

WEEKEND ON DEATH AND DYING

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Ven. Khensur Kangurwa Geshe Lobsang Thubten Rinpoche
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Preliminaries

Motivation

We begin by adjusting our motivation. If we listen to the teachings on the Dharma with a positive motivation, we will derive great benefit. Rinpoche is beginning with a quotation by the great Indian Master, [Āchārya] Chandrakīrti, from his *Entering Into the Middle Way*, where he says, “Now that you are free and able to practice, what will you do when you fall into the precipice of the bad migrations? Once having fallen into such a state, not even the Buddhas can draw you out.”

Now we have a precious human life. We have intelligence and, moreover, we have freedom to do whatever it is that we wish. If we wish, we can practice the Dharma, but not only do we have the freedom to practice, but we have the capacity to practice. Not only do we have the capacity to practice, we can achieve the fruits of our practice. So, we have both the freedom and the capacity to practice. So, first examine whatever it is you are setting out to do, thereby ensuring that you do not make a wrong choice of what you are going to follow.

We have the freedom to practice the path. We can practice the Dharma. We can practice whichever type of Dharma we wish. We can practice that of the Lesser Vehicle¹ or the Great Vehicle²—the Mahayana³—or we do not even have to practice the Dharma. We can just involve ourselves in the affairs of this life, and we can achieve those ends, or within the Dharma we can practice towards achieving the welfare of this life and future lives. We can practice Secret Mantra⁴. There are various possibilities open to us. But, the important thing is not to make a mistake on the path that we do follow. We should examine well in order to avoid practicing a wrong path. If we practice a wrong path then we will not only have difficulties in the course of this life, but we will fall over the precipice into bad migrations. In such a state, no one—not even the Buddhas—can lead us out of such a state. So, it is important that we examine the methods of achieving the happiness of which we are making use, and consider them well.

We are at the junction of two paths. We have to consider carefully which of those two paths we are going to take. We do not want to make a wrong choice. [We can choose] the path of virtue or the path of non-virtue—the path of virtue, for example, following the Dharma—or the path of non-virtue. Non-virtue is that which ultimately generates suffering. And so, at such a junction we should consider well which of these two paths we are going to take. A virtuous path is determined by the motivation by which we follow it—the motivation behind the taking of that path. There is no higher, no more positive motivation—no finer motivation—than that of the awakened heart, bodhichitta.

In generating the awakened heart we should contemplate as follows: “I am just a single person, but others are equal to space. If I only seek to bring about my own welfare, I am only bringing about the welfare of one individual. Therefore, whatever I do, the virtues will be small. On the other hand, if I seek to bring about the welfare of others because others are equal to space, then the virtues that ensue from such efforts will also be equal to space.” Therefore, generate the compassion which looks to all sentient beings and wishes to free them from suffering, thinking it would be wonderful if all sentient beings were free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

Compassion is encompassed in the attitude “It would be wonderful if all sentient beings, both myself and all others, were free of suffering.”, whereas love is encompassed in the attitude “It would be wonderful if myself and all others were to achieve peerless happiness.”

Having such an attitude, it is necessary that we seek to actually place all sentient being in that state, that is, a state free of all suffering where they experience peerless happiness. In order to do that, I must eliminate all my various faults and bring to consummation all my excellent qualities. Then we have to examine: “Can I, in fact, do that? Do I have that ability?”

We can develop the motivation to achieve that end by a process of first listening to the teachings. Having listened to the teachings of a spiritual Friend, putting those teachings into practice, and then meditating on them and so-forth—and in the course of doing just that with such a motivation to be able to achieve that very end—then we will accumulate a vast collection of positive potential, or merit⁵. And, this will be of immediate benefit to both yourself and others.

So, we are going to meditate together for two or three minutes in this way. [Thus followed a short meditation.]

Body of the Teaching

Purpose of Teaching

Today and tomorrow we will be talking about death and dying, and that is what I am going to be teaching and explaining. With regard to the explanations on death and dying within the two vehicles of the Great Vehicle—that of the Perfection Vehicle⁶—there is no particular explanation with regard to death and dying. In my explanation, I am going to be speaking mainly from that of the tradition or the vehicle of Secret Mantra, or Tantra. This is a very precious tradition, as well as its explanation. So, I hope you will generate some confidence and faith in the methods that we are going to be explaining. What we want to do is to try to understand the fact that we are going to be alone at the time of our death. What are we to do? How are we to approach our death? It is definite that we are all going to die. That comes to us all. All that is born is bound to die. What will benefit us at this time? It is a difficult period in our life. It is said that there are two main difficulties over the course of our life where we probably suffer the most. These involve our sicknesses, and also the moment of our death. During the course of our life when we become sick we can rely upon other people. We can rely upon doctors, friends and those close to us who can assist us and help us to get well, but at the time of our death we are going to leave behind not only the doctor, our loved ones and so forth, but our Lama as well. We are going to have to go alone. Where are we going? What can we expect? It is as if we had never been to this place and traveled this path before. Fear will arise in our mind. How are we to eliminate that fear from our mind? This is what we should consider. By contemplating death now we can be assured that we will not be afraid at the time of our death.

We are continually going around in circles. We go through this progression of death, intermediate state and the taking of rebirth⁷. Then we die again. Then we pass through the intermediate state—or the Bardo—and then we take rebirth again. Then we die again and then we travel through the intermediate state, take rebirth, progress through the intermediate state and die again—continually circling through in this process.

In our present situation we have already taken rebirth, so in terms of what is coming, we can expect our death, and then we are going to progress onto the intermediate state. Generally, you know the order of progression is that one takes rebirth, then progresses through the life and then there is death. Then there is the intermediate state. We have already taken rebirth, so we are going to be looking at the process of our death.

So, the reason that we first discuss death is that, for the practitioner of Dharma—someone who is practicing the Dharma—is seeking to bring to an end this circular process of death, intermediate state and the taking of rebirth. The practitioner of Dharma can bring an end to death. They can actually stop death. If you stop death, then there will be no progress through the intermediate state and one will not have to take a new rebirth. One has interrupted the cyclic pattern.

We are involved in this continuous process of taking rebirth, death, the process of moving through the intermediate state, again taking rebirth, death, moving through the intermediate state. We are continually circling through this process. This circling in birth, death and the intermediate state is what we call 'samsara', or cyclic existence. We all abide within that cyclic existence. What we are trying to do is eliminate these three. We are trying to eliminate birth, death and intermediate state. The way that we are seeking to do that is by the means of the path of Secret Mantra, or Tantra. Within that there are the two

levels of the Generation Stage and the Completion Stage⁸. By practicing these two stages of Secret Mantra, one is able to eliminate birth, death and the intermediate state and achieve the level of a Buddha.

Today, first, I am going to explain death. I am going to explain the actual process of death.

Story of Our World

There is a story behind our initially coming about in this particular world of ours. At one time we were celestial beings. The planet was not, as yet, inhabited by human beings. We were able to fly through the sky. We did not eat coarse food. We lived on the bliss of meditative stabilizations and so forth. Due to the 'degeneration of the age', we came to lose our consciousness of the celestial realms, the 'Sky Worlds'. The celestial beings emanated the human form we have now. We began to inhabit this planet in aspect of human beings. Still we had many wonderful powers and so forth. Moreover, we had a body which was made up of the six constituents. These six constituents which make up our body are the earth, water, fire, and wind energy, channels and drops. So, our body is made up of these six constituents—earth, water, fire, wind energy, channels and drops⁹.

Composition of the Body

We all possess a body composed of six constituents—earth, water, fire, wind energy, channels and drops. These channels—these are the various pathways within the body in which the wind energies move. There are three main channels within the body. There is the central channel. There is the right channel, and there is the left channel. Of the various channels in the body, there are three main channels—the central, right and left. The wind energy which flows through the right channel is mainly associated with the afflictive emotion of hatred. The wind energy which mainly flows through the left channel is associated with the afflictive emotion of attachment, or desire. That wind energy that flows mainly through the central channel is associated with ignorance. Though there are three main channels, these channels go on to branch out extensively throughout the entire physical body. All told, there are said to be 72,000 channels within the human body¹⁰.

The Winds and Death

At the time of our death, as the dying process progresses, all of these wind energies which are flowing through these extensive pathways throughout the entire body—these 72,000 channels—will begin to withdraw and finally withdraw all the wind energies in the body into the three main channels.

As the dying process progresses, all of the wind energies have withdrawn from the 72,000 channels into the three main channels. Following that, the wind energies from the two side channels will withdraw and enter into the central channel.

Immediately preceding the actual death itself, the wind energies have completely withdrawn into the central channel. The wind energy is associated with the mind. Within the central channel, at the moment of our death, is a combination of wind energy and mind. It is this wind energy and mind which will then leave the body. When that occurs, that is the moment of death.

Reasons for Conscious Dying

As we are progressing toward our death, we have [or develop] some major illness of some sort [for example] and our body is becoming weak and frail. In the Tibetan tradition, [it is] at such a time that someone close to the patient (the dying person) would go to a lama and have what is called a “mo” thrown. “Mo” means a divination. This divination would determine what types of rituals, what types of ceremonies, should be done in order to help the patient recover. But, let us say that all the various rituals have been done, yet they have not been effective. Then, a doctor is called in. The doctor examines the patient and prescribes whatever treatment is necessary. Let us say that the doctor is called in and the treatment is administered, but there is no benefit. The patient begins to see “Well, what am I to do? It is definite that I am going to die. We have done the divinations. We have done all the necessary rituals. They were of no benefit. We have called in the doctor. We have administered the treatment. That, too, was of no benefit. I have relied upon doctors. I have relied upon rituals. The doctor has given up on me. The lamas have given up. There is nothing they can do. What am I to do? Here am I lying in my bed about to die, like a fallen tree, and I lay here.” It is time to rely on the precept of one’s Teacher.

The patient is lying on his or her death bed. There are those who are dear to us standing around. There is our father, our mother, our sister, our brother, all of our friends and they are all crying. But still, they wish us well. There is nothing that they can do. We have relied upon all of the various rituals. We have relied upon the doctor. We have to leave all of them behind, along with our family. So, what is the person to do? What should they be considering within their own mind? They want to ensure that they are not going to take rebirth in a bad migration. How can they be assured of that—that they take rebirth in a positive, happy migration? It is at that moment that their mind should turn toward the Dharma.

We are concerned with what we are to think at the moment of our death when we can no longer rely on any externals.

We can no longer rely upon anything external to ourselves. If we have practiced the Dharma well over the course of our life, then we can be assured that we will have a means—a method—to work with at the time of our death. It is at that time that we should remember the explanations and the teachings of our Lama, of our Spiritual Friend. It is at the moment of our death, if we can remember well the unerring precepts that our teacher has given us, that we can apply those and be assured we will avoid a bad migration in the future. Moreover, we will experience a happy migration in the future. It is necessary to remember the Dharma and it will benefit [us]. If we do not remember these precepts at the time of our death, then the Dharma will not have benefited us. What are we to remember at the time of our death? What is the precept? This is quoted from the *Guru Puja*, the [section titled] “Offering to the Spiritual Master”. This is also mentioned within the text on *Seven-Point Mind Training*, where it says that the Five Powers¹¹ themselves are the Great Vehicle—the Mahayana—as precepts on the transference of consciousness. Cultivate the path of practice. So, the best thing that we can do for ourselves at the time of our death is to apply the Five Powers at the moment of our death. And so, it would be useful if you were actually to take notes and write these down in order to ensure that you remember them. The first of these Five Powers is the ‘Power of White Seed’, or we can call it the ‘Power of Positive Seed’.

The Five Powers

So, the first of these five powers that we are going to explain is the Power of Positive Seed or, more literally, the White Seed. This [Power] is in order that we do not generate attachment at the moment of our death. We should practice the giving away of all of our various material possessions, our wealth and

so forth, making provisions for your family—but also making offerings to the Three Jewels—your teachers and so forth. The point is that we should try to clear everything out so that there is nothing that we would grasp [toward which we would stay attached]—not even a trifling object at the moment of our death. We do not want to develop attachment for ‘things’ at the moment of our death. Therefore, if we develop attachment, this will bring about a bad migration in the future. So, we are trying to develop a situation of practicing generosity, giving it all away so there is nothing towards which we can develop attachment.

The second of the Five Powers—the first was the Power of Positive Seed—is the Power of Aspiring Prayer. As our body begins to shut down, the various elements lose their capacity to support consciousness in a serial fashion, which we are going to explain. Beginning with earth, then moving on to fire, and finally the wind energy of the coarse body, [they] will eventually lose their ability to support consciousness. In this shutting down process, we will go through some terrifying experiences. When the earth element begins to lose its ability to support consciousness, there is a sense of sinking beneath the earth, and great fear arises. Then, when the water element begins to shut down, there is a sense of being carried away on vast, flowing water. Then, there is the burning in fire. And then, there is being carried away by the winds. So, as all these elements begin to lose their ability to support consciousness, we will move through these various experiences. They are all quite terrifying, and we will generate fear. It is at this time that—in order to eliminate our fear and in order to move into the bardo, into the intermediate state without fear and, moreover, to generate a positive state of mind at that time (a virtuous state of mind)—we should make prayers to the Three Jewels: the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

First, there was the Power of Positive Seed. The second was the Power of Aspiring Prayer. The third power has various translations. Sometimes it is called the ‘Power of Intention’. I am going to call it the ‘Power of Determination’. This [power] is [for] developing the very strong determination that I am [one is] not going to lose sight of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha or my teacher throughout this dying process. I am going to hold them close to my heart and, moreover, develop the motivation of love and compassion for sentient beings. So, one is trying to develop the intention to keep the mind on the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, one’s teacher, and love and compassion for others.

It is necessary that we have meditated [on], cultivated and become familiar with the awakened heart—bodhichitta—and the understanding of Emptiness. So, we should try to maintain that familiarity over the course of our death process.

The fourth of these powers is—I use the term—‘Repudiation’. Sometimes it is termed ‘Regret’. Actually, Repudiation is it. Generally, our minds are governed by our self-centeredness. At the moment of our death, it is as if we do not want to have anything to do with that self-centeredness. We repudiate it and, moreover, you try to develop love and compassion for sentient beings, rather than self-centeredness.

And then, finally, the fifth of the Five Powers is the ‘Power of Familiarity’. In this power we are familiarizing ourselves with, for example, the way in which Shakyamuni Buddha himself passed away into Nirvāṇa¹², or beyond sorrow. And so, in order to be mindful of that we assume the bodily position in which the Buddha passed away. This involves lying on our right side, cradling our cheek on the right hand, and the left hand is lying upon the left side of the body. This is emblematic of the posture in which the Buddha himself passed away. If one assumes that posture and is mindful of a Buddha, in that state one cannot take a bad migration as a rebirth. One can be assured of taking a positive migration.

This is a very practical method that we can implement at the time of our death—implementing this practice of the Five Powers. It is a way that we can take care of ourselves. We are dying alone, and it is our responsibility to ensure that what occurs over the death process—having received teachings from our

teachers, our Lamas and so forth—that we implement them. It is our responsibility. If we have heard a teaching, now we have to try to ensure that we remember [it] at the time of our death. This is something that we have to do for ourselves as individuals—to make this kind of effort at the moment of our death. Nobody else can do it for you. You have received the precept—what we can do at the time of our death in terms of the practice of the Five Powers. Now it is up to you to remember them at the time of your death and implement [them] at the time of your death. If we do that, we can be assured that we will not go on to have a bad rebirth. Moreover, we will take a positive rebirth. Moreover, in terms of a positive rebirth, [we will be born to] a human life—not only just a human life, but a human life where we have all the supports and conditions necessary to practice the Dharma. We will meet with teachers. We will meet with the precious Awakened Heart. We will meet with Emptiness. This would be a tremendous benefit. What do you want? You want happiness. What do you not want? You do not want to suffer. This is like making a choice for yourself and choosing something that you want—something good—a happy rebirth, and avoiding that which you do not want, that which you do not like: a negative rebirth. So, there is great benefit to implementing these Five Powers at the time of your death. That is good isn't it?

What is it that is going to help you in the course of your dying? We cannot rely upon our parents. We cannot rely upon our relatives. We cannot rely on our books and so forth. We cannot even rely on our own body. It is only our practice of the Dharma upon which we can rely as we go through the conscious process of death.

The Four Elements and the Map

We have a body which is made up of four elements—earth, water, fire and the wind energies. In the course of the death process these elements will begin to deteriorate: that is, they will lose their ability to be able to support consciousness. This process of the deterioration of the elements is termed 'the dissolving of the elements'. As the elements dissolve, the faculties shut down. There are various signs of what is beginning to appear within the dying person. There are both internal signs and external signs. Our body does not accompany us to our future rebirths. It is our mind which goes forward. Our body will be left behind. As the mind begins to separate from the body, the body no longer is able to support consciousness and, in a gradual fashion, there are various appearances which occur to the dying person. It is like journeying to a foreign country, and we need some map to give us some indication of how this journey is to be undergone. We will reach various places along our journey. We will be here and then here and then here in turn. So, we are going to explain the map which outlines the progression of the consciousness as it moves through this dying process. If we understand this path well as we pass through the dying process, we will recognize [and think to ourselves] "Now I have come to this place in the process. Now I have come to this place in the process", and we will not generate fear. We will understand what is actually happening to us as all these various appearances begin to occur. So, we are going to go through an eight-step process of the deterioration of the various supports of consciousness—the earth, the water, the fire and the wind energy. Then there is what is called the 'White Appearance', 'Red Increase', and 'Black Near-Attainment' and then, finally, we will come to the moment of our death, which is the 'Clear Light' of death. We are going to go through this map of our journey in the death process.

Secret Mantra and the Map

Especially within Secret Mantra, the yogi [or yogini] familiarizes him or herself with this map, which describes this journey extremely well. They know exactly where they are at any point along the transition process. They know what to do, what is coming up next and, therefore, they can take advantage of this

situation. At any stage in this process they can ultimately achieve Buddha-hood over the course of their death. A yogi who has practiced Secret Mantra can make use of this dissolution of the various elements as a means to attain Buddha-hood. In the proficiency of the practice of the yogi of Secret Mantra, we are talking about three levels. Those who have practiced according to the best of the practice can achieve Buddha-hood in this very life and in this very body that we now possess. The middling attainment would mean that we can attain Buddha-hood in the intermediate state. And then, the lesser attainment is in terms that we would attain Buddha-hood in the very next life. So, the advanced yogi who makes use of Secret Mantra can, by using this dissolution process, attain these various levels and achieve Buddha-hood at these various times.

It is very important that we maintain some composure over the course of the dying process so we can hang on to and gain meaning from these very positive states of calm-abiding, love and compassion and whatever understandings of Emptiness that we have come to over the course of our practice in this life. If we do this, then we can be assured of a good migration. We can be assured of a human life where we can carry on our practice again and again—the practice of Secret Mantra—not only seeking to facilitate [our own development], but the achieving of a good migration in order to achieve Buddha-hood. The daily use of the ability to think about this dissolution process at the time of awakening is in order that this process can occur over the course of meditation, but it also occurs at the time of sleep, and it also occurs at the time of death. So, the proficient yogi [or yogini] who practices Secret Mantra can achieve these appearances, and travels the path which has been described even in the course of awakening [being in the waking consciousness]. It occurs also that we can follow the map in the time of falling asleep, and also at the time of death.

This is really a precious teaching that was told by Śhākyamuni Buddha. Even by simply practicing it, we are at least planting seeds – called latent seeds – of the Dharma of these precious teachings, these profound teachings. Just like planting seeds in the field, when the rains come, then those seeds will germinate and our hearts grow. Even though we may not be able to attain the various fruits of the practice in this life, nonetheless, we are at least planting the seeds of the teachings, so that in a future life when the Lama presents these explanations again, the practice will germinate like when it rains and we will gain profound realizations in that way. So, we can gain the attainments in this life. It is really of tremendous importance that we implant these seeds of practice in our mind-stream. So, how are we to travel this path? We are going to look at the layout of the map. We are going to go through eight appearances on our journey. We are going to come to eight places. If we have not trained our mind, we will be lost at the time of our death and, with all eight appearances that are arising, we will experience great fear in the future. We will not know what to do or where we are going. This map allows us to have a sense of “Well, now I have reached here. Now I see this appearance. What can I do now, and now what can I expect?” So, we want to have a map of how this process is going to progress forward.

The Process of Dissolution

We are going to look at the manner of dissolution, the deterioration of and the process of the deterioration of the body in the dying process, and we are going to look at this in terms of various elements which constitute our experience. The way that we are going to divide this is in terms of the Five Aggregates¹³, the Four Constituents and the Six Spheres¹⁴. So, beginning with, explaining, what are the Five Aggregates? The Five Aggregates are, first—to name them—form, feelings, discriminations, compositional factors and consciousnesses.

The Five Aggregates

The form aggregate coincides with the body, so the body is the form aggregate. The feeling aggregate is the three types of feeling that we normally experience—pleasant feelings, unpleasant feelings and neutral feelings. This is the aggregate of feelings. The aggregate of discriminations are the types of thoughts where we make discriminations. We distinguish, or we recognize, “This is a person. This is a horse. This is a house, and so forth.”—recognizing and making distinctions. That type of thinking is called the ‘aggregate of discriminations’. The next aggregate is the aggregate of compositional factors. These are the types of thoughts in which we are [involved in] the various discursive types of thinking—“Today I did this. Yesterday I did this. Tomorrow I am going to do this. When I get to work I am going to do these various types of jobs.” and the way we think about going about doing it and the thoughts which arise in the course of doing that work. When we are fixing food [for instance, we think] “How am I going to make this?” and the various types of thoughts [associated with that]. So, our discursive thought processes in the course of doing our various activities is the ‘aggregate of compositional factors’. Finally, the aggregate of consciousnesses are, again, the various thinking processes of the mind. “I did this before. I am doing this now. I will do that tomorrow.” So, the various backgrounds of discursive thinking in which all this takes place is the ‘aggregate of consciousnesses’.

It is necessary also to discuss what are called the ‘Five Powers’. Sometimes these are translated as the ‘Five Faculties’. This begins with the eyes—the sense faculties, sense powers—eye sense power, ear sense power, nose sense power, tongue sense power and bodily sense power. The consciousness depends upon these various sense powers or sense faculties.

In terms of an illness or an accident of some sort and when the death process is commencing, then it is going to be experienced in terms of these various factors which we are listing.

The Signs of Death

We are going to commence the death process and the various experiences that are gone through in the course of the process. We will begin with a discussion, first, of what occurs in terms of the aggregate of form. We said the aggregate of form coincides with the body. The body, in the course of the dying process, is deteriorating. What does it mean when the body deteriorates? It means that the body is losing its strength. There are various external signs to this process of deterioration. The limbs are described as becoming very thin. They seem to shrink in appearance. They are very loose. When the body loses its strength it loses the ability to perform its various functions.

This external appearance of the body, which is termed the ‘external sign’, which appears to the outside, corresponds to an internal deterioration. This is in terms of the earth element. So, we can see that the earth element is deteriorating. The term which is normally used is ‘the earth element is dissolving’. It is losing its ability to perform its function.

To repeat, we said that there were going to be various appearances in the course of the dying process. As the body—the aggregate of form—begins to deteriorate, there is the external sign and the appearance of the thinning of the various limbs of the body. The limbs are very loose.

Coincidental with what is occurring with the body, the eye sense power is also deteriorating. An external sign that the eye sense power is deteriorating is that the dying person can no longer open and close their eyes.

Stage One

The body is deteriorating. We mentioned, what is the external sign? That is the thinning of the limbs, the looseness of the limbs and so forth. There is a correspondence to that. This is [that] the various elements are dissolving. We use this term ‘dissolving’. We use this term ‘earth element is dissolving into the water element’. What does that mean? It means that the function that the earth element has been performing up to this point is deteriorating. The next element in this series becomes more obvious. The next element is the water element. So, the function of the water element relatively becomes more obvious. This is occasioned with an inner sign. So, what is the inner sign when it is said that the earth element dissolves into the water element? There is the appearance of a water mirage. It is like on a hot summer’s day in a desert or sandy area when the sun is striking the sand and there is a shimmering, bluish appearance, as if there were water there. This is what appears to this dying person when the earth element dissolves into the water element.

So, we are working with our map here. We have started on our journey over the course of the death process. We have arrived at the first site, or location—the first place. This is the place we call ‘the earth element dissolves into the water element’. The earth element is deteriorating. Let us say that it is losing its ability to perform its function that it has been able to perform up to this point, and the water element is relatively more obvious to us in terms of its function. This has an internal appearance to the dying person. So, this person is aware [by] following this map, and they now see this bluish water mirage. They can, upon seeing this appear to their awareness—their consciousness—they can understand, “Ah! Now the earth element has dissolved into the water element.” They know where they are as they progress along these different locations because they have a map they are following.

It is at this point when the functions of the three elements of form—that is, of the body, earth element and the eye sense power—they have ceased. So, it is as if the dying person no longer has a body, the earth element is not operating and neither is the eye sense power.

So, in terms of the five aggregates, we have arrived at the second of these, that is, the ‘aggregate of feelings’.

Stage Two

We are about to arrive at our second location. This is with the deterioration of the aggregate of feelings. Various sites of feelings have ceased. We no longer have feelings associated with the eyes. We no longer have feelings associated with, let us say, seeing. We no longer have feelings associated with hearing, nor smelling, nor tactile experiences.

We are losing our sense of feeling. We are no longer able to discriminate the types of experiences in terms of whether they are pleasurable, unpleasurable or even neutral.

Coincidental with this cessation of the aggregate of feelings, this is occurring simultaneously with the deterioration of the water element. Let us say the water element is losing its particular function which it has been able to perform over the course of our life. This has certain external signs which are indicative of the water element losing its ability. We call it ‘the water element is dissolving’. All the various elements of the body—the parts of the body which are made up of water constituents—begin to dry up.

The saliva begins to dry up. There is a lessening of sweat. The urine decreases. What are called regenerative fluids—procreative fluids—are drying up. So, all the various constituent parts of the body which are made up of fluids are beginning to dry.

Previously, the eye sense power had ceased. Now, at this point—at the second location—the ear sense power ceases. With the cessation of the ear sense power, the sound ‘ur’ which is omnipresent—always there—that sound ceases, this ‘ur’ sound.

What we described in terms of these various parts of the body—the fluids drying up—is termed ‘the external signs’ at this particular location. But there is also an internal sign. By ‘internal sign’, we mean that which is appearing to the consciousness of the dying person and their actual experience in terms of appearances. We said previously that, first, the earth element ceased—let us say, lost its function. We said that the earth element dissolves into the water element. Now what is occurring is, the water element is dissolving into the fire element. The water element is losing its ability to perform its function, and the next element within this serial fashion becomes more obvious. That is, the fire element becomes more obvious in terms of the experience of the appearance to the dying person. What appears to the dying person is as if you were in a closed room where there is no wind of any sort, and there was a wispy, bluish smoke arising in that room.

We are following along our map in this journey in the death process. There are these various external signs of where we have arrived. Now there is the internal appearance/sign for the dying person—what is appearing for them. We said that this is the appearance of this bluish smoke. The dying person, upon seeing the arising of this appearance of this bluish smoke, they can understand, “Ah! I have arrived at the second location in my nine-step journey.”

In our progress we are working through the five aggregates. The aggregate of form has ceased. The aggregate of feelings has ceased, and now we are going to speak of the death process in terms of the aggregate of discriminations, or perceptions or recognitions.

Stage Three

So, the aggregate of discriminations is deteriorating. It is ceasing. What are some of the external signs that this process is taking place? One loses the ability to discriminate. This would come to mean, for example, one would not be able to discriminate, “Ah, this is my mother. This is my father.” One would not recognize them for who they are. We would not understand what this is or what that is. There would be no recognition. There would be no understanding of what previously we were able to discriminate and recognize. You lose that ability.

Coincidental with this process of the aggregate of discriminations ceasing is the deterioration of the third of the four elements—the physical elements. First, the earth element has ceased. The water element has ceased, and now the fire element is deteriorating. It is losing its ability to perform its particular function—that is to say, to bring about warmth to the body. A sign that this is occurring is—one of the functions of the fire element is to aid in the digestion of food—due to the deterioration of the fire element, food can no longer be digested.

On our journey through the death process, we are arriving at the third location. There is an inner sign—the appearance which is dawning or arising for the dying person. At this point, because the fire element is becoming most obvious, there is an association with that in terms of the appearance to the dying person.

(Rinpoche was not sure whether this occurs within Australia, but in Tibet there is a small insect. It is a firefly.) What is appearing to the dying person is [likened to] a dark sky with lots of fireflies flashing here and there, flying around in the dark sky. Maybe if you are not familiar with fireflies, [then, instead] when we have a festival of some sort, we have sparklers. You light them and there are all these sparks flashing here and there. Another analogy, or way you can visualize this, is if you were to take a handful of very dry grass, and you were to light it and throw it up in the air, and there are all these bits of dry grass flashing and burning up. So, these flashing lights or sparks or fireflies—this is this appearance to the dying person. When that appears, the person can understand, “Ah! I have reached the third location on my journey over this nine-step journey.”

The dying person can think to himself when these sparks or flashes of light, dancing in the dark, appear, “Ah! Now I have reached the third location.”

Stage Four

We are approaching the fourth location, and this is the deterioration of the fourth aggregate—the ‘aggregate of compositional factors’. There is an external sign that this is occurring. The external sign is that the physical form—the body—can no longer perform any actions, such as moving around. It is like a fallen tree. Wherever you place it, it just lies there. There is no way that it can do anything for itself.

Coincidental with the ceasing of [functioning of] the aggregate of compositional factors is the deterioration of the fourth of the four elements (the physical elements). Previously, the earth element had ceased, then the water element ceased, then the fire element ceased and now the wind energy element is deteriorating. It is ceasing. What this comes to mean is that, in general, we can abbreviate all the various wind energies in the body—the various types/classes of wind energies in the body—into ten. There are five root and five branch wind energies. The five branch wind energies are associated with the physical senses—the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body. Those begin to lose their function. Then, there are also five root wind energies and these are normally centered, primarily, at various locations within the body. [These areas are] at the secret region of the body [the genital/sacral area], at the level of the navel, the heart area, the throat area and the crown area. Then, it is said that the branch wind energies begin to absorb into the first of the root wind energies. And then, that begins to absorb into the next, into the next, into the next. Then, finally, one is then left with the single wind energy, which is termed ‘life-bearing wind energy’ at the heart. So, all of the wind energies have withdrawn from their various sites, in the various parts of the body and have come to be centered and absorbed into the life-bearing wind energy centered at the heart.

There is this absorption of the wind energies from the various sites in which they are normally located throughout the body. They are absorbing into the area of the center at the heart. This process not only takes place in terms of one wind energy absorbing into the next—the five branches dissolving into the root and, finally, the life-bearing wind energy—but, even that life-bearing wind energy has different steps in the process of death in its absorption into the heart area. There is what is termed ‘entering, abiding and dissolving’. Now, [with] these three steps in this process—the life-bearing wind energy entering into the center of the heart area—the entering is accompanied with an external sign. The external sign of the life-bearing wind energy entering into the heart area is that the inhalation and exhalation ceases, so there is no air passing either through the mouth or through the nostrils, coming in or out. That is ‘entry’. With regard to ‘abiding’, the external sign that the life-bearing wind is now abiding is that, normally, there is a movement of the chest in the rising and falling associated with the breath. Any movement of that ceases. That is indicative that there is now the abiding of the life-bearing wind energy at the heart area. At this

point in worldly terms—in the view of the world—we would say, “Ah! The person is dead.” They are not breathing. There is no movement. So, we would normally say the person is dead.

It is at this point that, if you were in the hospital, then the doctor would say, “You can remove the body now.”

According to western interpretations, at this point we would say that the person is dead because there is no breath, there is no movement. But, according to the Buddhist description, the individual is not dead. The wind energy and mind are still residing within the body, though there are no outward signs. Nonetheless, the mind and wind energy are still residing in the body. We said that [with] the ceasing of the four elements, (This is the cessation of the fourth element.) the earth element has ceased. The water, fire and now the wind energy element, is ceasing. Or, let us say the gross wind energy element is ceasing. There is, we described, the external sign that this is occurring. What is the internal sign that this is occurring? It is described that there is a rising or the dawning of appearance of a sputtering butter lamp. It is like if we had a butter lamp where the oil or the butter was just about exhausted. The flame kind of flares up and then it goes down, then it flares up and goes down. It is just about to go out in its last gasps of flame. It flares up and goes down. That sputtering—that rising and ceasing of the butter lamp—this is what appears. This is the internal sign that we have arrived at the fourth location. So, to the dying person, when this appearance of the sputtering butter lamp appears, they think, “Ah! I have arrived at the fourth location on my journey.

Where are we along our journey? Four of the five aggregates have ceased their function—the aggregates of form, feelings, discriminations and compositional factors. They have ceased. The four elements have ceased function—earth, water, fire and wind energy. Of the five sense powers—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body sense powers—they have all ceased. They no longer function. The body can no longer feel hot and cold, rough or smooth. It is insensitive. It is no longer functioning.

Stage Five

So, of the five aggregates, the only aggregate which remains is that of the consciousness. All of the other four aggregates have ceased. The function of the body has ceased. It is no longer able to perform its functions. All that is left now is that of the mind, or the consciousness.

With regard to the aggregate of consciousness, there are numerous levels of subtlety and coarseness of consciousness. We begin with a coarse consciousness, and then there is a more subtle level, and a level which is more subtle than that, more subtle than that, subtler, more subtle.....It is only when we come down to the most subtle level of consciousness that we can actually say that the person is dead.

We have these varying levels of subtlety and coarseness of the consciousness. When the coarse consciousness ceases, then the next level of subtlety is manifest. Then, when that level of consciousness ceases, then the next level of subtlety of consciousness manifests. It is only when we come down to the extreme most subtle consciousness—that extreme most subtle consciousness is the mind of death. If we begin to take a look at these various coarse and subtle levels of consciousness—that which is most coarse [is what] we call ‘the eighty indicative conceptions’¹⁵. These are eighty types of conceptual consciousness. It is by the force of these conceptual consciousness that we involve ourselves in all the various activities, creating, actions and so forth which propel us to remain in cyclic existence—by the force of these eighty indicative conceptions—all of these various types of thought consciousness.

We can make a distinction within Buddhism into what are called ‘The Perfection Vehicle’ and ‘The Vehicle of Secret Mantra’, or Tantra. Within the Perfection Vehicle, what is the root of cyclic existence? It is said to be ignorance—ignorance, that is to say, [of] the conception of true existence, of phenomena and persons. The root of cyclic existence is [thus] ignorance—the conception of the true existence of the person and phenomena. Due to this basic root of ignorance, we generate various afflictive emotions. Due to these afflictive emotions, we create karma, or actions. Due to karma, or actions, we go on to take repeated rebirths. So, within the Perfection Vehicle, the root of cyclic existence comes down to ignorance. But, it is posited differently within Secret Mantra, or Tantra. The roots of cyclic existence [in Secret mantra] are the wind energies. Why is that? Because (we just mentioned the eighty indicative conceptions) these various thought consciousnesses—conceptual consciousnesses—are supported on wind energies. Therefore, in Secret Mantra, the root is the wind energy supporting these eighty indicative conceptions.

Levels of Consciousness

There are varying levels of coarseness and subtlety with regard to the wind energies. There are corresponding varying levels of coarseness and subtlety with regard to the consciousnesses associated with those levels of wind energy. The wind energies and the mind, they accompany one another. They go together. There is a correspondence between the degree of subtlety or coarseness with regard to them. In the course of the dying process, there is a deterioration of the wind energy element. First, we have just discussed the deterioration of the coarse wind energy element, but there are varying levels of more subtle wind energy levels remaining. These begin to dissolve, or let us say, they begin to lose their particular function. The next, as was just mentioned, is the level of the wind energy element which supports the eighty indicative conceptions. We just talked about these eighty indicative conceptions—all of these various types of thought consciousnesses, due to which we continually circle within cyclic existence. The wind energy which supports that particular level of consciousness—let us say the eighty indicative conceptions—is losing its function. Therefore, as it loses its function, the eighty indicative conceptions begin to cease. As this ceases there are various more and more subtle levels of wind energy elements which become obvious, or more predominant, and thereby more corresponding levels of mind which are associated with particular levels of wind energy element. These are termed the ‘White Appearance’, ‘Red Increase’ and ‘Black Near-Attainment’. We are moving down to different, more and more subtle, levels of wind energy elements. As the coarser winds deteriorate, there is a corresponding deterioration in terms of the minds which are supported on those particular levels of wind energy elements, until we come down to the mind of death itself—the very most subtle level of mind—which is supported by the most subtle level of wind energies. This is called the ‘mind of death’. This ‘mind of death’ is said to be neutral. Being neutral, it can be influenced in either a positive or negative direction. Now, a yogi who has practiced makes use of this most subtle level of consciousness—this mind of death—in the course of his or her practice. In using that mind [he or she] is able to use that mind to achieve Buddha-hood at the moment of their death. If we can associate that mind with a virtue (a virtuous thought), then that mind becomes virtuous. It is neutral in itself and it becomes the entity of whatever mind it is associated with. The yogi transforms the mind of death into the entity of a path and achieves Buddha-hood. If, on the other hand, that mind of death becomes associated with a negativity (a non-virtue), then that will lead us to a bad migration in the future.

There are five levels of mental consciousness. We are only talking about mental consciousness here—not, for example, eye consciousness and so-forth—but mental consciousness. The coarse mental consciousness is the eighty indicative conceptions—all of these various types of conceptual thoughts that normally predominate our minds. These are coarse. We said that the wind energy element dissolves. OK?

And, what is the internal sign? It was when the butter lamp appeared. The sputtering butter lamp is appearing to the dying person's consciousness. That indicates that the coarse wind energy has lost its function. The coarse wind energy supports the eighty indicative conceptions. Therefore, the eighty indicative conceptions cease, and a more subtle level of wind energy element becomes obvious, or predominant and, thereby, that particular level of mind, or consciousness, which is being supported by that subtlety of wind energy.

The different levels of wind energy are losing their function. The coarsest is dissolving into the more subtle levels of wind energy and so-forth, and with that, the various levels of coarse and subtle mind—mental consciousnesses—supported by those wind energies. Previously, we arrived at the fourth location on our journey, and with that, the inner appearance which indicated our location—the sputtering butter lamp—appeared. Now the wind energy is continuing to deteriorate (is dissolving). The eighty indicative conceptions cease. A more subtle level of wind energy becomes obvious, and a particular conceptual consciousness which is supported on that becomes apparent, in terms of the inner appearance to the dying person. This is called the '[mind of] white appearance'. What does it look like? To explain in terms of the way it looks, in India, after the monsoon, it has rained a great deal, so the atmosphere is very clean. There is no dust in the atmosphere, in the sky and so-forth. So, the air is very pure and clean. It is a dark night and there is the dawning of a full moon. With the dawning of the full moon, there is this white moonlight that pervades the entire sky. It appears with great clarity, and there is a sense of vacuity. So, there is this vacuous, clear, white light of the moon appearing in the sky. That is called the 'white appearance'—that particular conceptual consciousness.

White Appearance/Fifth Stage

Where does this 'white appearance' originate that is appearing in the course of the death process? Initially, when we took rebirth, the individual—just prior to taking rebirth—is in the intermediate state. Its future parents are having intercourse, and there is the coming together of the sperm and ovum—what are called the 'white and red constituents'. This is how it is referred to here. The consciousness of the intermediate state being is drawn to that combination of white and red constituents and enters into that site. That is the taking of rebirth. So, the consciousness entering into the white and red constituents, which have joined together, this constitutes rebirth. The white constituent comes from our father. The red constituent comes from our mother. They donate that particular constituent to the formation of the offspring. As the being begins to develop, these two constituents develop. Some measure of that white constituent, as the fetus develops, will develop and will remain primarily in the crown area. In the course of development of the fetus, a measure of that red element will remain and reside predominantly at the level of the navel. There are said to be a white drop, which is suspended at the crown of the head, and a red constituent, which is suspended at the level of the navel. We said that the wind energies are deteriorating. At a certain point, the wind energy which has supported this white drop—has maintained its position primarily at the crown of the head—when that particular wind energy deteriorates and loses its function—the white drop, which is in the nature of the water element or a liquid, flows down. So, it begins to flow down the central channel toward the heart. It is due to that flowing down of the white element from the crown to the heart that this is experienced, in terms of the white appearance to the dying person.

In terms of our map—our journey—(these locations on our map), we have arrived at the fifth location. The five aggregates have ceased their function—that is, the aggregates of forms, feelings, discriminations, compositional factors and, now, gross consciousnesses, have ceased. The internal sign

that we are now experiencing is this dawning of this brilliant, white moon which pervades this vacuous, empty, clear space. And now we know that, “Ah! Now I have arrived at the fifth location.”

Red Increase/Sixth Stage

There is a further deterioration in terms of the wind element. The coarse wind element is losing its function and a more subtle wind element is becoming more obvious or predominant. This is experienced, in terms of the death process, as the red constituent—which we said came from our mother and which has been held suspended in the central channel at the level of the navel—beginning to rise up. The red constituent is in the nature of fire. Fire has the nature of rising upward. Sometimes we talk about the ‘tummo’, or ‘fierce woman’. This is the fire element, which is associated with the red constituent. It begins to rise up through the central channel, moving up toward the heart area. So, the white element [constituent] has descended and the red element [constituent] is now rising up to meet the white constituent. The inner experience, which appears for the dying person that this is occurring, is that within this clear, vacuous space or sky, it is as if this red, orange-ish sun is rising. As the sun is rising, the entire vacuous, clear space is pervaded with this reddish-orange color.

Black Near-Attainment/Seventh Stage

We have the white drop descending from the crown, and the red drop (constituent) ascending from the level of the navel. They are both moving toward the heart area. Within the central channel there is what is called a ‘channel wheel’—a chakra—or just a ‘wheel’. Residing in the center of that wheel is the most subtle—the very subtle—consciousness. It abides there throughout our life. As the white drop is descending and the red drop is ascending, these two drops (or constituents) encapsulate the very subtle wind energy (the very subtle consciousness). In the process of encapsulating that consciousness, there is the appearance for the dying person of what is called the ‘black near-attainment’. This is a vacuous space, but it is free of any sunlight or moonlight—of any light whatsoever. It is an all-pervasive blackness, but it is a vacuous blackness. So, the mind experiences complete darkness—blackness. That is called the ‘black near-attainment’.

Now we have arrived at the eighth location on our journey.

Mind of Death/Clear Light/Final Stage

The white constituent is descending from the crown, and the red constituent is rising from the level of the navel. They come together at the heart channel wheel, or chakra, where there resides the most subtle level of—the very subtle level of—mind and wind energies. Their coming together encapsulates this combination of very subtle wind energy and mind. The experience of this event to the dying person is the dawning of the black near-attainment. Visually, this is a vast vacuity of clear space pervaded by blackness or darkness. Now, there are two parts to this—to the black near-attainment. With the upper part, or the beginning part, there is a factor of mindfulness. So, it is possible to think at this point—to have some kind of conceptual thought. This is an extremely important point. It is the last moment that we are going to be able to have any kind of mindfulness. For the yogi who is practicing Secret Mantra, he generates that black near-attainment in the nature of Great Bliss and he recalls his (or her) realization of Emptiness. So, this first part of the black near-attainment is transformed into the entity of a path of Great Bliss and realization of Emptiness.

The next moment—the latter part of this black near-attainment—there is no mindfulness. It is like you swoon into unconsciousness. The mind completely becomes dark. There is no mindfulness. There is no thought. It is like when you turn off the light. Everything is darkened. There is nothing. There are no appearances. There is no thought. This is in the course of the latter part of the black near-attainment. These white and red constituents go on to dissolve into the white and red constituents which originated with our parents, which have always resided from the original consciousness which entered into the fertilized ovum from our parents, which has abided at our heart. So, these original white and red constituents which have come [down] from the crown and upward from the navel dissolve into the original white and red constituent. Upon dissolving into what is called the ‘indestructible drop’ at the heart, it is like flipping on a light switch. The mind becomes very alert. There is a pervasive dawning of what is called the ‘clear light’. This is the primordial consciousness. This is the consciousness that has resided from beginningless time. It is the same entity as its wind energy. This is the mind of death.

Stopping Death

What the yogi does—even though there was this interval of unconsciousness—due to having previously generated that Great Bliss and mindfulness of realization of Emptiness, this mind of clear light is transformed into the realization of Emptiness in the experience of Great Bliss. With respect to that extremely clear mind of Great Bliss and Emptiness, the yogi thinks, “I am the truth body [Dharmakaya] of a Buddha.” So, identifying one’s self as the truth body of a Buddha—which is imputed upon this extremely subtle wind energy and mind, and which is in the entity of Great Bliss and the realization of Emptiness—will stop death. It will stop the intermediate state. It will stop rebirth. That individual will definitely achieve Buddha-hood.

Let us say we cannot do that. We go on to the intermediate state. We have not stopped death. We go through the dying process and complete the dying process. We move on to the intermediate state. Here the practitioner of Secret Mantra—the yogi—would meditate on him or herself, just by way of example, as Vajrayogini. [They] would arise in the intermediate state in aspect of Vajrayogini, cultivating this realization. One was Vajrayogini. You are being led to the Pure Land of *Kha Choe Shing* [Tibetan term for the Pure Land of Vajrayogini]. The horns are blowing [along with] the cymbals and drums, and you have the aspect of a very youthful body. It is very appealing, and you are being led there. This is the appearance that you are practicing in the course of the intermediate state. With that, you can achieve Buddha-hood by realizing Emptiness, making use of that embodiment and that appearance and that identity of a Buddha. Maybe you cannot achieve that. OK? Barring that, you go on to take rebirth. But, having practiced [Secret] Mantra previously, you will not take a bad rebirth—a bad migration. You will achieve a human life and, moreover, a life where you will be able to carry on your practice of Mantra, and you will achieve Buddha-hood in that life. OK?

On the other hand, let us say you do not practice. We said that this mind of clear light—this mind of death—is neutral. It can be influenced by any type of mind that arises, that it is conjoined with. If it becomes conjoined with or comes under the influence of a negative state of mind—non-virtuous thought—then this will propel you into a bad migration. This will throw you into continued cyclic existence. Why is that? Because, having taken rebirth, you will go on to generate the various types of more and more coarse wind energies. You will develop the coarse wind energies and, as we have said, coarse wind energies act as a support for coarse consciousnesses. Among these coarse consciousnesses are the various afflictive emotions of attachment and so-forth. By the arising of the coarse wind energies, there is the arising of the concomitant afflictive emotions which propel us into committing negative

actions and so forth (karma), and we go on to circle continually in cyclic existence. This is why we said the wind energies are the basis of cyclic existence. They are the root of cyclic existence.

Now, what happens now in terms of the physiology? The white constituent has descended. The red constituent has ascended, dissolves into the primordial drop, and they begin to continue their downward and upward movement, respectively. [Along] with this comes the dawning of the clear light. The red drop is arising (ascending). [When it exits the crown] according to the Tibetan tradition, the outward appearance of the actual death of the individual is accompanied with the external sign that a red drop of blood—a red constituent—will exit through the nose. The white drop, or white constituent, will exit through the genitals. For the Tibetan, this is a sign that the being is dead. After that, you can do whatever you want with the body. If you want to burn or cremate the body (or so-forth), it can be done then. Until that point the mind is [still] residing in the body. The individual is not dead. It is only with the completion of this cycle and the arising of these signs that, from the Tibetan point of view, that the individual is said to be dead.

We can see from this that, if we can make use of this mind of death—even if only to develop a virtuous state of mind—we can ensure that we will not take a bad migration. At the highest level we can stop death, intermediate [state] and rebirth. We can attain Buddha-hood. But, even at a level of ourselves, we can ensure that we will not take a bad migration, and that we will take a positive, happy migration. If we do not practice, then we cannot influence the nature of this mind of death and, therefore, the outcome of the death process. So, we have to practice again and again and again, emphasizing. Essentially, you know, maybe we cannot practice tantra in this way. We should try to realize Emptiness. You can see how important the realization of Emptiness is. But, maybe we cannot realize Emptiness. [If not, then] Practice the Three Principle Aspects of the Path—the awakening heart, that is, generating love and compassion, practicing the determination to be free, the will-to-awaken—try to set yourself some kind of future goal, and implement the means to achieve that. Set some kind of goal for yourself and, as best you can, practice in order to actualize that. Cultivate these extremely positive states of mind—the awakened heart, faith in your lama, and compassion. If you do this, there is no doubt that you will take a positive rebirth—a happy rebirth. You will not take a negative rebirth. This is important for your life, not only in this life, but in future lives. Again and again, cultivate positive states of mind—virtuous states—to habituate your mind to these virtuous states. If you do that, you will have nothing to worry about when you die.

Conclusion

Such an explanation and such practices are not found in sutra—let us say, the Perfection Vehicle. They are only found within Secret Mantra, or Tantra. Moreover, such a practice is not found in the lower tantras. It is only found in higher tantras. There are three lower tantras—action, performance and yoga tantra. There is one upper tantra—higher tantra—that is ‘Highest Yoga Tantra’ [anuttara yoga tantra]. So, such a practice is only found within Highest Yoga Tantra. The entrance way into Highest Yoga Tantra is the taking of the four empowerments. So, if we have taken the four empowerments, we should go on to practice the taking of the three [Buddha] bodies into the path. This is the main meditation we should be concerned with. This is the practice of the generation stage. If we do not meditate and cultivate this taking of the three bodies, then all of what we have described in terms of achieving Buddha-hood in the course of the dying process, you will not achieve. You will not [arise as a Buddha]. Having taken the empowerments of Highest Yoga Tantra, we should observe our commitments and vows and, moreover, we should practice the Three Principle Aspects of the Path—the will-to-awaken, the awakened heart but, especially, the awakened mind. That is to say, the most important is the view of Emptiness.

-----End of the body of the teaching-----

Questions

In general, my eyes are not so good, and today I am having trouble with my hearing, and sometimes Jampa speaks softly. We were just discussing on whether or not to have a session of question and answer, but Rinpoche is not hearing so well, so we are just going to keep it very short. Maybe just a few minutes of question and answers. OK? So, if you have any questions.....

Question: With the dissolution stage we experience when we are sleeping, is there a time frame for that? Is there a time frame for when we go through these dissolution stages?

Answer: This dissolution process arises in the course of going to sleep. Once you are asleep, then there is just ‘an emptiness’. The process has already passed. How long this process will last in the going to sleep, there is no set time frame. It depends upon the practitioner. It is necessary to train in this. It will not appear to you without the process of training. First, make a request to your lama and your meditational deity, offer mandalas and make prayers that these various appearances may appear clearly to one’s self in the course of going to sleep. Then you have to pay careful attention as you fall asleep. As you are falling asleep, pay careful attention to whatever is appearing to yourself. If you keep training in this way, eventually, slowly, slowly, eventually, you will begin to catch some of these appearances in the course [of falling asleep], but it is a matter of training, and there is no particular frame of time of how long the length of this will be—the dissolution process.

To continue with what we were saying, in order to be able to train in the course of falling asleep with regard to the dissolution process, you should first train in the waking state. First, training in the waking state and being able to observe these appearances, then you will be able to observe these at the time of falling asleep, and then, if you are able to follow them in the course of falling asleep, you will be able to follow them in the course of the actual death process. Geshe Chekawa is the author of a mind-training text called *Seven-Point Mind Training*. He said that the mind has one wonderful quality. No matter how afflicted it may be, it can always be taught something else. So, we don’t talk about the mind being afflicted or obscured. We talk about the mind ‘having afflictions’, or ‘possessing afflictions’ or ‘possessing obscurations’. The mind is not afflicted, in the sense that it can be trained. It can be trained in any way we wish. If we train it in a positive direction, we can increase that positive nature of the mind more, and more, and more. Our mind is just like a child. A child needs to be trained. If we just leave the child to its own devices, the child will just simply run wild and be spoiled, and it is a pain to everybody. On the other hand, if we train it well, then it serves the child well and ourselves as well.

There was a previous lama who said that when the three come together—a qualified Lama (a spiritual teacher), a qualified student and the Dharma—when these three meet, it is like we can mold Buddha-hood with our hand. It is just like forming it with our hand. We can create whatever we wish.

Dedication

So, if we have a coming together of a qualified spiritual teacher—a Lama—the qualified Dharma (the Teachings) and students—and the student makes effort and is intelligent, then there is nothing that we cannot accomplish. We can accomplish Buddha-hood. So, I ask you to please put into practice as best you can whatever you might have heard in the course of our teaching together. Having heard these teachings on Secret Mantra, it is extremely rare and it is extremely fortunate, and I feel fortunate for having had the

opportunity to explain them. And, moreover, we have accumulated a vast collection of virtue—of skillful actions—in having listened and explained this profound Dharma in this manner. We can dedicate all this virtue toward peace and happiness in the world. Whatever wars, whatever disasters [there are] in the world, may they all cease. May all the wishes of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, quickly succeed. May the various traditions with the Buddhist tradition—whether it is Kagyu or Nyingma and so-forth—may there be harmony. May they all practice in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha. So, I ask you to please put into practice whatever may be of benefit to you.

OK Thank you very much. Very good! Very Good!

Closing Prayers. End of Sessions.

Editor's Notes

Transcription, editing, and by Malvin Artley

The CD is available through TBI. The End Notes are points of clarification for readers who may not be that familiar with certain facets of Buddhism and Buddhist practice.

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End Notes

¹ **The Lesser Vehicle** (Hīnayāna in Sanskrit) refers to the sutra path in Buddhism, also known as the Shravaka path, or path of the Solitary Realizer (Arhat). Some sources refer to Hinayana teachings as the earliest teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha, although the use of the term in that way is seen as pejorative, being used especially by early Mahayanists to denigrate followers of the Hinayana path. Followers of the Lesser Vehicle have, as their primary aim, the attainment of Pratyeka Buddha-hood—the attainment of Nirvana, or Arhat status. There is no pledge to liberate all sentient beings from samsara on the path of the Lesser Vehicle.

² **The Great Vehicle** (Mahāyāna in Sanskrit.) is a classification of Buddhist practice based upon three main factors: 1) As a living tradition, it is the largest of the two Buddhist traditions, the other being Theravada. 2) In terms of Buddhist philosophy, Mahayana refers to a particular type of motivation in the practice, namely the Bodhisattva motivation (the attainment of liberation in order to be of help with the liberation of all sentient beings). 3) As a practice, it is one of the three main divisions of such practice in Buddhism—Hinayana (see Lesser Vehicle), Mahayana, and Vajrayana (see Secret Mantra). The earliest mention of Mahayana is between the first century BCE and the first century CE.

³ See ‘Great Vehicle’, note 2

⁴ The path of **Vajrayāna**—also known as Anuttarayogatantra, Tantrayana, the Diamond Vehicle, the Adamantine Vehicle, Esoteric Buddhism, and **Secret Mantra**—is a class of Mahayana practices that requires initiation into the practice by a fully qualified Initiate/Teacher/Guru. In the vernacular, Vajrayana is known as the ‘fast track to enlightenment’, in that it is said that, through some of its practices (sadhanas), one can achieve full enlightenment in a single lifetime by means of their application. Vajrayana is not a philosophical system of Buddhism. It is classed as a division of Mahayana Buddhism and takes Mahayana as its philosophical foundation, upon which its vows and commitments are based. Of Vajrayana practice, HH The 14th Dalai Lama has said, “Tantra is limited to persons whose compassion is so great that they cannot bear to spend unnecessary time in attaining Buddhahood, as they want to be a supreme source of help and happiness for others quickly.” Vajrayana is called Secret Mantra because much of its texts are unintelligible to the uninitiated, and because the practitioner is bound by an oath of secrecy about the practice—as a protection to him/herself, the Teacher, and to the uninitiated. Vajrayana evolved in India, beginning in the 4th century CE, where it had died out by the 13th century, by which time it had made its way fully into Tibet.

⁵ **Merit** (def) essentially, as defined in Buddhist terms, is positive imprinting on one’s mental continuum that yields happiness in life, i.e., positive karma. Merit is said to have three bases leading to its accrual: giving, virtue, and mental development (study and meditation). Merit accumulates as a result of good deeds, acts and thoughts, which carry over to future rebirths and to later in the present life.

⁶ **The Two Vehicles** of Mahayana are the Paramitayāna (The Perfection/Causal Vehicle) and Mantrayāna (Resultant Vehicle) Paramitayana is the study and application of Lam Rim principles (The Three Principle Aspects of the Path—renunciation, bodhichitta, and dependent arising) and realization of the Six Paramitas (Perfections)—generosity, ethics, patience, joyous effort, concentration, and wisdom. The Paramitayana is the sutra path in the Mahayana tradition. Mantrayana encompasses the four divisions of Tantra—Performance, Action, Yoga, and Highest Yoga Tantra. In the Paramitayana, there is no visualization of one’s self as a deity, whereas the visualization of one’s self as a deity is central to all Tantric practice. The preceding sentence defines the primary difference between the two Vehicles in Mahayana practice.

⁷ **Death, Intermediate State** (Devachan in Sanskrit—the Happy Land, or God Realm), and **Bardo** are the stages of the cyclic process of Samsara involved with a person’s existence between lives. The chain of cause and effect runs unbroken through all three stages, and it can be broken at any point along that path, resulting in one’s liberation. Along with the stage of life, these four stages thus form the wheel of Samsara, or continual rebirth (see also the front cover and the section ‘**On the cover**’ following the end notes).

⁸ **The Generation and Completion Stages** are the two primary divisions of Highest Yoga Tantra practice. In general, one must master the Generation Stage before one can move on to Completion Stage practice, although there are sadhanas that are an exception to that rule. In the Generation Stage, one ‘generates’ (visualizes) one’s self as the central deity of the practice, along with the entire retinue and the surrounding environment. In general, it is said that if one can hold the visualization of that in full detail and in complete steadiness of focus for at least 40 minutes, then one is ready to progress to Completion Stage practice. In Completion Stage practice, one works within the Voidness/Emptiness aspect of consciousness as a skillful means

of personal transformation, and in that, one works with the winds and drops, the subtle channels (nadis) and the chakras (energy vortices) within the subtle body for the purpose of generating the Great Bliss of Enlightenment (Nirvanic consciousness. See note 13).

⁹ **The Six Constituents** are defined as the subtle aspects of the four elements—earth, water, fire, and air—along with the winds and the drops. The wind (prāna in Sanskrit) is, literally, the life-force that animates the four elements. Wind is said to be inseparable with mind. It is said, “The mind and the winds(breath) are one.” The drops equate with bodhichitta—the awakened mind. In Secret Mantra practice, it is said that the channels (formed from the four elements) are the body of awakening, the winds are the speech of awakening, and the drops are the mind of awakening.

¹⁰ **The Nadis** are the energy channels or vessels within the subtle (vajra) body through which the winds move. They correspond to the meridians in acupuncture, and there are various gradations of them, from major to extremely fine. The human body is said to have 72,000 nadis. All the nadis are said to have their origin in the heart chakra

¹¹ **The Five Powers** are Faith, Effort, Mindfulness, Concentration, and Wisdom. They are parallel facets of the Five Spiritual Faculties (Indriya) and, as a group, are one of the seven sets of the ‘qualities conducive to enlightenment’ (Bodhipaksa Dharma)

¹² **Nirvāna**—a much misunderstood term—literally meaning, “blown out” in Sanskrit. It is a state of utter bliss (the Bliss of Full Enlightenment, or Great Bliss, to distinguish it from worldly bliss) and complete, untrammled consciousness, the state of complete union or absorption in all-Being (Hindu), which is known as the full realization of Emptiness—the Void Sphere of All Things—in Buddhism. Nirvana is not a locality. Rather, it is the state of being where the Dharmakaya vesture (truth body) is manifested, or realized. In attainment of full Nirvanic consciousness, one has finally attained the first realization of Buddhahood.

¹³ From Pali Canonical sources, **the Five Aggregates** are the five groupings of constituents (‘heaps’) that comprise the temporal portion of a human life—that which is appropriated at each birth and which dissolves at the end of each life. In some systems (Theosophy, etc.), the combined Five Aggregates compose what is termed, in those systems, ‘the human persona’—the combined functioning of the physical, emotional and coarse mental states of a human being. The Five Aggregates can be summarized as follows: Form (rūpa), Feelings (vedanā), Discriminations (sañña), Compositional Factors (sankhāra), and Consciousness (viññāna). Of these five, three are said to be mental factors (cetasika)—feelings, discriminations, and compositional factors—whereas form and consciousness stand alone. What is clear from this paper is that the dissolution process of the aggregates at the time of death is a linear process, in that the aggregates dissolve sequentially, from the coarsest to the most subtle of them—form being the coarsest, or densest, and consciousness being most subtle. It should be noted, however, that Buddhist sources differ as to how the aggregates relate to one another. From Pali sources, the aggregates are all interrelated, whereas in this paper, which is based upon Mahayana sources, the aggregates have a linear relationship, thus suggesting a hierarchy of order, from coarsest to most subtle. In Theosophical sources, the aggregates form the three lower bodies of a human being. The form aggregate is the physical nature in that system, the feelings are the emotional nature, and the other three aggregates form the lower mind and the intellect, or higher mind (It is said that there are three types of mind in the mental continuum in that system.). There is a most subtle type of mind in the Theosophical model, too, which equates with the ‘mind of death’, or the ‘mind of clear light’ in this paper, and which persists from life to life. In the Pali Canonical works, the form aggregate is derived from the four elements (earth, water, fire, and air). The consciousness aggregate arises from the other aggregates. The mental factors arise from the interaction [contact (phassa)] of the form and consciousness aggregates. The Five Aggregates are also called the five skandhas.

¹⁴ **The six spheres** (of consciousness) are the six senses—touch, hearing, sight, taste, smell and mind.

¹⁵ **The eighty indicative conceptions** are the various emotional and cognitive states within the mental continuum (see note 14, re: *cetasika*). They are commonly divided into three groups of 33, 40, and 7, resp. The group of 33 are indicative of the Mind of White Appearance, and are thus of the coarsest type of mind. The group of 40 are indicative of the Mind of Red Increase, and the group of 7 are indicative of the Mind of Black Near-Attainment, the most rarified, or subtle, type of mind. They are listed as follows:

1 Great separation from attachment: a mind not desiring an object

2 Middling separation from attachment

-
- 3 Small separation from attachment
 - 4 Mental going and coming: a mind going to external objects and coming to internal ones
 - 5 Great sorrow: the mental anxiety experienced upon separation from an attractive object
 - 6 Middling sorrow
 - 7 Small sorrow
 - 8 Peace: a mind remaining peacefully
 - 9 Conceptuality: a mind distracted towards an external object
 - 10 Great fear: the mind of fright generated upon meeting an unpleasant object
 - 11 Middling fear
 - 12 Small fear
 - 13 Great craving: a mind attracted to a pleasant object
 - 14 Middling craving
 - 15 Small craving
 - 16 Grasping: a mind thoroughly holding to objects of desire
 - 17 Non-virtue: doubt with respect to virtuous actions
 - 18 Hunger: a mind desiring food
 - 19 Thirst: a mind desiring drink
 - 20 Great feeling: feelings of pleasure, pain, or indifference
 - 21 Middling feeling
 - 22 Small feeling
 - 23 Conception of a cognizer
 - 24 Conception of cognizing
 - 25 Conception of a cognized object
 - 26 Investigation: a mind investigating what is suitable and unsuitable
 - 27 Shame: a mind that abandons misconduct for reasons that concern oneself
 - 28 Compassion: a mind wishing for others to be separated from suffering
 - 29 Mercy: a mind thoroughly protecting an observed object
 - 30 Desire to meet the attractive
 - 31 Qualm: a mind not abiding in certainty

-
- 32 Collection: a mind of gathering possessions
- 33 Jealousy: a mind disturbed by others' good fortune or good qualities
- 1 Attachment: a mind attached to an object not yet attained .
- 2 Adherence: a mind attached to an object already attained
- 3 Great joy: a joyous mind upon seeing what is attractive
- 4 Middling joy
- 5 Small joy
- 6 Rejoicing: a happy mind from having achieved a desired object
- 7 Rapture: a mind repeatedly experiencing a desired object
- 8 Amazement: contemplating an object that did not arise before
- 9 Excitement: a mind distracted through perceiving an attractive object
- 10 Contentment: a mind satisfied with a pleasant object
- 11 Embracing: a mind wishing to embrace
- 12 Kissing: a mind wishing to kiss
- 13 Sucking: a mind wishing to suck
- 14 Stability: a mind of unchanging continuum
- 15 Effort: a mind tending towards virtue
- 16 Pride: a mind considering oneself to be high
- 17 Activity: a mind of completing an activity
- 18 Robbery: a mind wishing to steal wealth
- 19 Force: a mind wishing to conquer others
- 20 Delight: a mind becoming accustomed to the path of virtue
- 21 The great innate-born: a mind engaging in non-virtue because of arrogance
- 22 The middling innate-born
- 23 The small innate-born
- 24 Vehemence: wishing to debate with the excellent for no reason

-
- 25 Flirtation: desiring to play upon seeing the attractive
- 26 Angry disposition: a mind of resentment
- 27 Virtue: a mind desiring to put effort into virtuous actions
- 28 Clear word and truth: a mind wishing to speak so that others can understand; a mind that does not change its discrimination of the facts
- 29 Untruth: a mind wishing to speak having changed its discrimination of the facts
- 30 Definiteness: a mind of very steady intent
- 31 Non-grasping: a mind not desiring to hold an object
- 32 Donor: a mind wishing to give away possessions
- 33 Exhortation: a mind wishing to exhort the lazy to practice Dharma
- 34 Heroism: a mind wishing to overcome enemies such as the delusions
- 35 Non-shame: a mind engaging in non-virtue, not abandoning misconduct despite our own disapproval or religious prohibitions
- 36 Pretension: a mind deceiving others through . hypocrisy
- 37 Tightness: a mind of sharp conscientiousness
- 38 Badness: a mind used to a bad view
- 39 Non-gentleness: a mind desiring to injure others
- 40 Dishonesty: a mind of crookedness
-
- 1 Middling attachment: a mind of equal attachment and hatred
- 2 Forgetfulness: a mind of degenerated mindfulness
- 3 Mistake: a mind that apprehends a mirage as actual water and so forth
- 4 Non-speaking: a mind not wishing to speak
- 5 Depression: a mind of annoyance
- 6 Laziness: a mind having displeasure in virtue
- 7 Doubt: a mind of uncertainty

On the Cover: (Adapted from <http://www2.bremen.de/info/nepal/Gallery-2/Wheel/Wheel-Expl.htm>)

The Wheel of Life illustrates the essence of the Buddhist teachings, the Four Truths: the existence of earthly suffering, its origin and cause, the ending or prevention of misery and the practice path to liberation from suffering. The Wheel of Life

describes the cause of all evil and its effects, mirrored in earthly phenomena just as it is experienced by everyone from the cradle to the grave. Picture by picture it reminds us that everyone is always his or her own judge and responsible for their own fate, because, according to Karma, causes and their effects are the fruits of one's own deeds. The circular composition of the Wheel of Life guides the viewer from picture to picture along the black path or the white path. It leads him or her through the twelve interwoven causes and their consequences to rebirth in one of the so-called Six Worlds. Projected on one plane, they fill the whole inner sphere the Wheel of Life. But the meaning of this painting is to show the way out of all these worlds of suffering into the sphere beyond.

The Wheel of Life is dedicated to all animated beings who have not yet attained the first step of spiritual liberation [Nirvana]. It therefore illustrates in a popular way the essence of the Buddhist teachings, the Four Truths: the existence of earthly suffering, its origin and cause, the cessation or prevention of misery and the practice path to liberation from earthly suffering. The Wheel of Life describes the cause of all evil and its effects, mirrored in earthly phenomena just as it is experienced by every man from the cradle to the grave. Picture by picture it reminds us that everyone is always his or her own judge and responsible for their own fate, because, according to Karma, causes and their effects are the fruits of one's own deeds. This so-called fate is demonstrated by the Lord of Dead, who like a monster, holds the Wheel of Life in his claws; he is a symbol of the transitory nature of all earthly phenomena.

The picture-path to follow begins in the centre arrow of the wheel. There, the three spiritual poisons are depicted: a black pig for ignorance, a green snake for envy and hatred and a red cock and for lust and greed. Who ever delivers himself up to these basic evils walks along the Dark Path leading to hells and bad rebirths. The other way is the Path of Bliss leading to better rebirths and upwards to final liberation. Both paths are illustrated by the ring surrounding the centre of the picture scroll: saints and sages lead the virtuous along the Path of Bliss, and demons, armed with nooses, drag the sinners along the Dark Path. In this way, the ignorant and the sinful, by the twelve interdependent causes and their effects are mercilessly driven through the Wheel of Life.

This is described by the twelve pictures of the **outer circle**:

The first picture: Beginning with Ignorance, which is spiritual blindness, illustrated by an old and sightless man with a stick, unable to find his way [bottom left]. **The second picture** shows a potter, his pots being symbolic of his own deeds [acting, speaking and thinking] with which he moulds his own karma, popularly called fate. **The third picture** depicts a tree and a monkey springing from branch to branch: this symbolizes the major consciousness which in ignorant people springs uncontrolled from object to object. For this reason, by analysis leading to the understanding of inner and outer phenomena, Buddhist psychology always aims at the full control of consciousness. **The fourth picture** shows a boat with two people, symbolizing name and form, spiritual and physical energy, inseparably floating on the stream of life. **The fifth picture** is of a house with five windows and a door, symbolizing the five senses and the faculty of thinking, those entrances [i.e. the sense organs] by which the outer world is perceived. **The sixth picture**, a man and a woman embracing, demonstrates contact, the consequence of sensual perceptions. **The seventh picture** is dedicated to the emotions by which one is struck, as by an arrow in the eye. **The eighth picture**, of a woman offering a drink to a man, illustrates desire, stimulated by perceptions and emotions and leading to the so-called thirst for life. **The ninth picture** illustrates sensual entanglement: the longing to keep that which is desired, represented by a man plucking the fruits of a tree. **The tenth picture** symbolizes the procreation of a new life, here depicted by a beautiful bride. **The eleventh picture** shows the consequence: procreation is followed by birth, a woman giving birth to a child, shown here in the natural crouching position. The **twelfth** and last picture shows old age and death, the inevitable end of all earthly existence, illustrated here by bearers with a bier, the corpse swathed and in the fetal posture ready for the next rebirth and further misery in one of the symbolic six worlds

The Symbolic Six Worlds

The first of these transitory worlds is the **abode of the so-called Gods**. It is a temporal paradise achieved by good deeds, and it is illustrated in the uppermost section of the wheel. Here the Buddha with the lute is seen reminding the gods of their limited pleasures and guarding them against vanity and haughtiness, which encourages them to believe in their own imperishability. But these gods are not yet freed from sorrow; they too, after thousands of human years, are subject to old age and death. Their special suffering is the illusion of the eternity of their paradisaic state; their misery lies in their eventual comprehension of the error.

To the right, the **World of Titans** is illustrated: they are permanently warring against the gods and fighting for the fulfillment of their own desires; their suffering is the endless war, the result of envy and insatiable ambition. Here the Buddha appears with a sword. Still in the **upper half of the wheel**, to the left, the World of Men is depicted: driven by egoism and ignorance, they suffer from the permanently repeated cycle of birth, sickness and death. The Buddha with the begging bowl appears to help them. In the **lower half of the wheel**, to the left, the World of Animals illustrates their special suffering: oppression by other beings. They devour each other and become beasts of burden. Here Buddha appears with a book. The **fifth world**

[bottom, right] is the realm of the insatiable, greedy ghosts, suffering from hunger and thirst which they can neither appease nor quench; they present a ghastly picture with tightened throats and bloated bellies. Here Buddha appears with a symbolic treasure box, filled with spiritual jewels.

The **last world** follows [bottom] with the **cold and hot hells**. They are places of torment for all those who have committed evil deeds out of hatred and anger. But this infernal life, however long, is not eternal ; after atoning for sins, rebirth into a better world is always possible. In the World of Hells an assistant of the Lord of the Dead weights the deeds of the deceased who are entering his kingdom, but this is administrative work, because the fate dead has already been decided by themselves. Here the Buddha appears, bearing a flame, to bring light and hope even to these darkest regions.

The appearance of the Buddha in the **Six Worlds** commemorates also the potential Nirvana, inherent in all beings, because all creatures, the proud gods as well as insatiable monsters, the warring Titans suffering men, as well as the tormented beings in hell and the animals, all have the possibility of attaining salvation in a future good rebirth in the World of Men.