

Self-grasping ignorance sees all things to exist in an unchanging manner and not dependent on other things or imputation. As a result, we are self-centred and, in the face of inevitable change, complacent in our belief that our opportunity to study and practise Dharma will last a long time. Practising Dharma means to consciously and continually train our mind in virtue and abandon non-virtue.

Remembering death, like a hammer, smashes the complacency of worldly activities and crushes attachment, hatred, jealousy, and pride related to this life.

Four misperceptions cause error in making the best use of life, harm our Dharma practice, and cause unnecessary misery:

- (i) Changing things are seen as unchanging
- (ii) Suffering is regarded as pleasure
- (iii) The imperfect is seen as perfect (impure as pure)
- (iv) The selfless is seen as having absolute reality

The four seals of Buddhist thought oppose those four misperceptions:

- (i) All products are impermanent: changing moment-by-moment and finally ceasing altogether.
- (ii) All contaminated objects are miserable
- (iii) Nirvana is peace
- (iv) All phenomena are selfless

Disadvantages of not remembering impermanence

- (i) You forget Dharma, thinking life will last forever
- (ii) You remember but procrastinate and do not practise
- (iii) Your practise is contaminated by 8 worldly concerns
- (iv) Although you practise well, you do not persevere
- (v) Vulgar behaviour makes you unsuitable for liberation
- (vi) You die with many regrets

Advantages of remembering death

- Actions are purposeful, don't waste time
- Practice is most powerful and effective
- Supports practice at beginning
- Supports practice in middle
- Supports practice at the end
- You die happily and pleasantly

Detaching one's mind from the eight worldly concerns

Like jewels, holy beings never change; like the arms of a balance, ordinary beings go up and down from excitement to depression with the slightest change in their circumstances.

- 1 Attachment to gain: receiving gifts and money.
- 2 Aversion to loss or not receiving such things.
- 3 Attachment to pleasure of good health, happiness, experiencing sensual delight.
- 4 Aversion to the pain of sickness, unhappiness.
- 5 Attachment to praise, ego-pleasing words, love, acknowledgement, good news. Personal approval.
- 6 Aversion to blame, scorn, not hearing nice words about self and family, bad news. Disapproval.
- 7 Attachment to fame, reputation – even after death – (and power). Social status.
- 8 Aversion to notoriety, disgrace, losing reputation, (and power).

The solution to these concerns is renunciation of attachment to the pleasures of this life. When our mind is indifferent to either pleasing or adverse situations we can maintain it in virtue.

Causes of death

- 1 **Exhaustion of karmic lifespan** The karmic causes to be humans that ripened as we died in our past life include karmic causes for our lifespan and our gender.
- 2 **Exhaustion of merit** to obtain necessities for life – food, clothing, shelter. This can cause death even before our karmic lifespan is completed
- 3 **Weakening of life-supporting wind**: untimely death due to carelessness, putting oneself in danger, or doing things that could have been avoided such as overeating, eating unhealthy or poisonous things, using medicines inappropriately, and risky behaviour not knowing what we are capable of doing.

Steps in the process of dying: The body and mind are included in the 5 aggregates of form, feelings, discriminations, volitions, and consciousness. During death, these weaken from the coarsest to the subtlest in 25 steps. The body and mind have gross, subtle, and very subtle aspects:

BODY	{	Gross: the karmically-acquired form aggregate
		Subtle: channels, drops, winds
		Very subtle: most subtle wind of clear light
MIND	{	Gross: six main consciousnesses; fifty-one mental factors
		Subtle: white, red, and black visions
		Very subtle: most subtle mind of clear light

The five root winds that support mind and bodily functions

- 1 *Life-supporting wind* maintains breathing and life; supports the five senses; based at heart. At gross level, associated with 6 main minds and 51 mental factors, at a subtle level with the white, red, and black visions; at very subtle level, with the clear-light vision.
- 2 *Downward-voiding wind* assists urination and defaecation; based at the anus and sex organ.
- 3 *Upward-moving wind* assists speaking and swallowing; based at the throat.
- 4 *Equally-abiding wind* is associated with bodily heat and digestion; based at the navel.
- 5 *Pervading wind* assists bodily movement; located in the joints and limbs.

Weakening (“absorption”) of the form aggregate

- 1 **Bodily form:** the limbs become thin, weak, and difficult to move.
- 2 **Mirror-like wisdom:** realises many objects, such as ugly and beautiful, at the same time. Sign: the vision becomes blurred, dark. *Buddha Vairocana:* knows the extent of everyone and everything that exists.
- 3 **Earth element:** the property (nature) of solidity and the function of load-bearing. Sign: a sinking sensation or feeling of pressure on the chest.
- 4 **Eye-sense:** difficulty in opening and closing the eyes.
- 5 **Inner-form:** colour of the body fades, becoming very pale; inner vision like a mirage of water on hot desert sand.

Weakening of the feeling aggregate

- 6 **Feelings:** pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings of touch diminish. Subtle feelings remain.
- 7 **Wisdom of equality:** Equality sees the 3 feelings as just feelings; it sees similarity in things such as products necessarily being impermanent. Sign: can’t recollect mental feelings of pleasure, pain, or indifference. *Buddha Ratnasambhava:* awareness of the equality of everyone as objects of compassion and everything as empty in nature.
- 8 **Water element:** function of cohesion, nature of fluidity. Liquids of body – sweat, saliva, tears – begin to dry up. Dying person complains of a dry mouth.
- 9 **Ear sense:** it becomes difficult to hear sounds; have to shout into the ears of dying person.
- 10 **Inner sound:** buzzing in ears stops. Inner vision like room full of smoke. Indications of future birth may manifest: agitation, anguish indicate bad birth; peace, no distress, indicate good birth.

Weakening of the discrimination aggregate

- 11 **Discriminations:** lose ability to remember the affairs of close friends and relatives.
- 12 **Wisdom of individual discrimination:** knows names and classifications of things. Sign: forget names of relatives. The karma for future rebirth ripens. *Buddha Amitabha:* awareness of the individuality of everyone and everything.
- 13 **Fire element:** function of ripening, nature of warmth. Body becomes cold and digestion stops. The cold approaches the heart from above and below.
- 14 **Smell-sense:** breathing becomes weak with short inhalation and long exhalation.
- 15 **Inner smell:** sense of smell is lost. Inner vision of blackness permeated by dancing red sparks.

Weakening of the volitions aggregate

- 16 **Volitions**: can no longer move.
- 17 **Wisdom of accomplishment**: ability to set and attain goals in this and future lives. Sign: forget purpose of external work in this life. *Buddha Amoghasiddhi*: awareness of how to accomplish temporary and ultimate aims of all.
- 18 **Wind element**: function of lightness, nature of movement. Breathing stops, but not yet dead.
- 19 **Taste-sense**: tongue contracts and turns blue. The sense of touch is lost at this point.
- 20 **Inner taste**: lose sense of taste. Inner vision becomes a pinpoint of light in total darkness.

Weakening of consciousness aggregate (conceptual mental consciousness). Dharmadhatu wisdom is equivalent to the mental consciousness with its potential to become the Dharmakaya. *Buddha Akshobya*: awareness of the sphere of reality – the two levels of truth about everyone and everything.

21 Cessation of 80 primitive conceptions begins

- 22 **White drop descends** from crown chakra towards heart chakra, borne on winds from upper part of body. The 33 coarsest primitive thoughts such as repulsion, sorrow, fear, hunger, thirst, and protectiveness cease. These have the nature of the vision of *white appearance* that now occurs, like moonlight in a clear sky, *empty* of true existence of the previous vision.
- 23 **Red drop rises** from navel chakra to heart chakra, borne on winds from lower part of body. The 40 more subtle thoughts such as longing, satisfaction, the wish to suckle, kiss, hug, or be unruly cease. These have the nature of the vision of *red increase* that now occurs, like the colour of a deep red sunset in the night sky, *empty* of true existence of the white vision.
- 24 **Winds enter indestructible drop** The 7 most subtle thoughts, such as boredom, indifference, and laziness cease. These have the nature of the *black vision of near-attainment* that now occurs, like a totally dark tropical night.
- 25 **Clear light vision**: the drop energies have absorbed into upper and lower parts of indestructible drop; winds have entered the indestructible drop and are most subtle. After a momentary loss of consciousness the two halves of indestructible drop slightly separate, and final vision of death – *clear-light vision* – like hint of light in early dawn sky indicating sun is below horizon. The clear light vision is a non-affirming negative – a vacuity that is the absence of the three previous subtle visions. It is non-conceptual and, unlike the previous three visions, there is no appearance of true existence, but it is not the wisdom realising emptiness.

Entering the bardo and taking rebirth

The primary cause for the bardo body is the subtle wind energy. It can pass through walls and float in sky. The co-operative cause for bardo body is the subtle mind affected by the ripening throwing karma; the form of bardo body is same as next birth. The primary cause for the mind of the bardo being is the subtlest consciousness; the co-operative cause is the wind energy.

The *Abhidharmakosa* says future birth is irreversible, but tantric practices performed either by the bardo being itself or by a Lama can change the destiny even within the bardo. Those to be born in the desire realm are nourished by odours – pleasant odours for a happy rebirth, unpleasant odours for an unhappy rebirth. Duration of life in bardo is indefinite, some say the bardo being experiences a death-like event every seven days and reappears in the same bardo aspect until it is eventually reborn, usually within seven weeks. Through karmic clairvoyance, the bardo being can see its place of birth at a great distance. It has a vision of mother and father engaged in coitus (not actually occurring). Sex of bardo being is determined by previous throwing karma; males have desire for future mother and hostility towards future father. The opposite emotions occur in a female. Desire attracts it to a vision of the parents' sex organs in union and the hostility causes it to die. The eternal drop enters mother's womb and joins with the egg at conception, abides within a new indestructible drop.

The mind at the time of death

When dying, the most powerful karma will ripen, whether it is virtuous or non-virtuous. If our virtuous and non-virtuous karmas are equal, whichever mental attitude we are most familiar with will be strongest at the time of death, *and this will determine the type of karma that will ripen*. If we live a virtuous life, unless we have a very strong negative karma, the momentum of that virtue will enable us to die in virtue and have a happy rebirth. If our mind is habitually non-virtuous and we do not try to prevent disturbing emotions from arising during life, the momentum of that non-virtue will make it difficult for a virtuous karma to ripen at death.

The karmic imprint that throws our mind into a future life ripens while the dying mind still has some capacity to discriminate between things – during absorption of the aggregate of discrimination. If we can maintain some virtuous mental factors, especially faith, that virtue will be a condition to activate virtuous karma. If our mind is disturbed by anger or some other non-virtue, this will activate a non-virtuous karma and cause an unhappy rebirth. Three conditions nourish and activate the throwing karma for the next life: craving, grasping, and an accomplishing karma of similar type to the main throwing karma, such as a virtuous thought that nourishes a virtuous throwing karmic propensity.

After weakening of the aggregate of discrimination, if a karma has ripened for rebirth in the lower realms the dying person will go cold first from the upper part of the body. If a karma has ripened for a happy rebirth, the feet will become cold first. If negative karma has ripened, the dying person can experience terrifying hallucinations when dying; there is a feeling of going from light into impenetrable darkness. If virtuous karma has ripened they can have pleasant visions such as walking through a garden and entering a palace, going from darkness into light, and no frightening hallucinations.

Entering the bardo is like a balance: as one life finishes, the next begins. The moment the consciousness leaves the body it takes the form of the bardo being. Some claim that people appear in the bardo in their old body, even wearing the same clothes as in their previous life, but such visions are the activity of a spirit taking the form of the dead person. In fact, the bardo beings are in the form of their next life. They have the five sense faculties and mental consciousness. They have a clairvoyance whereby they can go to any place they think about. They can pass through walls; the only things that obstruct their passage are the site of their future rebirth or a holy object such as a stupa.

Bardo beings to be reborn in hell have the colour of burnt logs; to be born as hungry ghosts are a watery colour; to be born as animals are grey; to become humans or desire realm gods are the colour of fine gold; and to become form realm gods are white. There is no bardo for the formless realm.

How to take advantage of a perfect human rebirth

- 1 *Reflect on the need for spiritual development.* We all wish for happiness and freedom from pain; the way to achieve this is to change our mind and attitudes; the only way to develop positive attitudes is Dharma practice.
- 2 *Check to see if you have the ability to practise Dharma.* The two requirements are, externally, guidance of a qualified lama and, internally, a perfect human rebirth. The special advantage is that we humans of the Southern Continent have the intelligence to discriminate between right and wrong, beneficial and harmful.
- 3 You must *think to practise Dharma immediately*, it may be many aeons before this opportunity arises again, you cannot put off practice through procrastination.

Relying on the ten Innermost Jewels of the Kadam Tradition to stop the eight worldly concerns and attain renunciation

The four entrustments (aims or dedications)

- 1 *Entrusting yourself to Dharma* as the innermost, ultimate, and simplest way of thinking, speaking and behaving. The eight worldly concerns are useless, and, at death, only one's Dharma practice can help. If you think, "If I stop working for this life I will become poor," then:
- 2 *Trusting a life of poverty without compromising Dharma practice.* Do not hesitate to break old habits and devote your life to practising Dharma even if you have to beg. Don't be obsessed with the comforts of this life. If you worry, "But I may die of starvation etc.," (remember: Buddha dedicated merit for 5 million rebirths as wheel-turning king so that followers would not starve), then:
- 3 *With total trust in Dharma, willing to accept death as a simple consequence of poverty.* "In all my previous lives I've never given up my life for the sake of my practice. If I die now, okay, look at how many meaningless lives and meaningless deaths I have experienced." If you worry, "Who will help me when I'm sick and dying, who will look after my body and possessions," then:
- 4 *Trusting Dharma by seeing a lonely death as the simplest way to die.* Such worries are attachment to the good things of this life. There is no way you can be sure to live long; it is better to go into retreat now.

The three diamond-firm convictions (vajra-like renunciation, unshakeable resolve)

5 *To maintain Dharma practice* with no sense of shame about what others (parents, friends, relatives) think. Not being captured by attachment to 8WD and not being enticed away by their pleas.

6 *To keep purely all Vinaya commitments and tantric pledges*, always remaining steadfast in practice.

7 *To abandon any discouragement or shame*. Don't be trapped by concerns about friends and wealth, never hesitate to leave home despite inducements to stay.

Expulsion, demotion, and attainment

8 *Letting yourself be expelled from "normal" society*. Not sharing the childish values of others, you renounce the pursuit of mundane pleasures to follow Dharma, which is at odds with the values of worldly people.

9 *Bearing being ranked among dogs* in the eyes of others, accept any hardship. Others live in a city of fools.

10 *Give up interest in worldly affairs*; be intent upon attaining divine rank of Buddhahood through practice.

The nine-fold meditation on death

Death is inevitable because:

1 **Yama is coming, nothing can turn him back** No running, sweet talk, beauty, charm, strength, wealth, or magic can prevent us being crushed by four mountains. Similarly, we cannot stop the four fears of *ageing* destroying youth, *sickness* destroying health, *decline* destroying fortune, and *death* destroying life.

2 **Your lifespan cannot increase and is constantly running out.** Long-life practices do not increase the lifespan; they only block obstacles to living out our full karmic lifespan.

3 **You die even if haven't had time to practise Dharma:** young do not think to practise Dharma; aged are too feeble; in the middle we are too busy, put it off, or practise weakly and impurely

Decision: *"I must practise Dharma; especially I must help others; in particular I must cultivate bodhicitta."* We ignore death and expend our energy on this life. Striving for sensual goals is a mistake. In the face of Yama, our executioner, we realise that all our efforts for temporary enjoyment add up to nothing but death in the end. Trying to be happy we have fought with our family and friends; all the years of struggling to overcome difficulties will not help in the face of death. We have to leave everything behind. We should think, "If I am to die tomorrow, what should I do today?"

The time of death is uncertain because:

4 **Lifespan is not fixed**, especially in age of five degenerations¹

5 **Conditions for death are many and for life are few** The only things that protect us in this life are prayers made in former lives, merit, and the Buddhas' compassion. In contrast, threatening our lives are: 80,000 kinds of obstructing demons hovering like flies around a rotting carcass; 404 categories of disease that envelop us like a fog; 360 types of overpowering demons that loom over us greedily; 15 extraordinary overpowering demons that attack children; and 360 calamitous demons. Imbalance of the elements, many outer and inner conditions, even food and medicine taken for health can all kill us.

6 **The human body is very fragile.**

Decision: *"I must follow Dharma from this moment onwards."* Deep in our minds the thought of *not dying* is almost definite. But there is no valid reason to prove we will not die today. Believing we will live for many years to come, we work only for this life and make no preparation for death or the life after. The strong feeling, "Today I may really die," brings a powerful sense of urgency to our daily practice. We will want to free ourselves from worldly concerns and put our energy into practice. Then, even if we don't die today, we will have accomplished many goals for the future lives, instead of wasting our time we will have done something useful. Like soldiers at war, we should be constantly vigilant, expecting the enemy to attack at any moment, and be prepared. Acting for worldly concerns is in competition with preparing for the future. Thinking again and again, "I might die today," gives strength to overcome attachment, to stop procrastinating, and to practise strongly right now. If we do not prepare for death we are setting ourselves up for disaster. If we prepare beforehand, when death comes it will be easy.

Except for Dharma, nothing can help at time of death

7 *Wealth is of no help* – you cannot bribe Yama.

8 *Friends are of no help* – they cannot go with you.

9 *Your body is of no help* – cannot fight off Yama with strength.

Decision: *"I must follow only Dharma."* The practice of thinking every morning, "What will be helpful to me if I die today?" and acting appropriately is a jewel that will give comfort and security the closer we approach death. All of our enjoyments are karmic ripenings from past lives, if we exhaust our stock of merit and do nothing for the future we are headed for misery and disaster. The child-like behaviour of seeking pleasure from meaningless things and crying over losses is short-term and foolish. Focusing on the future is a much more mature way to live.

¹ (1) **Lifespan** decreases to ten years; (2) **Times** are full of strife and calamities (these two diminish the power of things that sustain life, such as food and medicines); (3) **Afflictions** become corrupting influence on laity; (4) **Views** become wrong and corrupting influence on sangha (these two diminish the cause of virtue by promoting pursuit of worldly pleasures and fostering weariness); (5) **Beings:** bodies become small, ugly, weak; merit declines in power; minds decline in sharpness of intellect, power of recollection, and diligence.