being Mahakarunika! Meditate on the thought that when the light dawns, it is Mahakarunika. This is the most profound crucial point. It is extremely important, because this oral instruction obstructs birth.

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At this stage, it is extremely important that you carefully employ the methods for obstructing the womb entrances. Principally, there are two such methods of obstruction. These are: first, the method that obstructs the person who is to enter the womb and, second, the methods that obstruct the womb that is to be entered.

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Set down above are several profound and genuine instructions for effecting the obstruction of the womb entrances. For those with high, average, or low ability it is impossible not to be liberated by these instructions. This is because: first, consciousness in the intermediate state is endowed with an, albeit corrupt, supernormal cognitive ability. Therefore, whatever one says to the deceased is heard by the deceased. Second, even if the deceased was deaf or blind while in the human world, now, in the

intermediate state, all the sensory faculties will be complete and therefore whatever is said will be apprehended. Third, since the deceased is continually being overwhelmed by fear and terror, there is an undistracted concentration on what to do; therefore, what is said will be listened to. Fourth, since the consciousness has no physical support, it is easy to guide and it can penetrate to the essence of whatever is focused upon. Additionally, since the power of retention is now many times clearer, even the mentally weak will have, in the intermediate state, a lucid awareness, by virtue of their past actions. Hence, they will have the gift of knowing how to meditate on that which is taught and the gift to assimilate such points of instruction. These are the reasons why the performance of rituals on behalf of the dead is beneficial.

It is extremely important that your motivation be firmly concentrated as you approach the womb entrance. Therefore think as follows: “Ah! For the sake of all sentient beings, I shall be born as a universal monarch, or acting purely like a great dignified sal tree, I shall be born into the brahman class, or as the child of an accomplished master, or into a family that maintains an immaculate lineage of the sacred teachings, or into a family where the mother and father are deeply devout. Then, once I have taken on a body that is blessed with the merit of being able to act on behalf of all sentient beings, I shall dedicate myself to acting on their behalf!” You must concentrate your motivation on this thought and thus enter the womb.

Nevertheless, with the exception of certain persons who have experience of this equanimity, it is difficult for being to sever themselves from the deep-seated and long-lasting disease of negative habitual tendencies. Therefore, if the deceased remains unable to be free from attachment and aversion, in the above manner, such negative beings who are of the lowest capacity may seek refuge in the animal realms or similar kinds of inferior existences. In order to counteract this, again calling to the deceased by name, you should speak as follows:

O Child of Buddha Nature, if you do not know how to choose a womb entrance and you are unable to give up your attachments and your aversion, then, regardless of which of the above appearances arise, you must call out, by name, to the Three Precious Jewels. Take refuge in them! Pray to Mahakarunika! Go forward with your head held high. Recognize that this is the intermediate state! Give up your attachment and your clinging to the friends, sons, daughters, and relatives that you have left behind. These attachments are not helpful to you now. Enter into the blue light of the human realm. Enter into the white light of the realm of the gods. Enter into the mansions of precious jewels and the gardens of delight.

More On...Moving Toward A New Birth ^[8]

Even though this introduction may have been given many times, due to the potency of strong negative past actions, recognition may be difficult. It is very beneficial, therefore, to repeat the introduction now, many times. Again, therefore, calling to the deceased by name, you should say the following words at least three times.

The Six Lights of the Six Realms of Cyclic Existence

O Child of Buddha Nature, if you have taken to heart the introduction that has gone before, from now on the body of your past life will grow more faint and the body of your next life will grow more vivid. At this, you will be dismayed, and you will think: "I am experiencing such misery! Now I will look for whatever kind of body I can find." Thinking in this way, you will move haphazardly and randomly toward whatever might appear and consequently the six lights indicative of the six realms of living beings will dawn; and, according to your past actions, the light of the realm into which you are to be born will shine the most of all.

O Child of Buddha Nature, listen! What are these six lights, you may ask? A dull white light indicative of the realm of the gods will arise. A dull red light indicative of the realm of the anti-gods will arise. A dull blue light indicative of the human realm will arise. A dull green light indicative of the animal realm will arise. A dull yellow light indicative of the realm of the anguished spirits will arise, and a dull smoky light indicative of the realm of the hell beings will arise. These six lights will emerge. And at this time, your present body will take on the colour of the light of the realm into which you are to be born. O Child of Buddha Nature, at this juncture, the essential points of the oral instructions are extremely important.

Meditate now on the light that dawns as being Mahakarunika! Meditate on the thought that when the light dawns, it is Mahakarunika. This is the most profound crucial point. It is extremely important, because this oral instruction obstructs birth.

Meditative Absorption Focussed on Emptiness

Alternatively, you should meditate for a long time on your meditational deity, whichever it may be. Meditate on the deity appearing like an illusion, completely free from inherent existence.

Alternatively, you can focus your intention on whichever Buddha field you wish: on Manifest Joy (Abhirati), on Dense Array (Ghanavyuha), on Alakavati, on Mount Potalaka, or you may wish to focus on coming into the presence of Padmasambhava of Oddiyana, in the celestial palace of Lotus Light, or indeed on whichever Buddha field you wish to enter. Be single-minded! Do not be distracted! Immediately upon establishing this intention, you will take birth in the chosen Buddha field. Yet again, alternatively, if you wish to proceed into the presence of Maitreya in the realm of The Joyful (Tusita), think as follows: "At this juncture in the intermediate state, the moment has come for me to proceed into the presence of the king of the sacred teachings, Maitreya, in the realm of The Joyful. Therefore, it is there that I will go!" If you focus your intention on this thought, you will take birth, miraculously, in the heart of a lotus, in the presence of Maitreya.

Nevertheless, with the exception of certain persons who have experience of this equanimity, it is difficult for beings to sever themselves from the deep-seated and long-lasting disease of negative habitual tendencies. Therefore, if the deceased remains unable to be free from attachment and aversion, in the above manner, such negative beings who are of the lowest capacity may seek refuge in the animal realms or similar kinds of inferior existences. In order to counteract this, again calling to the deceased by name, you should speak as follows:

O Child of Buddha Nature, if you have not attained recognition as a result of the introductions that have gone before, then based on the potency of your past actions, the perception will arise that you are moving upward, or moving horizontally, or moving downward. As this occurs, you should meditate on Mahakarunika. Remember this!

Yet again, as described before, the experience will arise of being pursued by whirlwinds, blizzards, hail, or fog, and a crowd of people, and you will be trying to escape. Those who are lacking in merit will experience that they are fleeing towards a place of suffering. Those with merit will experience arriving at a place of happiness.

O Child of Buddha Nature, now, at this point, the signs of the environment into which you are to be born, on one among the four continents, will arise. Specifically for this moment, there are many profound essential points of oral instruction. Therefore listen, now, without distraction. Even though, previously, you have not taken to heart the essential instructions introduced to you, you can do so now, for even those whose practice is very weak can understand and apply one of the following essential instructions. So listen, now, without distraction.

The Two Main Methods to Obstruct the Womb Entrances

At this stage, it is extremely important that you carefully employ the methods for obstructing the womb entrances. Principally, there are two such methods of obstruction. These are: first, the method that obstructs the person who is to enter the womb and, second, the methods that obstruct the womb that is to be entered.

First, Obstruct the Person: Meditate on Emptiness

The oral teaching for the method that obstructs the person who is to enter the womb is as follows:

O Child of Buddha Nature, (*call to the deceased by name*), visualize now your meditational deity, whichever it may be, with vibrancy. Meditate on the deity as vividly apparent, yet completely lacking in inherent existence, like the reflection of the moon in water. If you do not have a specific meditational deity, then visualize the Lord Mahakarunika, again with great vibrancy. Then, gradually, dissolve the image of the meditational deity from the extremities inward, until it disappears completely and then meditate on the resultant union of inner radiance and emptiness, which is utterly free from any objective referent. This is the profound essential point. Meditate in this way, for it is said that by this means entry into a womb will be averted.

Should even this introduction not cause obstruction and should the deceased continue to draw closer to the act of entering a womb, there are also the profound oral instructions that obstruct the womb entrances. These are as follows:

Second, Obstruct the Womb: There Are Five Ways

O Child of Buddha Nature, listen carefully! In the recitation of the “Root Verses of the Six Intermediate States,” the following lines are spoken. Repeat these, now, after me:

*Alas, now as the intermediate state of rebirth arises before me,
I must with one-pointed intention concentrate my mind,
And resolutely connect with the residual potency of my virtuous past actions.
I must obstruct the womb entrances and call to mind the methods of reversal.
This is the time when perseverance and purity of perception are imperative.
I must give up all jealousy and meditate on my spiritual teacher with consort.*

It is extremely important to clearly repeat these verses aloud, to arouse your memories of past virtues, to meditate on this prayer, and to experientially cultivate its meaning.

The meaning of these verses is as follows: the line “now as the intermediate state of rebirth arises before me” explains that you are now roaming in the intermediate state of rebirth. As an indication of this, if you look into water, you will not see your reflection. Your body does not even cast a shadow. These are both signs that you do not have a solid body of flesh and blood, but that you are roaming, with a subtle mental body, in the intermediate state of rebirth.

Now, therefore, you “must with one-pointed intention concentrate your mind,” undistractedly. At this moment, this singularity of intention is by itself the most important factor. It is like a horse being controlled by the use of a bridle. Whatever your intention focuses upon, this will come about. Do not turn your mind to negative past actions! Call to mind, now, your connections in the human world with the sacred teachings and instructions, remember the empowerments and oral transmissions previously received, remember your connection with this “Great Liberation by Hearing in the Intermediate States”, and so forth.

It is extremely important that you “resolutely connect with the residual potency of your virtuous past actions.” Do not forget! Do not be distracted! The present moment is the dividing line between progression and regression. The present moment is the time when, by lapsing into laziness, even for an instant, you will experience constant suffering. The present moment is the time when, by concentrating with a singular intention, you will achieve constant happiness. Concentrate your mind with a single-pointed intention. “Resolutely connect with the residual potency of your virtuous past actions.”

Now is the time when you must obstruct the womb entrances. It is said in the verses that you “must obstruct the womb entrances and call to mind the methods of reversal. This is the time when perseverance and purity of perception are imperative.” You have now arrived at that stage. Your priority now is to obstruct the womb entrances. There are five methods that will bring about obstruction of the womb entrances, so keep them carefully in mind.

Method #1 to Obstruct Womb: Spiritual Teacher With Consort

O Child of Buddha Nature, at this stage, the perception will arise of a male and a female engaging in sexual intercourse. Upon perceiving this, do not enter between the male and the female, but be mindful and “meditate on” the male and the female as being your “spiritual teacher with consort.” Prostrate yourself before them and make offerings, projecting these from your mind. Be intensely devoted and request instructions from your spiritual teacher and consort. Just by intently focusing your thought in this way, the womb entrances will certainly be obstructed.

Method #2 to Obstruct Womb: Personal Meditation Deities

Should the womb entrances not be successfully obstructed through this method and you are nonetheless drawn ever nearer to entering the womb, then meditate now on the spiritual teacher and consort as being your personal meditational deities, whichever these may be, or, if you do not have a personal meditational deity, meditate on the spiritual teacher and consort as being Mahakarunika and his consort. Again, make offerings, projecting these from your mind and generate the thought very intently: "I request the attainment of your spiritual accomplishment!" Thereby, the womb entrances will be obstructed.

Method #3 to Obstruct Womb: Reverse Attachment and Aversion

Should even this not obstruct the womb entrances, and you are still drawn ever nearer to entering the womb, the third method, which reverses attachment and aversion, is now to be revealed to you. These are four modes of birth: birth from an egg, birth from a womb, supernormal birth, and birth from warmth and moisture. Among these, the birth from an egg and birth from a womb are very similar, in that in both cases you will see the male and the female engaged in sexual union, as described above.

If, based on either attachment or aversion, you enter a womb at this time, you will be born as a horse, bird, dog, human, or whatever is appropriate. If you are to be born as a male, you will experience the perceptions of a male. You will feel intense aversion toward the father and you will feel jealousy and attachment toward the mother. If you are to be born as a female, you will experience the perceptions of a female. You will feel jealousy and attachment toward the mother and you will feel intense attachment and affection toward the father.

This emotional arousal will cause you to enter a womb. Here you will experience the "co-emergent delight", in the midst of the meeting between the sperm and the ovum. From that state of bliss you will faint into unconsciousness, and as time passes the embryo will come to maturity in the womb, moving through its various stages of development, that is, the clotting of the embryo, the oval elongation of the embryo, and so forth until, finally, you will emerge from the womb and open your eyes.

Now, you will have turned into a puppy. Previously having been a human being, you will now have become a dog. So, consequently, you will suffer in a dog kennel, or, similarly, in a pigsty, or an anthill, or a wormhole, or else you may be born as a baby bull, a goat, a sheep, and so forth. There is no way back. You will experience all manner of sufferings in a state of great obscurity and delusion.

Through this process you will continue to remain within the six classes of living beings, including the realms of the hell beings and the anguished spirits. You will be completely drained by boundless sufferings. There is nothing more awesome or frightening than this! Oh dear! This is truly terrifying! Oh dear, Oh dear, in this way, those who lack the oral instruction of a genuine spiritual teacher will indeed fall into the great abyss of cyclic existence and be tortured unbearably by continuous sufferings. Rather than this, listen to my words! Understand this instruction of mine. I will reveal now an oral instruction that obstructs the womb entrances, through the reversal of attachment and reversal of aversion. Listen and understand this well! It is said in the "*Root Verses of the Six Intermediate States*:"

I must obstruct the womb entrances and call to mind the methods of reversal.

This is the time when perseverance and purity of perception are imperative.

I must give up all jealousy and meditate on my spiritual teacher with consort.

As is described in the oral instruction above, if you are to be born as a male, you will feel attachment toward the mother and aversion toward the father. If you are to be born as a female, you will feel

attachment to the father and aversion toward the mother. Thus you will come to experience jealousy, a conflict of attachment and aversion. Specific to this stage, there is a profound oral instruction.

O Child of Buddha Nature, when the feelings of attachment and aversion arise, meditate as follows: “Alas, sentient beings such as I, with such negative past actions, have, up until now, roamed in cyclic existence. I have continued to wander in this way, being driven on by my feelings of attachment and aversion. If, especially at this time, I continue to be influenced by attachment and aversion, there is a danger that I will roam into the limitlessly diverse states of cyclic existence and risk sinking into the ocean of suffering, for a very long time. Therefore, now, from the very beginning, I must not generate attachment or aversion. Oh dear, Oh dear! As of now, I shall never again be motivated by attachment or aversion.”

By concentrating intently on this thought, as it is said in the *tantras*, the womb entrances will be obstructed by this singular intent alone. O Child of Buddha Nature, do not be distracted! Concentrate your mind on this thought, with a one-pointed intention.

Method #4 to Obstruct Womb: Illusion-Like Nature of Phenomena

Yet if, even having done this, the womb entrances are still not obstructed and the deceased draws ever nearer to entering a womb, then the womb entrances should be obstructed by giving the oral instruction on the unreal and illusion-like nature of all phenomena:

O Child of Buddha Nature, meditate in the following way! “Alas! The father and the mother in sexual union, the rain, the blackness, the hurricane, the thunderous sound, the fearful and terrifying experiences – the nature of these and all phenomena is illusion-like. In whatever form phenomena rise, they are not real. All substantial things are unreal and false, like a mirage. They are not permanent. They are not changeless. So what is the purpose of my attachment to these perceptions? What is the purpose of my awe and terror?

That which is non-existent, I am seeing as existent! In reality, all these things that I perceive are the perceptions of my own mind. Yet the essential nature of mind is primordially non-existent, like an illusion. So how is it possible for things to exist externally, in their own rights? Since I have not understood this before, I have always regarded the non-existent as existent. I have regarded the unreal as real. I have regarded illusions as truth. This is why I have roamed in cyclic existence for such a long time.

Now, yet again, if I do not realize that all these phenomena are illusions, I will continue to roam in cyclic existence, interminably, and without doubt I will drown in a swamp of every manner of suffering. Now, I must realize that all these phenomena are completely devoid of substantial existence, even for a single instant. In reality, they are like a dream, like an illusion, like an echo, like a celestial city, like a mirage, like a reflection, like an optical illusion, like the moon reflected in water. It is absolutely certain that these phenomena are not truly real, but that they are false. Through this singular resolve, I will blow apart my apprehension of their true existence. Through utter confidence in this meditation, my apprehension of self-existence will be reversed.” By knowing from the depths of your heart that all these phenomena are unreal, the womb entrances will certainly be obstructed.

Method #5 to Obstruct Womb: Inner Radiance

However, if, despite this teaching being given, the apprehension of true existence is not shattered, and the womb entrances are therefore not obstructed and the deceased draws ever nearer to entering a womb, then there is a final profound oral instruction:

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O Child of Buddha Nature, if, even after having engaged in the above meditation, the womb entrances have still not been obstructed, now, according to the fifth profound oral instruction, you must obstruct the womb entrances by meditating on inner radiance.

The method of meditation is as follows: “Alas! All seemingly substantial phenomena are expressions of my own mind. Yet in reality, this mind is of the nature of emptiness, it is beyond creation and beyond cessation.” By focussing your thought in this way, your mind should naturally return to an uncontrived and stainless state. Let the mind rest in this, its natural state, directly in itself, in the same way, for example, as water is poured into water. Let the mind rest in its natural flow, clear, uncontricted, uncontrived, and relaxed. By following this method you can be sure that the womb entrances to the four modes of birth will certainly be obstructed. Meditate again and again in this way, until the womb entrances are closed.

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Set down above are several profound and genuine instructions for effecting the obstruction of the womb entrances. For those with high, average, or low ability it is impossible not to be liberated by these instructions.

Receptive, Powerful Consciousness of the Bardo

This is because: first, consciousness in the intermediate state is endowed with an, albeit corrupt, supernormal cognitive ability. Therefore, whatever one says to the deceased is heard by the deceased. Second, even if the deceased was deaf or blind while in the human world, now, in the intermediate state, all the sensory faculties will be complete and therefore whatever is said will be apprehended. Third, since the deceased is continually being overwhelmed by fear and terror, there is an undistracted concentration on what to do; therefore, what is said will be listened to. Fourth, since the consciousness has no physical support, it is easy to guide and it can penetrate to the essence of whatever is focused upon. Additionally, since the power of retention is now many times clearer, even the mentally weak will have, in the intermediate state, a lucid awareness, by virtue of their past actions. Hence, they will have the gift of knowing how to meditate on that which is taught and the gift to assimilate such points of instruction. These are the reasons why the performance of rituals on behalf of the dead is beneficial.

Indeed, it is extremely important to persevere in the reading aloud of this “Great Liberation by Hearing in the Intermediate States” for the entire forty-nine days. For if liberation is not achieved at one introduction, it can be achieved at another. This is the reason why, not just one, but many introductions should be given.

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Then again, there are several kinds of persons who do not achieve liberation, despite having received the above introductions and having been taught the above visualization techniques. This lack of ability comes

about through limited familiarity with virtuous past actions, extensive primal familiarity with non-virtuous past actions, and the potency and great force of negative obscurations.

Choosing the Environment of Rebirth

So, at this stage, if the womb entrances have still not been successfully obstructed as described above, there is a profound oral instruction for choosing an appropriate womb entrance, which should now be presented. Again, one should request the assistance of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, take refuge in the Three Precious Jewels, and cultivate an altruistic intention. Then, as before, calling to the deceased by name, three times, one should say the following words:

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O Child of Buddha Nature, (repeat the name of the deceased), listen carefully. Even though many authentic introductions to the instructions have previously been given to you, up until this stage you have not taken these to heart. Now, if you have been unable to obstruct the womb entrances, the time has actually come for you to assume a body. There are not just one, but several different kinds of profound and genuine instructions that relate to your choice of an appropriate womb entrance. So comprehend these well. Do not be distracted. Listen without distraction! Understand, and maintain a firm intention!

O Child of Buddha Nature, now, if you are to be born as a human, the indications and signs that relate to the environment into which you may be born, on one among the four continents, will arise. You must recognize these indications! Indeed, you must choose the continent based on a careful examination of these indications of the environment into which you may be born.

If you are to take birth on the Eastern Continent, Videha, you will see a lake, adorned by male and female swans. Do not be drawn toward this place! Call to mind the methods of reversal and apply these! For were you to go there, even though it is a happy and tranquil place, it is an environment where the sacred teachings do not flourish. So do not enter this continent!

If you are to take birth on the Southern Continent, Jambudvipa, you will see grand and delightful mansions. If indeed you can enter here, do so!

If you are to take birth on the Western Continent, Aparagodaniya, you will see a lake adorned around its shore by male and female horses. Do not be drawn toward this place! Call to mind the methods of reversal and apply these! For even though it is a place of great wealth and abundant resources, it is an environment where the sacred teachings do not flourish. So do not enter this continent!

If you are to take birth on the North Continent, Uttarakuru, you will see a lake adorned around its shores by cattle or a lake adorned by trees. Recognize these appearances as indications of the birth that you are about to assume! Do not enter there! For even though this is a place where there is longevity and which has merit, it is an environment where the sacred teachings do not flourish. So do not enter this continent!

If you are to take birth as a god you will see delightful celestial palaces, many-storied and composed of diverse jewels. If indeed you can, you should enter here!

If you are to take birth as an anti-god, you will see exquisite groves and spinning wooden torches creating wheels of fire. Do not enter there, under any circumstances! Call to mind the methods of reversal and apply these!

If you are to take birth as an animal, you will see rocky caverns, empty hollows, and straw sheds, shrouded by mist. Do not enter there!

If you are to take birth as an anguished spirit, you will see tree-stumps, black protruding silhouettes, blind desolate gorges, or total darkness. Were you to go there, you would be born as an anguished spirit and experience the manifold sufferings of insatiable hunger and thirst. Do not enter there! Call to mind the methods of reversal and apply these! Be courageous and strong!

If you are to take birth as a hell being, you will hear the songs of those of negative past actions. Or, quite simply, you will feel powerless and compelled to enter. Whereupon, the perception will arise that you are moving into a land of darkness, where there are black and reddened houses, black earth-pits, and black roads. Were you to be drawn to this place, you would enter the hells and experience the searing unbearable sufferings of heat and cold. Be careful! Do not enter into the midst of this, for there will be no opportunity to turn back. Do not enter there, under any circumstances! As it is said in the root verses: "You must obstruct the womb entrances and call to mind the methods of reversal." These are wholly necessary now!

Being Pursued by Avenging Forces

O Child of Buddha Nature, although you do not wish to move forward, you are powerless not to do so. The avenging forces, who are the executors of the unfailing laws of cause and effect, will be pursuing you. You will have no choice but to move forward. Before you, the avengers and executors will be leading the way. The experience will arise of trying to flee from these forces, of trying to flee from the darkness, from the most violent windstorms, from the thunderous tumult, the snow, the rain, the hail, and the turbulent blizzards, which swirl around you. Frightened, you will set off to seek a refuge and you will find protection inside an enclosed space, such as within the mansions, just described, or in rock-shelters, or holes in the ground, or among trees, or within the bud of a lotus flower. Hiding here, you will be very hesitant to come out, and you will think: "I should not leave here now." You will be very reluctant to be separated from this protected place and you will become utterly attached to it. Then because you are so very hesitant to go outside, where you would be confronted by the fears and terrors of the intermediate state, you will, because of this fear and awe, continue to hide away.

Thus, you will assume a body, however utterly bad that may be, and you will, in time, come to experience all manner of sufferings. This experience of wanting to hide is a sign that you are being obstructed by malignant forces and carnivorous ogres. Particularly related to this stage, there is a profound oral instruction. Listen, therefore, and understand!

At this time, when you are being pursued by avenging forces and you feel powerless to escape and you are terrified and frightened, you must, in an instant and with perfect recall, visualize the Transcendent Lord Mahottara Heruka, or Hayagriva, or Vajrapani, or else, if you have one, your personal meditational deity. Visualize the deity as having a huge Buddha-body, with thick limbs, standing upright, in a terrifying wrathful manifestation, which pulverizes every form of obstructing force.

By virtue of this practice, insulated from the avengers by the blessing and compassion of the meditational deity, you will secure the ability to choose a womb entrance. This is a profound and genuine crucial point of the oral instructions. So, understand this now!

Moreover, O Child of Buddha Nature the gods inhabiting the form realms of meditative concentration, and similar beings of the higher realms, take birth through the potency of their meditative stability. Also, certain classes of malevolent forces, including the anguished spirits, arise on the basis of the transformation of their mental body itself during this very intermediate state, through a shift in their mode of perception. In this way, they assume the forms of an anguished spirit, malign force, or carnivorous ogre, capable of displaying diverse miraculous acts. The anguished spirits who reside in the ocean depths, the anguished spirits who move through space, the eighty thousand classes of obstructing forces, and so forth, all come into existence consequent on such a shift in their mode of perception, while still in the mental body.

Concentrate on the Meaning of Emptiness

At this time, therefore, while visualizing the wrathful deity, it is essential that you hold in mind the meaning of emptiness, the essence of **The Great Seal**. If you are not able to practice in this way, you must cultivate your experience of the illusion-like natural expressive power of actual reality. If you are unable even to practice in that way, you should meditate on the meditational deity Mahakarunika, without allowing your mind to experience attachment in any respect whatsoever. Through practicing this effectively, Buddhahood will be attained in the Buddha-body of Perfect Resource during this intermediate state.

Instructions on Entering a Womb

O Child of Buddha Nature, if, due to the potency of your past actions, you must at this stage enter a womb, a further teaching on the methods of choosing a womb entrance is now to be taught. Listen carefully, therefore! Do not just move toward whatever womb entrance appears to you. If, while being pursued by the avenging forces of the laws of cause and effect, you are powerless and unable to resist the process of entering a womb, then you must, at this time, meditate on Hayagriva. Since you now possess a subtle, supernormal cognitive ability, you will clearly apprehend all the potential birthplaces as they arise, in sequence. Therefore, make your choice, based on the examination of the indications and based on the instructions!

There are two kinds of oral instructions that can now be applied: first, the oral instructions for transferring the consciousness to the pure Buddha fields, and second, the instructions for choosing a womb entrance within impure cyclic existence.

Therefore, listen carefully and do as follows:

First, the transference of consciousness to the utterly pure realms of the sky-farers is effected by those of highest ability, by directing their intention as follows. "Alas! I am deeply sad that even after an infinite 'incalculable aeon' I am still left behind in this swamp of cyclic existence. How dreadful it is, that while so many have attained Buddhahood in the past, I have still not achieved liberation. Now, this cycle of existence disgusts me! It horrifies me! I have long been led astray by it! Now, the moment approaches for me to move forward! Now, I must take birth, miraculously, in the bud of a lotus flower, in the presence of

the Buddha Amitabha, in the western Buddha field of The Blissful (Sukhavati)!” Focus your intention, concentratedly, on this thought! It is essential that you make this effort!

Alternatively, you can focus your intention on whichever Buddha field you wish: on Manifest Joy (Abhirati), on Dense Array (Ghanavyuha), on Alakavati, on Mount Potalaka, or you may wish to focus on coming into the presence of Padmasambhava of Oddiyana, in the celestial palace of Lotus Light, or indeed on whichever Buddha field you wish to enter. Be single-minded! Do not be distracted! Immediately upon establishing this intention, you will take birth in the chosen Buddha field. Yet again, alternatively, if you wish to proceed into the presence of Maitreya in the realm of The Joyful (Tusita), think as follows: “At this juncture in the intermediate state, the moment has come for me to proceed into the presence of the king of the sacred teachings, Maitreya, in the realm of The Joyful. Therefore, it is there that I will go!” If you focus your intention on this thought, you will take birth, miraculously, in the heart of a lotus, in the presence of Maitreya.

Alternatively, if you are unable to accomplish this transference, or if you desire to enter a womb or you are obliged to enter one, then there are the following instructions on choosing a womb entrance within impure cyclic existence. Therefore, listen carefully. Utilizing the supernormal cognitive ability you now possess, examine the continents once again, as just described, and make your choice. You must enter a land where the sacred teachings flourish!

Be warned, however! It could be that, in reality, you are about to take birth by entering into a substance that is fetid and polluted, and yet that filthy mass will be perceived by you as sweet-smelling and you will be drawn toward it and take birth within it. Therefore, whatever such attractive appearances may arise, do not grasp at them as substantially real! Ensure that you remain utterly free from the symptoms of attachment and aversion, and on that basis choose an excellent womb entrance.

What to Think on Entering a Womb

It is extremely important that your motivation be firmly concentrated as you approach the womb entrance. Therefore think as follows: “Ah! For the sake of all sentient beings, I shall be born as a universal monarch, or acting purely like a great dignified sal tree, I shall be born into the brahman class, or as the child of an accomplished master, or into a family that maintains an immaculate lineage of the sacred teachings, or into a family where the mother and father are deeply devout. Then, once I have taken on a body that is blessed with the merit of being able to act on behalf of all sentient beings, I shall dedicate myself to acting on their behalf!” You must concentrate your motivation on this thought and thus enter the womb.

As you enter the womb, consecrate it by perceiving it as a celestial palace of the deities. Be full of devotion. Ensure that you enter while praying to and imagining that you are receiving empowerments from the conquerors of the ten directions and from their sons, as well as from the meditational deities and, in particular, from Mahakarunika.

However, be warned, for as you make this choice of a womb entrance, there is a risk of error. There is the risk of error when, through the potency of your past actions, an excellent womb entrance is perceived as a bad one, and when a bad womb entrance is perceived as a good one. At this time, the essential points of the teachings are crucial. Therefore, once again, you should act as follows. Even though perceptions of an excellent womb entrance may occur, do not become attached to these. And conversely, even though perceptions of a poor womb entrance may occur, do not feel aversion. The essential point of the profound

and genuine instructions is that you enter the womb in a state of great equanimity, utterly free from the dichotomies of good and bad, acceptance and rejection, or attachment and aversion.

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Nevertheless, with the exception of certain persons who have experience of this equanimity, it is difficult for being to sever themselves from the deep-seated and long-lasting disease of negative habitual tendencies. Therefore, if the deceased remains unable to be free from attachment and aversion, in the above manner, such negative beings who are of the lowest capacity may seek refuge in the animal realms or similar kinds of inferior existences. In order to counteract this, again calling to the deceased by name, you should speak as follows:

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O Child of Buddha Nature, if you do not know how to choose a womb entrance and you are unable to give up your attachments and your aversion, then, regardless of which of the above appearances arise, you must call out, by name, to the Three Precious Jewels. Take refuge in them! Pray to Mahakarunika! Go forward with your head held high. Recognize that this is the intermediate state! Give up your attachment and your clinging to the friends, sons, daughters, and relatives that you have left behind. These attachments are not helpful to you now. Enter into the blue light of the human realm. Enter into the white light of the realm of the gods. Enter into the mansions of precious jewels and the gardens of delight.

^[8] From *Meditations on Living, Dying and Loss: The Essential Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Graham Coleman, Viking, 2009, pages 123-145

^[4] From *Meditations on Living, Dying and Loss: The Essential Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Graham Coleman, Viking, 2009, page 123

* **About this web page:** The contents of this web page were prepared in July 2017 by Len Warren of *Pure Land of the Indestructible Buddha*, Hayagriva Buddhist Centre, 64 Banksia Terrace, Kensington 6151 Western Australia. It contains quotes taken from:

- *Meditations on Living, Dying and Loss: The Essential Tibetan Book of the Dead* by Graham Coleman, Viking, 2009
- *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: First Complete Translation* by Graham Coleman, Penguin Classics, 2005