

Simple practices to help the dying, the dead and the bereaved

- Akong Rinpoche recommends Chenrezig prayers or just the mantra, which should be done as often as possible during the 49 days after death, especially during the first 3 days.

- “The best prayers are the ones you usually do and at the end, dedicate them to the deceased.”
(Ringu Tulku)

- **‘Sending and Taking’ (Tonglen meditation)- suitable for Buddhists and non Buddhists alike**
Sit comfortably with your spine upright, being aware of your breath as it flows in and out. Visualise yourself as a sphere of golden light, with the deep inner conviction that this form truly represents your true pure nature of perfect awakesness and universal compassion. The white light of compassion is in your heart.

Focus on the dying / deceased person. Breathe in. As you do so, take in all of his or her suffering, which comes out in the form of a thick, black, tar-like liquid which is heavy and almost solid. With every few breaths this liquid enters your ‘heart of wisdom and compassion’ where the white light of compassion burns it up like fuel, creating more compassion and strengthening your awareness of your true nature.

While this is going on, with every few breaths you breathe out all goodness, virtue and happiness from your heart to him or her. The pure qualities take the form of crystal-clear white light which frees the dying person from suffering and the causes of suffering. So it is a two-way process. You take suffering in the form of the black liquid, and exchange this for the pure white light.

As you continue with the exercise, the black liquid becomes gradually thinner and paler as the suffering is slowly removed. Finally, after about half an hour, what you breathe in is the same white light of purity as that which you breathe out. You do not need to think of this process as happening with every breath; each third or fourth breath is sufficient. Visualise that the dying person’s suffering is relieved and that they have become perfect wisdom and compassion, the same as you.

There is no need to fear that you will become sick or overwhelmed, because you are not your ordinary self when doing this exercise – you are visualising yourself as a light form and thus cannot suffer any harm.

Taken from Akong Rinpoche’s book ‘Taming the Tiger’

- *As soon as it is detected that the dying process has begun, a family member or friend should sit at the bedside and gently say to the deceased:*

“Do not be afraid, whatever appears, it is only a projection of your mind, like a dream. There is nothing to fear, your body can no longer be hurt. Just relax and when a bright white light appears, go towards it, merge with it.”

This can be said several times.

Because hearing is the last sense to go, it is considered helpful to say this and other prayers aloud (and indeed for the 49 days following death – the intermediate/Bardo state prior to rebirth).

- Set aside a few moments daily to talk to the deceased. They should be reassured that even though they may see frightening things, they should recognise these as being merely projections of their own mind. As they no longer have a body, they can no longer be hurt. Light a candle and send blessings and positive thoughts to them.

- The 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th, 35th & 49th days following death, are considered to be significant for the deceased and some people choose to sponsor 1,000 candles on those days.

- One could also perform virtuous positive acts and dedicate the merit to the deceased: being of service to others; give up alcohol /smoking / meat for a year; take one or more of the Five Precepts for a period; do Nyung Nay practice.