

## Funeral Rites for Rebirth in the Sukhāvātī Realm -According to the Tibetan Pure Land Tradition-

Tadeusz Skorupski  
(England • SOAS)

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### 《요 약》

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장례의식은 불교에서 가장 중요한 정기적인 의식들 중에 하나이다. 이러한 의식은 수도자나 죽은 사람들을 위해서 행해지고 있다. 그렇다고 장례의식의 목적이 죽은 사람들만을 위한 것이 아니라 근원적으로는 ‘*samsāra*’의 윤회로부터 완전한 해방을 구하는 모습을 의미한다.

티벳불교에서의 죽음은 두 가지를 의미를 인식한다. 하나는 열반으로 입적하는 것으로 다섯 가지에 완전히 용해되는 것을 뜻한다. 이러한 죽음은 더 이상의 ‘태어남’이 없다. 열반의 경지는 카르마 안에서 용해 되거나 평화를 얻은 경지인 것이다. 또 하나의 죽음은 카르마의 법칙에 의해서 통제 되거나 하나의 영혼이 열반 안으로 들어가기 전까지 순환적인 주기 안에서 지속적으로 반복되는 것이다.

카르마는 불교의 관례를 통해서 카르마의 힘은 없어질 수 있다고 할지라도 근본적으로 외부적인 간섭을 수행하지는 않는다. 즉 불교의 이념들은 각자의 노력을 통해 해방을 얻는 것을 가르치고 있다. 하지만 카르마의 경로가 식별하기 어려워 제의식의 효과나 수행의식을 통해 알아 볼 수밖에 없다.

여기서는 티벳불교에서 죽은 후의 몸을 적절히 배치하는 방법을 얻는 제의식이나 축제에 관심을 갖는 것이 아니라 이를 통한 실질적이고 복합적인 힘, 그리고 카르마적 흐름을 바꾸거나 심지어 없애버릴 수 있는 의식에 관심을 갖고자 한다.

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Funeral rites constitute one of the most important and regularly performed rituals in Buddhism. In all Buddhist lands, the funeral rites are performed for both monastic and lay followers. The principal purpose of all such rites is not merely to dispose of the dead bodies in a dignified way, but primarily to secure happy rebirths or a state of complete liberation from the cyclic rebirths in this world technically called in Sanskrit *samsāra*.

### 1. *Categories of death and death rituals*

Buddhism fundamentally recognises two types of death. The first type, which coincides with the passing into *nirvāṇa*, represents a complete dissolution of the five aggregates.<sup>1)</sup> When this type of death take place, there are no further rebirths. As the final dissolution and peace have been attained, there is no need for any ritual intercessions. In fact there is no way of coming into contact with those who have passed into *nirvāṇa* because their personal identity has been dissolved and ceased to persist in any perceptible form within this world. However, since the Buddha declined to explain the state after his final *nirvāṇa* on the grounds that it was not conducive to one's spiritual growth to know about it, the actual state of *nirvāṇa* remains in Buddhism one of the undetermined matters. Consequently, most of the descriptions of *nirvāṇa* fundamentally depict it by contrasting it with *saṃsāra* as being peace, tranquillity, freedom from sorrow and so forth. However, bearing in mind that the actual state of *nirvāṇa* is undetermined, it also remains an unresolved question whether such attributes of *nirvāṇa* can be real or experienced in the actual state of *nirvāṇa* after the final dissolution of the aggregates. When one takes into account the Buddhist teaching that living beings and all elements of existence called in Sanskrit *dharma*s are devoid of the real self or soul (*anātma*), then one must assume a negative answer. It is however certain from the position of Buddhist doctrines, that the death which coincides with passing into *nirvāṇa* transcends and dissolves the force of *karma* and eliminates the recurrence of further rebirths in this world.

The second type of death is controlled by the law of *karma*, and it recurs repeatedly in cyclic waves until one passes into *nirvāṇa*. In this case the moment of death represents a time factor, which marks the end of one life and the transition to a new life, and it consists in the dissolution of the five aggregates acquired at birth as a retribution for the past actions, and an acquisition of a new bodily existence in conformity with the retributive force of *karma*. The law of *karma* as a moral law of retribution does not essentially permit any external intervention, although the force of *karma* can be eliminated through the practice of the Buddhist path. The fundamental

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1) The five aggregates (Sanskrit *skandha*) of the human personality are: corporeality, feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness.

and unadulterated doctrines of Buddhism teach the spiritual path of gaining deliverance through one's own effort, but do not postulate that the course of *karma* and the passage from one life to another, as punctuated by death and rebirth, can be controlled or modified by rituals. The operation of *karma* has been declared by the Buddha as being inconceivable. In other words, the pathways of *karma* are difficult to discern and should not be speculated about. However, although Buddhism places an emphasis on the inevitable course of *karma*, right from the early period there were introduced various elements which eventually provided doctrinal justifications and foundations for the performance and efficacy of funeral rites. We are not concerned here with the funeral rites and ceremonies which merely serve as ways of disposing the dead bodies, but primarily with the rites which were devised to channel tangible and concrete powers, and which could alter or even eliminate the *karmic* flux of the departed people.

All Buddhist traditions have their own particular customs and methods of executing the funeral rites. However, when one puts aside ethnic and regional customs and ritual paraphernalia, and when one considers the essential elements of ritual texts, broadly speaking, there are three main types of funeral rites. One type is related to the ancient Indian and Buddhist mythologies of Yama. The second type is based on the transfer of merit for the benefit of the dead people, and the third type is based on the *tantras* and the doctrine of the intermediate existence between death and rebirth.<sup>2)</sup> None of these three types of ritual is entirely independent, but they include elements from other rituals and borrowings from one another.

## ***2. Rituals related to the mythology of Yama***

The mythology of Yama is complex and we consider here only the mythic factors relevant to the formation of funeral rituals. In the early brahmanical texts, Yama has two major identities.<sup>3)</sup> First, in the Vedic texts Yama is one of the gods living in his own abode or world, which is described as a happy place. His dwelling is referred to as the remotest part of heaven where there are deposited the imperishable light and inexhaustible waters. It

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2) Sanskrit: *antarābhava*, Tibetan: *bar do*, or *bar ma do'i srid pa*.

3) For more details on Yama see: A. Bergaigne, trans. by V. G. Paranjpe, *Vedic Religion*, Delhi, 1978, vol. I, 85ff.

is in that place that men hope to become immortal. Yama welcomes the ancient ancestors to his abode where he drinks with the gods, and where the ancestors participate in the life of the gods. Thus, Yama is the one who receives the dead in the abode described as being full of waters and light. Second, in the later brahmanical texts, Yama comes himself to collect the dead and plays the role of the ruler of the underworld. He also has two dogs as his messengers who search for men and bring death to them. Then in the texts called *Purāṇas* Yama becomes the judge and ruler over the hells where the wicked endure various sufferings. As judge, he sends the good people to heaven, and the wicked people to hells or back to earth.

In Buddhist texts the identity of Yama is also complex, and like in the brahmanical texts, he also has two major identities, namely Yama as the lord of death, and Māra as a divine being inhabiting a celestial abode located on the top of the Kāmadhātu, or acting as the lord of the entire kāmadhātu.<sup>4)</sup> In some Buddhist texts, Yama and Māra become merged together into a set of four Māras: Māra as the five aggregates, Māra as moral defilements, Māra as death, and Māra as a demonic manifestation.<sup>5)</sup> All four Māras taken together represent the implements of death in the sense that their primary role is to prevent people from becoming liberated from the bonds of *samsāra*, and to assure that they revolve in the cycles of birth and death. Yama is also presented in buddhist texts as a judge passing his judgement in accordance with the Buddhist Dharma. In one of the early Buddhist texts, the Buddha describes how the guardians of the hells seize people by their arms and lead them before the lord Yama, and request him to pass judgement. Yama duly examines the dead, and then passes the judgement by remaining silent. After that, the guardians of the Niraya hell proceed to execute the punishment by torturing the dead people.

The mythology of Yama and Māra inspired a particular type of funeral rites which are based on the concept of a formal judgement. This type of ritual is represented by the ritual texts composed in China in which the ten

4) The Buddhist world system consists of three worlds called in Sanskrit Kāmadhātu (realm of desire), Rūpadhātu (realm of subtle forms), and Ārūpyadhātu (formless realm). Each of these worlds is subdivided into different levels of existence: The Kāmadhātu includes beings born in hells, tormented spirits called *pretas*, humans, animals, and six classes of gods called *kāmadevas* and living in celestial abodes or heavens. The Rūpadhātu and Ārūpyadhātu are also divided into a number of abodes inhabited by divine beings.

5) In Sanskrit they are called: *skandha-māra*, *kleśa-māra*, *mṛtyu-māra*, *devaputra-māra*.

kings, including Yama, preside over a formal judgement of the dead people, while the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha<sup>6)</sup> endeavours to secure the release of the dead people undergoing the judgement. Some funeral rites incorporate some other elements relating to the mythology of Yama, such as the story about crossing the dangerous river called Vaitaraṇī. In this case, certain items such as a purse with some money are deposited inside the coffin for the dead people to pay for the safe crossing of that river.

### *3. Rituals based on the transfer of merit*

In early Buddhism, the validity of the transfer of merit to other people was a controversial issue. Some Buddhist masters postulated that the transfer of merit was valid and some argued that it was contradictory to the basic Buddhist doctrine on *karma*. According to the Mahāyāna and *tantra* teachings, the transfer of merit is fully approved and constitutes one of the essential elements of Mahāyāna and *tantra* practices.

Putting aside the early Buddhist controversies about the transfer of merit, in real life practically all Buddhist traditions, including the Theravāda countries of South-east Asia, profess and practise the transfer of merit to other living beings whether alive or dead.

The specific ways of helping the dead are described in a number of early Buddhist texts. In some of these texts, the Buddha explains that there is no way of helping those who have been already reborn in hells, as animals, humans, or gods. However, it is possible to benefit the tormented spirits called *pretas* who feed on food. The *pretas* subsist, the Buddha further explains, on whatever offerings are conveyed to them by their kinsmen and blood relations. If the immediate dead relatives are not reborn among the *pretas*, then the benefit goes to other relatives in that state. In some other texts the Buddha does not speak exclusively about the *pretas*, but makes more general statements to the extent that if people wish to benefit their dead relatives, they should make donations to Buddhist monks and transfer the acquired merit for the benefit of their departed relatives.

The funeral rites based on the transfer of merit are performed in the Buddhist countries of South-east Asia. The merit that is transferred to the dead on such occasions is largely acquired through donations to Buddhist

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6) In Chinese he is called Ti-tsang, and in Japanese Jizō.

monks, and through the recitation by monks of Buddhist texts called *parittas*. In the Mahāyāna countries such as China, Korea and Japan, the majority of funeral rites are also based on the transfer of merit acquired from reading Mahāyāna texts. The transfer of merit is also incorporated into the funeral rituals based on the Buddhist *tantras*.

#### *4. Rituals based on the Buddhist tantras*

The funeral rites based on the *tantras* are complex and include a number of elements, some elements are shared with the above described types of funeral rites, and some are specifically *tantric* in nature. From the perspective of their structure and function, the *tantric* funeral rites are largely devised on the pattern of the *tantric* practices and consecrations which are bestowed on the departed people, and on the fire ritual called *homa*. They also incorporate some Mahāyāna practices such as the generation of the thought of enlightenment and some Bodhisattva practices.

Depending on the circumstances and financial resources, the funeral rites can be very short and simple or fairly elaborate and prolonged. Some rituals are considered as essential and some as auxiliary or additional to the main rituals. Among the main and most frequently performed rituals, there are included the treatment of the dead body, the instructions given to the dead in the intermediate state, the guidance of the departed consciousness through the stages the Buddhist path and the bestowal of the *tantric* consecrations, and finally the cremation. So far as their aim and efficacy are concerned, the *tantric* rituals aim to achieve two principal goals. They strive to guide and help the departed people to gain the state of liberation from further rebirths, and if this is not successful, then to help them to gain good and happy rebirths. Although the efficacy of all such rituals is assumed, ultimately it is impossible to know whether someone has become liberated or reborn, and hence the rituals take into account these two possibilities, and aim to secure the best possible results for the departed people.

The treatment of the body mainly consists in the purification and blessing of the dead body with protective recitations and *mantras*, and the deposition of the corpse in a suitable container and place.

The instructions in the intermediate existence focus on explaining to the dead people their actual situation, and directing them how to strive for the

state of final liberation. If this fails, they are instructed and guided to seek for the best possible rebirth. This particular type of instructions is widely established in Tibet, but its origins go back to India.

What is the intermediate existence and what is its function in the process of rebirth?

Originally the early Buddhist texts taught that the last thought at the moment of death gave rise to the first thought at the moment of rebirth. It was thus an instant and uninterrupted transition from one existence to another without anything intervening between these two moments of death and rebirth. Later on this simple explanation has been reinterpreted through the invention of the intermediate state and intermediate being both called in Sanskrit *antarābhava*. The intermediate existence became a controversial issue: some Buddhist schools accepted and some denied it. The texts which affirm the intermediate existence teach that the intermediate existence and being constitute the medium through which living beings reach the places of rebirth.

What is the form of the intermediate being? It is explained in some texts that since the intermediate being is projected by the same *karmic* force which projects the being that is to be born in some place, the intermediate being has the same form as that being: it is endowed with a body or the five *skandhas* and it proceeds towards the *karmically* determined place of rebirth. And again, it is said in some texts that the intermediate being is similar to a five or six year old child with fully developed organs. It is endowed with velocity generated from *karma*, it encounters so resistance, and it cannot be diverted from its course towards the place of rebirth. Being endowed with a special vision, it sees the place of its rebirth and its parents united in sexual intercourse. It enters the womb, attaches itself to the inseminated ovum, instantly perishes, and thus gives rise to the consciousness at the moment of conception. Initially it was taught that the intermediate being proceeds instantly to the place of rebirth, but eventually some masters asserted that the intermediate existence can last for seven days and that it may recur seven times, altogether seven weeks or forty nine days. Then again, some masters introduced the teaching that it was possible to interact with the intermediate beings and help them through rituals to gain good rebirths.

The *tantric* texts accept the existence of the intermediate being as

described above, but they also have their own specific interpretation of the process of dying and the intermediate existence. According to some *tantric* teachings there are four moments in the process of dying. These four moments are described as four kinds of luminosity and four categories of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). During the first moment of death, once the breath is cut off and the sense faculties cease to function, the consciousness experiences the so-called luminosity of emptiness,<sup>7)</sup> which appears in the form of white light resembling the moonlight. During this moment the consciousness is separated from the external world. During the second moment the consciousness experiences the so-called luminosity of extreme emptiness,<sup>8)</sup> which appears in the form of red light resembling the sunset. During this moment the consciousness ceases to be aware of its own subjective entity. In the third moment the consciousness experiences the so-called luminosity of great emptiness,<sup>9)</sup> which appears in the form of black darkness resembling a pitch-dark night. During this moment the consciousness abides in a non-discursive state: it is not aware of the external world and of itself. Finally, in the fourth moment of consciousness there arises the so-called universal emptiness,<sup>10)</sup> which appears in the form of pure luminosity. This is said to be the actual moment of death. In this moment, the *tantric* texts assert, the consciousness abides in the universal emptiness understood as the sphere of pure reality.<sup>11)</sup> and the absolute body.<sup>12)</sup> If the consciousness is able to adhere to this state, it experiences buddhahood and liberation. However, if the force of *karma* prevails and agitates the consciousness, then the pure luminosity dwindles away, and a reverse process begins. The consciousness leaves the absolute state and the black, red and white kinds of light reappear in succession. Next the consciousness encounters the realm of the rapture body,<sup>13)</sup> which appears in the form of pure light or a rainbow, and then transforms itself into a vision of the five Buddhas. These Buddhas appear in order to guide the

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7) Sanskrit: *śūnyatāprabhāsvara*.

8) Sanskrit: *atyantaśūnyatā*.

9) Sanskrit: *mahāśūnyatā*.

10) Sanskrit: *sarvaśūnyatā*.

11) Sanskrit: *dharmadhātu*.

12) Sanskrit: *dharmakāya*.

13) Sanskrit: *sambhogakāya*.



consciousness back into the sphere of the absolute luminosity. If the consciousness is unable to do so, then there appear the visions of deities which have peaceful and wrathful appearances. These deities also attempt to guide the consciousness back to the absolute luminosity. When the consciousness fails once again to understand all those visions, the *karma* force prevails and causes the consciousness to be born as an intermediate being. This intermediate being has all kinds of visions produced by the force of *karma* and begins its journey in search of a new existence.

The guidance of the dead through the states of the Buddhist path and the bestowal of the *tantric* consecrations are explained the ritual texts known in Tibet as the rite with an effigy-card.<sup>14)</sup> The prototype of this category of ritual is outlined in one of the Yoga-Tantra texts.<sup>15)</sup> At the start of this ritual, the ritual master inscribes the name of the departed person on a piece of paper or card and summons the departed consciousness to rest in it. After that, he gives instructions and guides the consciousness through the entire Buddhist path, which includes the bestowal of the three refuges, the generation of the thought of enlightenment, and the *tantric* consecrations. The principal goal of this ritual is to secure the final liberation.

The cremation ceremony is based on the *tantric* fire ritual called *homa*.<sup>16)</sup> The cremation pyre is constructed from pieces of wood arranged on the pattern of the *homa* hearth. The actual shape of the *homa* hearth is drawn on paper and placed at the base. Similarly a specified *maṇḍala* printed on paper is deposited at the base of the heap of wood, and the dead body is placed on the top of the pyre. Next, the ritual performer proceeds to execute an appropriate visualisation<sup>17)</sup> during which he envisages and summon the

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14) Tibetan: *byang chog*.

15) entitled: *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*.

16) *Homa* is an ancient Indian fire rite in which a priest lights a fire, throws into it offerings, and requests the fire god to consume them and convey their essence to the gods. At some period this rite has been adapted and incorporated into Buddhist *tantric* rituals.

17) Sanskrit: *sādhana*. The process of visualisation consists of three basic steps. First one envisages the fire god (or any other deity) in conformity with his iconic description as given in ritual texts. This visualised form of the fire god is called the pledge deity or pledge being. This is a projected image in one's mind. Second, one summons the so-called knowledge deity from the realm of emptiness. This is the true deity. Third, one merges these two deities into one.

fire god Agni and a group of Buddhist deities usually arranged in a *maṇḍala*. He sets on fire the funeral pyre, and then throws into the fire various offerings, and requests the fire god to consume and offer them to the Buddhist deities. He invokes the Buddhas and other deities to receive the offerings and to perform the relevant activities for the benefit of the dead person. The cremation and other rites briefly outlined above are translated below as part of the funeral rites performed for gaining rebirth in the Sukhāvātī realm.

### *5. The funeral rites for rebirth in the Sukhāvātī*

The larger *Sukhāvātīvyūha* and the *Amitāyurdhyāna* are the two main Mahāyāna texts which contain the teachings about the Sukhāvātī, the pure land of the Buddha Amitāha. It is said in those texts that the people, who profess faith in Amitābha and invoke his name, will become reborn in the Sukhāvātī. Amitābha is said to have promised that when his devotees reach the moment of death, he will collect and lead them to his realm. It is also said in one of these texts that Amitābha's devotees, at the moment of death, behold Amitābha in ecstatic visions, leave this world and proceed to be reborn in his realm.

In Japan, the Jōdo priests recite the various parts of the *Sukhāvātīvyūha* as part of the funeral ceremonies. In the case of the funeral rites of the Jōdo Shinshu sect, the dead body is usually dressed in white garments similar to those worn by the people making pilgrimages, and the head is fastened with a white ribbon. The dead people are also provided with sandals made of rice straw, and a wallet with some money to pay for the boat crossing to the other side.

Immediately after the death, at the bedside, the Jōdo priest invokes the names of Amitābha and his attendant Bodhisattvas, and the names of the Buddhas of the ten directions. Next, he offers flowers, recites the confession of sins, performs a ceremonial shaving of the head, administers the three refuges, and bestows the vow of morality. After that, he chants the relevant passages from the above mentioned texts. The chanting focuses on the passages which speak of gaining merit through hearing the name of Amitābha. He further recites an invocation for rebirth in the Sukhāvātī realm, and the *nembutsu*.<sup>18)</sup> Finally, he dedicates the acquired merit for the

benefit of the departed person. When the body is placed in a coffin and on the day of the cremation, the priest performs a similar but differently arranged set of recitations, and executes certain ritualised activities devised for those occasions, such as beating the drum, burning incense, offering tea to the departed spirits, and requesting the dead person to depart. When the ashes are collected into an urn, the priest recites special texts devised for this occasion. After the funeral rites, a special ceremony is performed to purify the house. On this occasion, the priest sprinkles water towards the four directions, invokes the names of the Buddhas, recites specified texts and chants the *nembutsu*.

The funeral rites for rebirth in the Sukhāvātī, which are detailed below, represent an abridged and occasionally modified version of the funeral texts composed by the Tibetan master Karma chags med, also known as Rāgāśya. He lived in the seventeenth century and belonged to the Karma Kagyupa (bKa' brgyud pa) religious order. The unique characteristics of these funeral rites lies in the fact that they combine the Pure Land teachings about the rebirth in the Sukhāvātī with the *tantric* type of funeral rites performed in Tibet. In all these funeral rites, Amitābha is the chief deity attended by his two principal Bodhisattvas, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta. Like in the Pure Land tradition, Amitābha is visualised and invoked to lead the departed consciousness to the Sukhāvātī realm.

Out of the four rituals detailed here below, the first one provides an exposition of the practice of transferring consciousness at the time of death. This exposition consists of three integral parts: the preparatory training during one's lifetime in the method of transferring consciousness, the execution of the transference of consciousness at the moment of dying, and the way of performing it on behalf of other people at the time of their death.

The second ritual consists in a set of instructions that are read to the departed consciousness during the period of the intermediate existence. It is a short version of the text known in Tibetan as *Bar do thos grol* (=Liberation Through Hearing in Intermediate State). The composition of the

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18) The terms *nien-fō* in Chinese and *nembutsu* in Japanese correspond to the Sanskrit terms *buddha-anusmṛti* or *buddha-manasikāra*, which mean recollection or mindfulness of the Buddha. The practice of *nembutsu* involves both meditation on Amitābha and recitation of his name.

original and full version of this text is ascribed in Tibet to the famous Indian *tantric* master Padmasambhava, who visited Tibet in the eight century. He is said to have hidden this text in a mountain and then it was discovered in the fourteenth century by the rNying ma pa master Karma gling pa.<sup>19)</sup> This particular type of instructions given during the intermediate existence is widely practised in Tibetan Buddhism. However, some other traditions, such as the Jōdo Shinshū, also recognise the intermediate period of forty-nine days during which they perform certain rituals for the benefit of the departed people.

The third ritual is the one performed with an effigy-card. As already explained above, the ritual master summons the departed consciousness into an effigy-card, and the performs a series of ritual activities, which include the purification of the departed person from all sins, the blockage of the entries into the six spheres of rebirth, the bestowal of the *tantric* consecrations, and finally the guidance of the departed consciousness to the Sukhāvātī realm.

The fourth ritual, the cremation, includes the consecration of the dead body, the purification of the cremation site, the actual cremation, and the disposal of the ashes.

## II. TRANSFERENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS<sup>20)</sup>

### *1. Preparatory training in executing the transference of consciousness<sup>21)</sup>*

First, in order to ask for a suitable meditational disposition of practising

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19) This text has been translated into a number of western languages. One of the English translations is by F.Fremantle & Chögyam Trungpa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, The Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo*, by Guru Rinpoche according to Karma Lingpa, Berkeley and Londo, Shambhala, 1975.

20) The Tibetan title of this text is: *gNam chos thugs kyi gter kha las bDE chen zhing du 'pho ba'i gdams pa rgyas par bsgrigs pa*. The Tibetan text of this and the remaining funeral rites included here is based on a block print acquired in Nepal.

21) The Tibetan technical term for the transference of consciousness is *'pho ba* which corresponds to the Sanskrit terms *saṃkrānti* and *saṃcāra*.

the transference of consciousness, one should present a *maṇḍala* offering<sup>22)</sup> and then recite this:

“Having transformed this bronze *maṇḍala* into jewels and all the barley grains into gold and turquoise, I offer them with faith to the manifested body of my compassionate and merciful teacher. May he look upon me with compassion.”

Next, one should take the three refuges and raise the thought of enlightenment:

“Homage to the Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma, Saṅgha. I take refuge at their places of protection. In order to bring all living beings to the state of buddhahood, I raise the perfect thought of enlightenment.”

One recites this three times. After that, one instantly envisages oneself as the lord Mahākāruṇika. He is white, peaceful and smiling, and has one face and four hands. The two principal hands are folded at the heart, and the two lower hands hold a rosary of white glass and a white lotus. He is seated with his legs crossed on a lotus and moon throne. The hair on his head is matted into a head-dress and studded with five small jewels. His body is clad in silk and jewel ornaments, and it is endowed with the lustre of the thirty-two major marks and the eighty minor marks.<sup>23)</sup> The outer surface of his body is similar to a propped up tent of white sil, and the inside of his body is empty like an inflated balloon. Inside this totally empty space, there is the central vein<sup>24)</sup> which is endowed with four qualities. On

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22) During this ritual one offers the whole universe in a symbolic manner. One holds a flat plate, pours onto it handfuls of barley grains and recites appropriate verses.

23) According to some Buddhist teachings partly derived from the ancient Indian mythology, the bodies of certain unique people referred to as great sages or men (Sanskrit *mahāpuruṣa*) are said to be endowed with thirty-two major marks (Sanskrit *lakṣaṇa*) and eighty minor marks (Sanskrit *anuvyañjana*). Among the major marks are included such characteristics as a prominent forehead, deep blue eyes, golden complexion, forty teeth, long fingers and toes, and palms and soles marked with wheels. The minor marks specify the refined features of the limbs, finger-nails, ankles, manner of walking, and bodily purity. It is said that when such people decide to live as laymen, they become universal monarch (Sanskrit *cakravartin*), and when they live as ascetics, they become Buddhas.

24) According to the *tantras* the *yogin's* body has three principal vital channels or veins: the central one called *avadhūtī*, the right one called *rasanā*, and the left one called *lalanā*.

the outside, it is white to symbolise happiness. On the inside, it is red to symbolise purity. It stands in an upright position to symbolise the path to enlightenment, and in order to close the entries into evil rebirths, its lower opening beneath the navel is sealed. In order to advance along the path leading to heavenly abodes, its upper extremity at the top of the head, called the Brahma's aperture, constantly vibrates.

Above the crown of one's head, one should envisage the Lord Amitābha. He is red in colour, wears monastic robes, and sits on his lion throne made of a lotus and a moon. He has one face and two hands positioned in the meditation posture and holding an alms-bowl. He is seated like Maitreya with his two big toes positioned immediately above the upper extremity of the central vein.

Avalokiteśvara stands on the right side of Amitābha. He is white in colour and has one face and four hands. Two of his hands are folded together, and two hold a rosary and a lotus. He is standing on a lotus and a moon.

Vajrapāṇi Mahāsthāmaprāpta stands on the left side of Amitābha. He is blue in colour, has one face and two hands holding a *vajra* and a bell. He also stands on a lotus and a moon.

One envisages the above three deities being surrounded by countless Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and *arhats*.

One disperses rays of light from the three seed syllables (*Oṃ Āḥ Hūṃ*) placed on the three bodily spots (forehead, throat, and heart) of the above three deities, one summons them from the Sukhāvātī realm, and then one dissolves them into their envisaged bodies as described above.

Next, one recites the following supplication for the transference of consciousness:

“O supreme protector Amitābha, Mahākāruṇika and Vajrapāṇi Mahāsthāmaprāpta. I beseech you with my one-pointedly focused mind to grant me your blessing for perfection the profound path of transferring consciousness. When I and other people approach the moment of death, I beseech you to grant us the blessing of transferring our consciousness to the Sukhāvātī realm.”

One recites the above supplication as many times as possible. After that, one envisages one's heart inside the central vein in the form of a red eight-petalled lotus resembling a sealed knot of a bamboo tube. On the top

of it, one envisages a lunar disc similar in size and shape to a halved pea. On the top of the lunar disc one envisages the white seminal drop<sup>25)</sup> together with a red syllable *Hriḥ* similar in shape to the Tibetan punctuation mark(|). The seminal drop and the syllable *Hriḥ* have the nature of the combined vital wind of awareness and consciousness. They are lustrous with light, restless, and vibrating upwards.

Next, one envisages the following process. From the above envisaged syllable *Hriḥ*, there disperses a beam of light which assumes the form of a similar syllable *Hriḥ*, and then seals the aperture beneath (=anus), the passage leading into rebirths in hells. Another syllable *Hriḥ* disperses and blocks the urinary passage, the entry into the realm of animals. Next, two syllables *Hriḥ* disperse and block the mouth and the secret part, the entry to rebirth in the realm of the *pretas*. After that, one syllable *Hriḥ* disperses and seals the navel, the entry into the realm of the gods of desire (*kāmadeva*). Then again, two syllables *Hriḥ* disperse and block the ears, the entry to rebirth in the realm of the *asuras* and the world of form (Rūpadhātu). The next two syllables *Hriḥ* disperse and block the nostrils, the entry to rebirth in the world of the *yakṣas* and men, who are born, become old, suffer from diseases and die. The next three syllables *Hriḥ* disperse and block the aperture between the eyebrows<sup>26)</sup> the entry to rebirth in the world of form, and the eyes the entry to rebirth as a human king. Finally, one syllable *Hriḥ* disperses and blocks the entries to rebirth in the formless world (Ārūpyadhātu).

When one performs the above process of visualisation, it is appropriate to pronounce the syllable *Hriḥ* verbally and to count it.

Next, one pronounces *Hik* and envisages one's mind in the form of the white drop (*bindu*) marked with the syllable *Hriḥ*. One perceives the white drop moving upwards inside the central vein to the top of the head, and touching the toes of Amitābha's feet. Then one pronounces *Ka* and envisages the white drop falling down and resting on the lunar disc inside the heart. While envisaging this process, one breathes in three times the remainder of the vital winds. One holds and retains them, and then one

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25) Sanskrit: *bindu*. In this context the seminal drop constitute the vital energy or essence of the psychic body. In some other tantric contexts it denotes semen and the thought of enlightenment.

26) Sanskrit: *ūrṇā*.

stabilises them firmly for a long time. Next, one pronounces *Hik* in one's mind, and one envisages the winds of the right and left veins as having the form of blue dust rising upwards inside the central vein, while at the same time the white drop is touching Amitābha's toes. Next, one pronounces *Ka* in one's mind, and envisages the white drop descending and resting on the lunar disc in the heart. When one leads the white drop upwards, one places the fists on the sides of the head, and one gathers at the top all the projections of the vital winds.

The people who are not acquainted with the method of holding the breath should pronounce *Hik*, and envisage the seminal drop (*bindu*) rising upwards along the central vein and touching the Buddha's toes. Next, they should pronounce *Ka* and envisage it descending into the heart. Such a clear meditational visualisation of ascending and descending should be performed about twenty-one times.

As for the prayer, one recites the following verses:

“O perfect Buddha Amitābha, the lord Mahākāruṇika to the right, the Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta to the left, with countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in attendance. The perfect sphere called Sukhāvati is the realm of happiness and countless wonders. May I, upon my death, become reborn there at once without being obstructed by another rebirth. May I behold there the face of Amitābha. I recite my prayer in these words, and ask all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas residing in the ten directions to bestow their blessing and perfect attainments.”

While reciting this prayer, one envisages one's body as being pervaded with the ambrosia of immortality which trickles down from the alms-bowl held in the hands of Amitābha.

As for the invocation for longevity, one recites as follows:

“O perfect Buddha Amitābha, Mahākāruṇika, Mahāsthāmaprāpta, and countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. I bow and praise you with my devout mind, and I ask you to bestow upon me the attainment of life.”

One recites this prayer one full round on a rosary or as many times as possible. One envisages the lord Amitābha and his attendant Bodhisattvas as melting into light, and then dissolving into one's body, and the syllable *Ham* and a crossed *vajra* blocking the Brahma's aperture.

After practising in the above explained manner at regular intervals, the



sings of perfecting the method of transferring consciousness should appear on the Brahma's aperture. These signs appear in the form of heat, lymphatic discharge, itching and pricking sensation, numbness or swelling. The vertex becomes numbed, and blood or yellow liquid emerges from the Brahma's aperture. When such signs appear, one should examine the spot which is positioned eight fingers from the edge of the hairline. It overflows and aches when one inserts a blade of grass. When this happens, one should not train any more. Since there is a danger to one's life, one should stop the meditational exercises. One does not move the *bindu* inside the central vein, and one stops counting the syllables *Hik* and *Ka*.

When one does not have the Brahma's aperture or when one cannot activate it because of headaches and giddiness, one generates Amitābha one cubit above the head, and one visualises the ascent of the *bindu* together with the syllable *Hriḥ* towards, but not touching, the lotus throne of Amitābha positioned in the sky, and then one envisages their descent into the heart inside the central vein. When one executes this visualisation during several sessions, the Brahma's aperture should open, and blood and yellow water should ooze out from it. This concludes the exposition of learning the method of executing the transference of consciousness.

## ***2. Transference of consciousness at the time of dying***

The performance of the transference of consciousness by oneself is done in the following way. When all the signs of death appear, one attempts three times to avert one's death. However, if one does not succeed to avert it, one recites as follows:

“At this very moment of approaching my death and the intermediate state, I abandon the thoughts of attachment and adherence to all things. I will penetrate with determination into the essence of the clear instructions, and I will transfer my consciousness to the sphere of space, self-knowledge and non-rebirth. I will relinquish my conditioned flesh, blood and body, and I will understand that impermanence is an illusion.”

Praying in such words, one offers one's body, possessions and relatives to the Buddha Amitābha. Once this is completed, one abandons all thoughts motivated by passion. Acting in the same way as one did at the time of

training in the meditation of transferring consciousness, one blocks the bodily apertures with the syllable *Hriḥ*. One envisages the lord Amitābha and his entourage positioned in the sky above at a distance of one cubit. One discharges one's consciousness in the form of the white *bindu* marked with the syllable *Hriḥ*, and one envisages it dissolving into the heart of Amitābha. One does it repeatedly for as long as the breath is not cut off. If one is able to recite the invocation and prayer for the transference of consciousness, one recites them personally. Otherwise, one entrusts their recitation to a relative, a friend or someone else. In the end, having emerged on the crown of the head, the consciousness should definitely become reborn in the Sukhāvati realm.

### *3. Administering the transference of consciousness to other people*

When a sick man is definitely dead and his outer breath is cut off, one arranges the top of the dead person's head like a small tent. First one takes the three refuges, generates the thought of enlightenment, and calls many times the names of the Buddhas one knows. After that, one attunes the vocal cords for recitation, and lifting one's mind to the meditational state appropriate for the transference of consciousness, one chants in a soft and melodious voice the following text:

“O noble son who have departed from this life. Envisage your body as your chosen deity, the White Being. Inside your body, there is the central vein resembling a bamboo arrow, and inside the heart there is the red syllable *Hriḥ* similar to a punctuation mark (।). Next, envisage six syllables *Hriḥ* as dispersing and blocking the entries to the six places of rebirth, and the Brahma's aperture on your head as being open. Above your head, there is the lord Amitābha seated on a lotus and moon throne. Amitābha is red, wears monastic robes, and is seated with his legs crossed. He has one face and two hands placed in the meditation posture and holding an alms-bowl. The white Lokeśvara is positioned on the right side of Amitābha. He has one face and four hands. Two of his hands are folded together and two hold a rosary and a lotus. He stands on a lotus and a moon. Vajrapāṇi Mahāsthāmaprāpta stands on the left side of Amitābha. He is blue, has one face and two hands holding a *vajra* and a bell. He also stands on a lotus and a moon. These three deities are surrounded by countless Buddhas and

Bodhisattvas. Next, from the seed syllables resting on these three deities, there disperse rays of light which summon their transcendent bodies from the Sukhāvātī realm, and dissolve them into their envisaged forms. After that, envisage your consciousness in the form of the white *bindu* marked with the syllable *Hriḥ*, and perceive it as being transferred into the heart of Amitābha.

O Merciful lord Amitābha, Mahākāruṇika and Vajrapāṇi Mahāsthāmaprāpta, I supplicate you with the one-pointedly focused mind of the departed person to bless and transfer his consciousness to the Sukhāvātī realm.”

One meditates and recites this prayer seven times or twenty-one times. One pronounces many times the syllables *Ka* and *Hik*. Next, one pronounces a fierce *Phaṭ*, and one pulls out uprightly one single hair from the top of the dead person’s head. The hair disperses like a rotten matter, and a sudden noise and vapour emerge. A swelling appears on the head, and a kind of dew or yellow liquid comes out, or warmth and grease coemerge. In the case of people who are bald, the flow of lymph and swelling should be induced by pressing with the forefinger. One does it repeatedly until the appropriate signs appear.

Next, discharging rays of light from Amitābha’s heart, one envisages the dead person’s aggregates becoming diffused into light, and then dissolving into the heart of Amitābha. Next, one recites the prayer for rebirth in the Sukhāvātī realm and indicates the path. One chants the following verses:

“O wonderful Amitābha, Mahākāruṇika and Vajrapāṇi Mahāsthāmaprāpta. I supplicate you with the one-pointedly focused mind of the departed person to bless and transfer his consciousness to the Sukhāvātī realm.

O noble son who have departed from this life. Have no desire for this sorrowful world, but proceed without hesitation to the sphere of the Sukhāvātī realm. *Phaṭ Phaṭ Phaṭ.*”

While pronouncing the above verses, one envisages Amitābha departing to the realm of the Sukhāvātī realm like a discharged arrow. Finally, one recites some more prayers, and then concludes this rite with the following prayer for the transference of consciousness.

“O wonderful Amitābha, Mahākāruṇika and Vajrapāṇi Mahāsthāmaprāpta. I beseech you with my one-pointed mind to bless and transfer this dead person’s consciousness to the Sukhāvātī realm.”

### III. LIBERATION THROUGH HEARING IN THE INTERMEDIATE STATE<sup>27)</sup>

(The text that now follows is read to the dead people in order to guide them in the intermediate existence.)

On noble son of such and such a name, being impermanent, you have departed from this life. You do not trust whether you are dead or alive. You have no physical body of flesh and blood, but only a mind-body, somewhat eight years old and pervaded with the colours of the six pathways of rebirth. There is no sun or moon, but your body is bright with light. When you recollect your thoughts, you are able to produce deceptive appearances. As you have no fixed abode, you roam on mountain peaks and ocean shores. As you have no true friends, you befriend anyone dead or alive. As you have no proper food, you are satiated with smells and sined odours. If you are not given, there is no way of procuring food in the intermediate state. At times being frustrated by sorrow, you perceive with clarity and recollect the lives of the past, the intermediate state, and the future. However, forgetting them instantly, you become confused and wander on. In one single moment, you traverse the three thousand worlds without reflecting your image in the water or mirror, without casting your shadow, without leaving footprints on the soft sand or soil. These are the signs that you are wandering about in the intermediate state.

Knowing yourself that you are dead, your mind endures great afflictions. No matter how determined and strong is your heart, it cleaves. Now you have great regret about failing to accomplish the holy Dharma. Since you recall the sins and offences which you have committed, your mind is distressed. You are frightened and fear the arrival of Yama's messengers. You blame your relatives and feel animosity towards all of them. You suffer when you hear their voices coming towards you, and when you respond without being heard. You call 'Do not weep! I am here!' Approaching them, you embrace them, touch their faces, but they do not see you and continue to weep. Since you experience all such things, you should know that now

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27) The Tibetan title of this text is: *bar do thos grol*.

you are definitely dead.

You approach the spiritual teachers in whom you had placed your trust and hope of being protected. Since you perceive all the miseries of sins originated from imperfect rituals, impure vows, and meditation without clear vision, you think that they had deceived you, and you become overwhelmed by hatred. Consequently, you want to obtain quickly a body at any cost, and you endeavour to search for it everywhere. The projections of this kind arising before you are not produced by anyone. They are your own deceitful projections.

After four days, you have the visions in which the cardinal directions, the intermediate quarters, the nadir and the zenith become filled with rainbows, light and sparkles. The sky becomes crowded with the host of the Peaceful Deities, a clear radiance shines forth, and a beautiful mass of light blazes with splendour. From the hearts of the deities, there emerges the path of the five wisdoms in the form of beautiful and lustrous rays of light which penetrate your heart. Concurrently, there emerges the path of the six spheres of rebirth in the form of six ugly and obscure emanations, which also shine because they are parallel with the path of the five wisdoms. Out of those two paths, follow the bright path of the five wisdoms without stepping onto the path of the six spheres of rebirth. Pray wholeheartedly with devotion to the deities of the five Buddha families.

Next, there appear the chosen deities,<sup>28)</sup> the *ḍākinīs* and the protectors of the Dharma.<sup>29)</sup> They wear the requisites of the eight dreadful graveyards and resound with a thunder of one thousand cymbals and sounds of *Hūṃ Phaṭ*. The whole world quakes, rocks, trembles and shakes. They come to lead you out from the path of the intermediate existence. Do not be afraid! If you recognise your chosen deities, they will lead you to the realm of the Sukhāvati realm.

Later on, there arrive the hosts of the bloodthirsty Wrathful Deities to lead you out from the path of the intermediate existence. Their appearances are terrifying and unbearable to look at, and they roar in unison with one thousand thunders of *Hūṃ Phaṭ*. All the visions in the sky, on the earth, and in the intermediate existence become filled with wrath. Shouts of 'kill! kill!' and fire weapons fall down. In a way, you are in a similar situation to

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28) Sanskrit: *iṣṭhadevatā*.

29) *dharmapāla*.

a great sinner locked up in a prison. You cannot free yourself by trying to escape. Whichever way you turn, they all confront you. They did not come from another place. The hosts of the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities are the deities of your own body. You are like a confused person standing amidst the friendly and enemy armies spread over the ground of a mighty and terrifying battle. Do not be afraid! Do not fear! But strive to act with devotion!

After a period of two weeks, the fears dwindle away. During each week of the intermediate state, there is one fear. Snow, rain thick darkness and armies come in succession, followed by Yama with the hosts of beasts. At the front, you are cut off by white, red and black abysses. One thousand mountain peaks crumble down; one thousand oceans billow and roar; crackling flames spread over a vast forest; and strong winds rage. Such are the manifestations of the four sounds of fear and the eight precipitous tracks of anguish. They are the deceitful projections of your own mind. Since you do not possess a body of flesh and blood, there is no material substance to be destroyed by weapons, abysses, earth, fire or water. Therefore, adhere to your mind and abandon these fears. In truth, these are the Buddha manifestations which know how to benefit all living beings by various methods of conversion. Your thoughts about the unholy and impure teachers are your own impure and deceitful projections. For your own benefit generate faith and devotion, and do not be deceived.

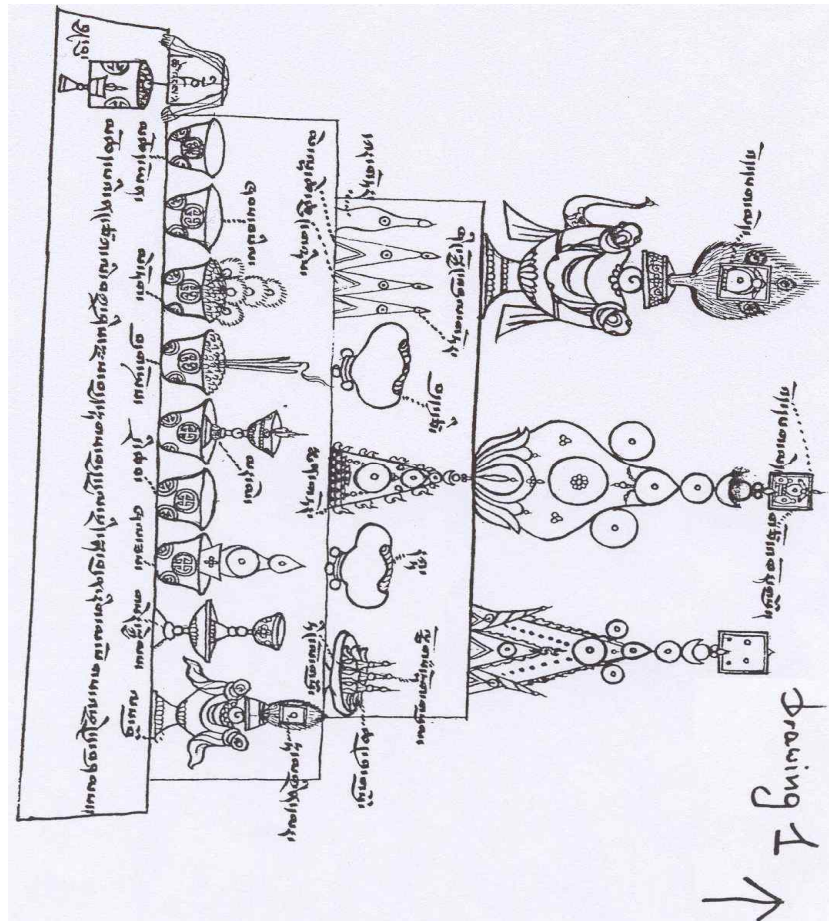
Desiring to obtain a human body, you wander through *samsāra* in search for a body. This is the sign that you have made an error of judgement. Abandon the thoughts of desiring to acquire the suffering of innumerable cycles of birth, old age, disease and death in the body of a man or a god.

Since we are the guides and the vehicles of the Buddha activities for your benefit, generate faith and devotion, and without being distracted, listen to these words: Your obstructions are purified by the consecration of non-returning and by the profound secret *mantras*. Thus, without attachment or desire proceed to the Sukhāvātī realm in the west, the sphere of lasting happiness, the realm from which there is no turning back.

#### IV. RITUAL WITH AN EFFIGY-CARD<sup>30)</sup>

##### 1. Arrangement

As for the effigy, one places before oneself the dead person's body, or a piece of his bone or some hair, or an image inscribed with his name, or one just writes the word *Nri*<sup>31)</sup> on a piece of paper. On a flat dish one arranges the following articles: three cones made of dough, three pellets made of dough, a small lamp made of dough, black sesame or mustard seeds, sand, and offerings for gratifying the senses.



30) The Tibetan title is: *gNam chos thugs kyi gter kha snyan bgyud zab mo'i skor las bDe chen zhing sgrub gi byang chog thar lam dkar po.*

31) The Sanskrit word *nṛ* means man.

<Drawing 1> Diagram of an altar with the items for the ritual with an effigy-card.

Top row: vase containing Amitābha, bali offering for Amitābha and his retinue.

Second row: four bali offerings for the fire god Agni and protective deities, human skull with ambrosia, medicinal bali offering, skull with blood, plate with cones, pellets and lamp made of dough.

Third row: eight bowls with offerings: water for the face, water for the feet, flowers, incense, butter lamp, scent, food, drink. The last item is the ritual vase containing the protective deity Hayagrīva. At the bottom on the left side there is the effigy-card.

## *2. Summoning the consciousness*

One focuses one's mind and envisages Amitābha and his retinue placed inside the ritual vase. One venerates the deities, sprinkles water on the effigy card, and recites as follows:

“O departed one placed here before me, assume the form similar to your living body. Homage to the Three Jewels and the three root deities. On account of the truth of the chosen deity, O consciousness of this person of such and such a name, wherever you are, above, below or in the intermediate space, I summon you from that place to this body, name, and bones.”

One recites this three times.

## *3. Removal of obstructive spirits*

One arranges the relevant offerings, sprinkles them with water while reciting the following verses:

“May this *bali*<sup>32)</sup> placed on this jewel-dish generated from the syllable *Bhrūṃ* give an intense enjoyment in conformity with everyone's expectations.

For the benefit of this departed person, O demons who torment the living and the dead, please take your offering and refrain from causing

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32) The Sanskrit term *bali* denotes a particular category of offerings made from dough and conical in shape.



obstructions to the liberation of this departed person. If you behave with disobedience, I shall assume the pride of a deity and split your heads to pieces. Therefore, do not stay here but go away.”

While rotating the cones made of dough in a clockwise manner in front of the effigy, one recites “*Oṃ salutation to the merciful Buddha.*” After that, one places the cones on a plate. This activity constitutes the rite of pacifying and purifying. Next, while holding the pellets and lamp made of dough, one recites the following verses:

“O demons and obstructive spirits in bodily and ethereal forms, who cause obstructions to this dead person’s attention, hearing, touch, and perception, take these pellets and lamp, leave this place and go somewhere else. If you refuse to go away, I will assume the form a mighty and wrathful king, and then reduce you to dust and sentence you to death in hells. Therefore, go away immediately.”

One rotates the pellets and lamp in an anticlockwise direction, recites a fierce *mantra*, and offers these articles by placing them on a plate. This concludes the rite of purification. One recites:

“I meditate on the deities, disperse rays of light into the ten directions, and I bring back the rays of light from the ten directions and from the Sukhāvātī realm. It is with these rays of light that I expel you, the demons who cut off and steal from people the life-force and vitality, and who cause obstructions to this departed person. I order you to leave this place and go away to another place.”

After reciting the above verses three times, one scatters pieces of metal.

#### ***4. Demarcating a protective boundary***

Next, one demarcates a protective enclosure:

“May the sphere above the effigy-card (or the dead body) become a *vajra*-abode, and may the sphere beneath it become a *vajra*-foundation. May the intermediate space become a *vajra*-enclosure. I demarcate a boundary with this great mass of fire. May this effigy-card remain unobstructed by the evil demons.”

### *5. Purification of the dead person's sins*

One arranges before oneself sesame seeds, fire and water, and then one recites as follows:

“Inside the heart of the departed one there is a black syllable *Paṃ*. All his evil sins become dissolved into the syllable *Paṃ* and assume the form of a scorpion. A wind blows from the syllable *Yaṃ* resting on his feet, and heat glows from the syllable *Raṃ* resting on his navel. His sins emerge from the right nostril and dissolve into the sesame seeds placed here at the front. The fire at the centre of the hearth for pacifying represents the wrathful deity *Vajraḍākinī*. The sins become burnt by being offered into her blazing mouth.”

One takes the sesame seeds with the right and left hands, turns the hands in circles, and throws them into the fire and water, while reciting the following *mantra*:

*“Om Vajraḍākinī consume consume Hūṃ. Burn all the sins and reduce them to ashes Svāhā. O vajraḍākinī depart into space. Muḥ.”*

Finally, one scatters some soil or sand, and one recites some more *mantras* in order to remove the sins of the dead person.

### *6. Lustration*

Next, one recites a supplication for lustrating the image of *Amitābha*. One holds the vase with water in one hand and reflecting it in a mirror towards the table with the offerings, one recites as follows:

“I beseech to wash with this scented water the body of *Amitābha*. Although the impurities have no power over the deities, I perform this function of purifying all evil obstructions. This is the highest ablution endowed with splendour. This is the most excellent water of compassion. It is the water of blessing and knowledge. Please bestow the appropriate attainments.”

Next one acts in a manner of wiping with a cloth and putting on a garment:

“I wipe this white cloth, soft and scented, on the surface of Amitābha’s body. Although the impurities have no sway over his body, I perform this function of removing suffering. I put this beautiful and yellow garment on Amitābha’s body. Although the cold has no sway over his body, I perform this function of intensifying his lustrous appearance.”

Next one reflects the mirror against the departed person and recites:

“This vase is the residence of the divine hosts of Amitābha. O departed one become purified from the obstructions of your sins, and gain liberation from the grip of the three poisons.

This is the water of the six perfections.<sup>33)</sup> This water washes away the six kinds of impurities and gives rise to the six perfections. This water truly purifies while I perform this act of washing.

Through this ablution of the six rivers, the performer removes the six kinds of impurities. Being endowed with the six excellent qualities, the performer of this excellent ablution remains free from the power of sins.

I execute this ablution with faith in order to worship all the Buddhas, who are endowed with all the excellent qualities free from the six kinds of impurities.”

Next, one purifies and destroys the poisons. Taking some sand one recites:

“O departed one, I beseech the host of Amitābha to purify and remove for you the obstructions of the three poisons. Desire, hatred and delusion are the three poisons in this world. They have no power over the Three Jewels. May they become destroyed by the truth of the Three Jewels. O Amitābha, pacify for the departed one all the obstructions of the three poisons.”

While one recites the above verses, one throws some sand at the effigy-card. Next, one takes the *kuśa* grass from the ritual vase, and holding it together with the dish containing sand, water and fire, one recites as follows:

“The four primary elements are the father of the three poisons.  
The four primary elements are also the mother of the three poisons.  
May the poisons of the departed one become neutralised

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33) Sanskrit: *pāramitā*. The six perfections are: generosity, morality, forbearance, energy, absorption, and wisdom.

Through may recitation of these words of truth.”

One waves a fan in a circular way over the effigy-card and recites:

“O Amitābha, Purify for the departed one the primary elements, and remove all the impediments that derive from them.”

One pours water into a plate, and then recites:

“May the Buddha’s merit and power, and the applied minds of all the deities induce this very moment the fulfillment of this dead person’s desired goals. O departed one be happy whether you are two-footed or four-legged. May your pathways be auspicious. Be also happy if you return to this place. Be happy during the day and night. Remain constantly happy and free from all evil.”

While scattering flowers and barley, one recites:

“May the departed one be victorious over all the discordant directions.”

### *7. Instructions and consecrations*

Next, one explains the Dharma and gives the following instructions to the dead person:

“O departed one of such and such a name. As you wander about in the places of the six Buddha families, pray to the six powerful Buddhas and become liberated.”

If a relative is present, he should make prostrations, and one envisages that they are actually made by the departed person himself:

“I prostrate with the devout mind of the departed person before the perfect Buddha Amitābha, his attendants, and countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. I bow before the Buddhas as the guides to the Sukhāvātī realm. I ask you to block the entries which serve as the passages leading to rebirths in the six spheres of existence.”

While repeating the above supplication, the relative should make as many prostrations as possible. After that, imagining that the following verse is pronounced by the departed person, one recites:

“O protector Amitābha, please listen. This sinful dead person is identical with me. Being oppressed by the sufferings of this world, I take refuge in you, and I request you to grant me the consecrations.”

One repeats this three times. After that, one instructs the dead person to take the three refuges and to raise the thought of enlightenment. While doing this one envisages that these things are actually done by the departed person:

“Homage to the Three Jewels. I take refuge at the places of their protection. I raise the thought of the supreme enlightenment in order to bring all living beings to buddhahood.”

Next one recites and envisages the following process:

“Above there is a flower, the water-born lotus. Inside it, there is the departed person in the form of White Being (Avalokiteśvara). Rays of light disperse from this deity’s seed syllables and bring down from the Sukhāvātī the body of Amitābha, his *mantra* and attributes, and the attendant hosts. These deities gently pervade and dissolve into the body of the dead person. O deities from the Sukhāvātī realm, I summon you to come to this place, and I beseech you to bestow your powerful blessings. Bestow the highest consecrations upon this devout person. O divine guides, please dispel all the obstacles to the liberation of this dead person.”

One rings the bell and recites Amitābha’s *mantra*.

Next, acting in the manner of placing the *vajra* on the head of the departed person, one says: “*May this vajra abide in you.*” Then holding the ritual vase in one’s hand one recites:

“O disciple who have departed from this life, listen to me. This vase with such a simple external appearance is nothing else but a vase made of jewels. Inside this jewel vase there is a jewel palace in which there reside Amitābha and the host from the Sukhāvātī realm. These deities discharge blessings like shower of rain. As they become dissolved into your body, receive the perfect *tantric* consecrations. O Amitābha consecrate his body, speech and mind.”

## ***8. Presentation of food and auspicious emblems***

One blesses food and other articles, and then offers them to the departed

person. One holds a card on which there are depicted items of food, and one reads the following words inscribed on its back:

“These pleasing and attractive dishes contain flesh, drink, butter, alcohol and tea. These articles have the nature of the ambrosia of wisdom which generates and nourishes happiness free from misery.”

As the beings in the intermediate state are satiated with mere smells, one scatters for them different kinds of food while reciting these words:

“O noble son who have departed from this life. You survive by craving for food and drink. If you are destined for rebirth as a *preta* to repay the debt of your previous existences, here are the very things which I have just blessed. Partake of these things blessed by the truth of the root deities.”

Holding a card with the eight auspicious symbols,<sup>34)</sup> one reads the text inscribed on its back:

“O departed one, please listen. Here are the eight auspicious emblems. Please receive them from me as a gift. May you gain happiness and prosperity.”

Holding a card with with the images of the four classes of the *tantric* deities called *ḍākinīs*, one reads:

“Adhere to the essence of true happiness, and act like a mighty hero abiding in a *tantric* union. May you abide in the state of the supreme Buddha Vajradhara.

O noble son who have departed from this life. Enjoy this abundant collection of riches. Since this is your last share of food, consume with delight this prepared meal. this tasty food that sustains life has been acquired in the treasury of the vast sky, and it has been perfected with the perfection of generosity. Do not become fond of the living or the dead. Do not desire the pathways of the living or the dead, but proceed to the pure sphere of the Sukhāvātī realm.”

One places before oneself a butter lamp and inside it one envisages a mass of blazing fire while reciting as follows:

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34) The eight auspicious emblems are: umbrella, two fish, conchshell, victory banner, endless knot, treasure vase, lotus, and wheel.

“The melted butter and Amitābha’s *mantra* rotate clockwise inside this butter lamp envisaged as a lotus and a moon. The wick of the lamp has the form of a red syllable *Hriḥ* and it blazes with the flame of the five Buddha wisdoms. This lamp removes the obstructions of the five poisons<sup>35)</sup> and the five impure aggregates of the departed one. May the departed one become endowed with the body of Amitābha which is pure and adorned with the major and minor marks of distinction.

The blue base of the flame is the wisdom-fire of Vajrasattva. The red fire above it is the wisdom-fire of Amitābha. The yellow waist of the flame is the wisdom-fire of Ratnasambhava. The white fire above that is the wisdom-fire of Vairocana. The dark summit of the flame is the wisdom-fire of Amoghasiddhi. Such are the fires of the five victorious Buddhas. May your five aggregates become purified by the massive fire of the five wisdoms. May you become free from the bonds of sins, and may you obtain the five wisdom-bodies.”

Next one dissolves the effigy-card. One calls the name of one’s spiritual teacher and recites: “There is no form, no sound, no touch, no taste and no phenomena.” One releases the consciousness towards the departed person, and one dispels it from one’s memory and vision.

### ***9. Concluding instruction***

Finally, one shows the path. One envisages the departed person in the form of Amitābha’s body seated on a lunar disc positioned in space and facing the west:

“O departed one, the Sukhāvati realm lies towards the west. Since it is the sphere of great blessing, it is a pure land. There are various Buddha lands such as the lands of the other four Buddhas. However, since rebirth in those lands is extremely difficult, turn away from them and proceed to the Sukhāvati realm. As I blow a mighty wind from my nostrils and strike the lunar disc positioned in space, O consciousness of the departed person seated on that lunar disc and having the form of Amitābha’s body, please speed away to the Sukhāvati realm like a discharged arrow. Phaṭ.”

## **V. THE CREMATION CEREMONY<sup>36)</sup>**

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35) The five poisons or moral defilements are: hatred, pride, envy, lust, and delusion.

### 1. *Treatment of the body*

In order to block the entries leading to rebirths in the six spheres of existence, one should summon the dead person in the same way as it was done in the previous ritual with an effigy-card. One writes down the long and medium *mantras*<sup>37)</sup> of Amitābha, and then one fastens them on the crown of the dead person's head. Next, one writes down the *mantra* of Avalokiteśva<sup>38)</sup> and attaches it on the right shoulder. Finally, one writes the *mantra* of Vjrapāṇi<sup>39)</sup> and attaches it on the left shoulder. This is an abridged procedure of sealing the body.

### 2. *Preparation of the cremation site*

If one is unable to perform the ritual activities of purifying the cremation ground and removing all evil obstacles in accordance with the secret *tantras*, then one simply touches the ground with one's hand and recites appropriate *mantras*, and the place becomes purified and excellent. After the *mantras* have been recited over the ground, the ground should not be dug. One places over it a stone slab, leaves or green grass, and one scatters over it some earth taken from another place. One touches the ground with one's hand and recites “*Oṃ immortality Hūṃ Phaṭ.*” One deposits on the ground one *bali* consecrated with an appropriate *mantra*, and then touching the ground on recites:

“I touch the earth with the right hand of Amitābha's pure body, and the earth quakes in six different ways. From beneath the earth, there emerges the earth-goddess surrounded by a group of soil spirits. She is golden in colour and adorned with silk and jewels. She is benign, well disposed, and holds a treasure vase.

36) The Tibetan title of this text is: *bDe chen zhing gi ro sreg cho ga ngan song gnas 'dren sdug bsngal mtsho skem gtan bde rab 'bar zhes bya ba.*

37) Amitābha has three root mantras, long, medium and short. The long one: *oṃ āḥ hūṃ amidheva āyuh siddhi hūṃ, oṃ bhrūṃ svāhā, bhrūṃ bhrūṃ.* The medium one: *oṃ amidheva hrīḥ.* The short or condensed one: *hrīḥ.*

38) *Oṃ maṇi padme Hūṃ.*

39) *Oṃ Vajrapāṇi Hūṃ.*

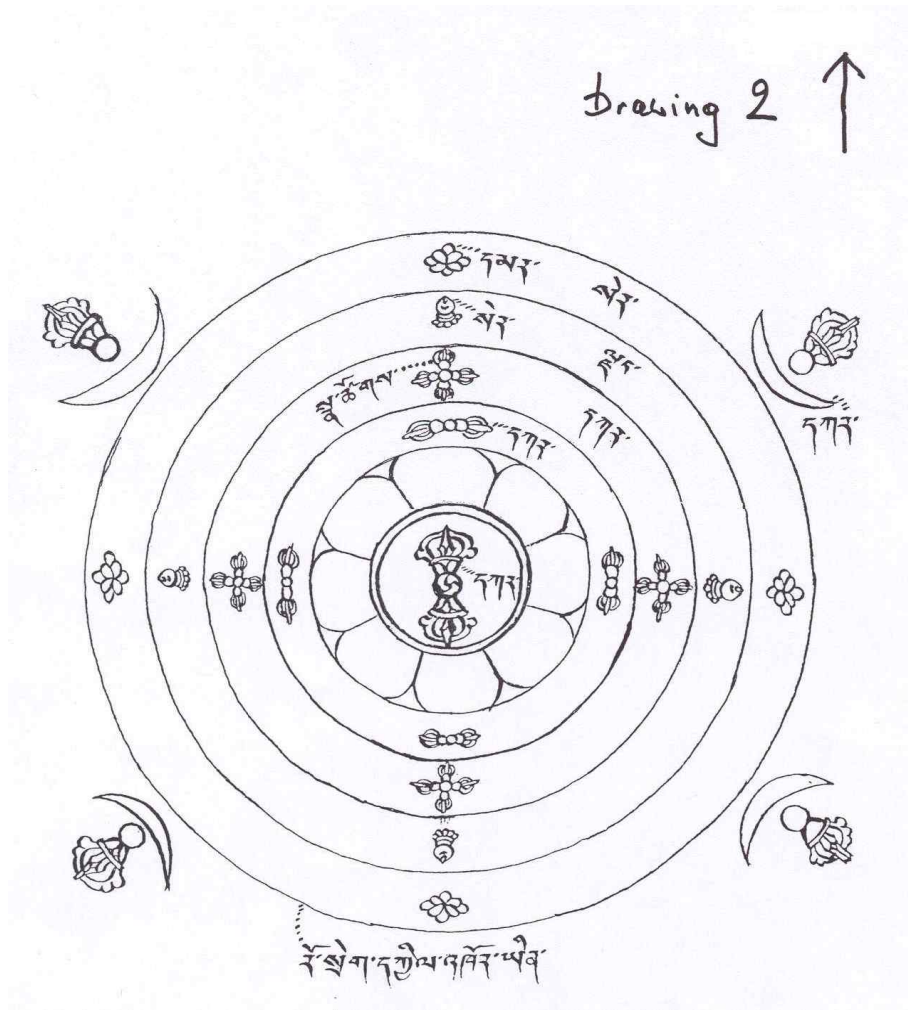


O earth-goddess, you are the queen of the world, the earth's sovereign who frequents the paths of the Buddhas of the three times. O earth spirits of this visible world, and the earth spirits who reside in this place, please come here and receive your offering. I ask you to surrender this place to me and go somewhere else. O earth-goddess Pṛthivī and the earth masters, please receive and consume your *bali*."

The earth-goddess replies:

"I grant this place for the benefit of living beings."

The earth-goddess dissolves into the ground, and the earth becomes transformed into a mass of gold.



<Drawing 2> Diagram of the cremation hearth which is placed underneath the cremation pyre. At the centre of an eight-petalled lotus there is a five-pronged *vajra*.

The eight lotus petals are surrounded by four circumferences on which there are drawn five-pronged *vajras*, crossed *vajras*, jewels and lotuses. On the four corners there are half-moons and half-*vajras*. This hearth has five concentric sections which symbolise the five Buddha families.

Next, one proceeds to draw the cremation hearth. The inner hearth is drawn in the form of a white *vajra* placed in the centre of an eight-petalled lotus. The eight lotus petals are marked with the colours of the cardinal and intermediate directions. On the outer edge of the inner hearth, one draws a white *vajra*. Then, progressing further outside, one draws a green crossed *vajra* on a white background, a yellow jewel on a green background, and a red lotus on a yellow background. On the four corners, one draws half-moons and half-*vajras*.

One rings the bell, circumambulates the hearth, and then covers it with a piece cloth. Above the drawn hearth one piles up wood into a square heap. One draws an eight-petalled lotus on a piece of paper to serve as a seat of the dead body, and an eight-spoked wheel to serve as its cover. Close to the hearth, one arranges all the articles of worship that are to be burned in the cremation fire, two *balis* for the fire god, and one triangular *bali* for the Dharma-protectors. One envisage the protective deity Hayagrīva, recites his *mantra*, and deposits him inside the ritual vase.

### ***3. The visualisation of the fire god and the Buddhas***

One envisages oneself as having the nature of Amitābha. One sprinkles water on the articles for worship and the casket containing the dead body while reciting as follows:

“*Oṃ pure by nature are all phenomena, pure by nature am I.*”<sup>40)</sup> May the articles for burning become pure and countless in number.”

One touches all the articles, recites their *mantras*, and envisages them as being washed and purified.

Next one arranges the *kuśa* grass on the border of the cremation hearth,

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40) Sanskrit: *Oṃ svabhāvaśuddhāḥ sarvadharmāḥ svabhāvaśuddho 'ham.*

and one purifies it by sprinkling it with the water from the ritual vase. One rings the bell and chants as follows:

“From the realm of emptiness there arises the syllable *Hūṃ*, and from it there emerges this peaceful cremation hearth filled with firewood. On a lotus and a moon there rests the syllable *Raṃ* from which there arises the fire good Agni. He is white and looks like a mendicant. In his hands he holds a wand, a water pot and a rosary. He sits on a goat and is surrounded by blazing flames.

All these articles for burning are generated from emptiness. They will become transformed into a heap of blazing fire permeated with the five wisdom of the five Buddhas generated from their seed syllables *Oṃ Hūṃ Trāṃ Hriḥ Āḥ*.”

Next one recites and envisages the cremation fire having the following form:

“The blue base of the flame epitomises the wisdom-fire of Vajrasattva. The red section of the flame above the base epitomises the wisdom-fire of Amitābha. The yellow waist of the flame epitomises the wisdom-fire of Ratnasambhava. The white section of the flame above the yellow waist epitomises the wisdom-fire of Vairocana, and the dark summit of the flame epitomises the wisdom-fire of Amoghasiddhi.”

“O departed person, may you become purified from the five poisons, and acquire the five wisdoms. May your five aggregates become purified with the massive flames of the five wisdoms.”

After that one ignites the fire inside the cremation wood and then recites:

“O fire of knowledge, do not disperse in all directions, and do not cause harm, but blaze in a peaceful manner.”

Next, one summons the knowledge fire god Agni:

“May Agni together with his attendants arrive from the south-western direction on the rays of light dispersed from the heart of the fire god envisaged inside the flames.

Come here, come here great spirit and enter this fire in order to consume this burnt libation and food. O fire god radiant with the flames of splendour, I invite you to take residence inside these flames in order to accomplish all aspirations by acting with compassion for the benefit of living beings. O knowledge-fire I ask you to sit on the south-eastern edge

of this cremation pyre, and merge with the pledge fire god envisaged inside these flames.”

Once again I disperse rays of light and summon the five Buddhas to execute the consecration.”

One recites the relevant *mantras* and presents offerings to gratify the fire god and the deities. After that one recites:

“O fire god all in lustrous splendour. While I present this burnt libation, you should preform your appropriate tasks. O son of Brahmā, the world’s protector, the noble god of pacifying and other rites, I bow down and praise you. I offer these articles as ambrosia to be consumed by the fire god.”

One holds the spoon and the ladle, and one pours the liquid butter and offers it to the fire god.

Next one recites as follows:

“I summon the departed person with the rays of light issued from the fire god’s heart, and I extract the obstructions of his sins with these rays of light. May his sins dissolve into the burnt offerings and become consumed by the fire god.”

If the departed was a holy person, one dissolves the obstructions of sins of all living beings.

#### ***4. The articles offered into the fire and their mantras***

The articles for burning should be offered with the thumb and the middle finger while reciting their *mantras*.

Grasping pieces of wood, one envisages them as having the nature of the tree of enlightenment, and one offers them into the cremation fire while reciting: “*Oṃ tree of enlightenment Svāhā*. Pacify for the departed one all the evil impediments which bar him from gaining splendour and perfect state.”

For the remaining articles (of which only a selection is given below), one recites the following *mantras*:

For the liquid butter: “*Oṃ salutation to Agni*. Pacify for the departed one all the obstructions of sins.”

For the black sesame: “*Oṃ salutation to the vajra which detroys all sins*.”

Pacify for the departed one all the obstructions of sins.”

For the white mustard: “*Oṃ fulfilment of all goals*. Pacify for the departed one all the fears and terrors of the intermediate state.”

For the barley: “*Oṃ great vehemence*. Pacify for the departed one the obstructions of sins which diminish the dead person’s strength to reach the sphere of the Buddhas.”

For the wheat: “*Oṃ vajra-eagerness*. Pacify for the departed one the obstructions of sins which bar him from gaining happiness and healthy life in his next rebirth.”

For the rice: “*Oṃ vajra-prosperity*. Pacify for the departed one all the impediments of sins which obstruct an acquisition of perfect merit.”

For the different kinds of medicine: “*Oṃ medicine*. Pacify for the departed one all the impediments of sins which obstruct a state of perfect health in the next rebirth.”

When one offers the articles of worship, one recites as follows:

“Whatever water for the face is available in the sphere of the entire world, and the water arranged here by me, I offer it to the hosts of the fire god. Receive it and perform the work of pacifying.”

One recites similar verses for the remaining articles of worship: Water for the feet, flowers, incense, light, scent, food, and sound. At the time of presenting the offering of sound, one should ring the bell and scatter flowers.

### ***5. The performance of the cremation homa***

Next one envisages Amitābha and his retinue seated inside a palace positioned inside the cremation fire.

If the dead man was an ordinary person, one envisages his bodily remains and the offered articles as being the same, namely as the offerings presented to the host of Amitābha. If the departed was a holy person, one envisages his bodily remains and the host of Amitābha as being the same.

Next one throws into the fire the articles for burning and offers them to Amitābha and his attendant Bodhisattvas. One recites the *mantra* of Amitābha and the above given *mantras* of the individual articles, and one offers these articles to Amitābha one hundred times. Next one recites the

*mantra* of Mahākāruṇika and the *mantras* of the individual articles, and one offers these articles to Mahākāruṇika twenty-one times. Similarly reciting the *mantra* of Mahāsthāmaprāpta one offers the articles to Mahāsthāmaprāpta, also twenty-one times. After that, one recites an appropriate *mantra* and offers the articles to all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the Sukhāvati realm. One does it either seven or twenty-one times. After that one offers the articles of worship:

“Whatever water for the face and other articles of worship are procurable in the limitless expanse of this world, and the offerings arranged here by me, I offer them to the host of Amitābha. *Oṃ Amitābha together with your retinue receive these offerings.*”

Next, one lifts the large *bali* for the fire god, smears it with melted butter, blesses it with a *mantra*, and offers it saying: “*Oṃ Amitābha and your retinue please consume this bali.*” Then one recites:

“O Lord Amitābha and your retinue. Having eaten this offered *bali*, please bestow the attainments of the pacifying, enriching and other rites. Provide me with protection and remain my companions in all my activities. Avert untimely death and diseases, and destroy demons and evil spirits. Dispel bad dreams, inauspicious omens, and evildoers. Bestow happiness, rich harvests, and large herds of cattle. Bestow all possible attainments of happiness and prosperity.”

The above verses should be repeated by all those who are present. After that, the *bali* should be thrown into the cremation fire.

Next, one sprinkles water and offers the *bali* to the protector of the Dharma.<sup>41)</sup>

“I disperse rays of light and summon the sphere-protector<sup>42)</sup> and his consort. I envisage them seated next to Vajrapāṇi inside the fire god’s flames epitomising the Sukhāvati realm.”

Next, one offers once more the articles of worship, and one recites prayers and asks the deities to accept these articles. One recites the Dharma protector’s *mantra* and the *mantras* of the articles, and one offers these articles into the fire.

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41) Sanskrit: *dharmapāla*.

42) Sanskrit: *kṣetrapāla*.

“In ancient times you made a promise to protect the Buddha’s teachings. I praise you the sphere-protector and your retinue. Your power and might stretch to the limits of the sky. Accept these pure articles of worship and accomplish the works entrusted to you.”

Next, one sprinkles the *bali* with melted butter, summons all evil demons,<sup>43)</sup> and then recites the following verse:

“O noble sphere-protector, accept this *bali*. Protect the departed person and follow him behind towards the sphere of great happiness. Remove all obstructions from this place and on the path of the departed person. For those who are alive, please remove all diseases and evil demons. Bring blessings and happiness.”

The *bali* should be thrown into the cremation fire.

## ***6. Concluding rites***

Next, one offers seven times the articles for burning while reciting the *mantra* of Amitābha and the *mantras* of the articles. After that, one offers the articles of worship, and recites the words of praise:

“I bow down and praise Amitābha seated in meditation. He teaches the Dharma in the Sukhāvati realm, always beholds living beings with compassion, fulfils his promises, and protects living beings.”

Next one invites Amitābha and his attendants to return to the Sukhāvati:

“Accomplish the activities for the benefit of living beings and grant them their appropriate attainments. At this moment, I request you to depart to the Buddha sphere. O knowledge-deities depart to your places. O pledge-deities dissolve within me.”

After that one offers the remaining articles into the fire and invites the fire god Agni to leave:

“O Agni, leave this place for my own and other people’s benefit. O Agni of knowledge, depart towards the south-east direction. O pledge fire god

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43) At this point, one summons into the *bali* the evil demons who cause obstructions and difficulties to the departed person on his Journey towards the Sukhāvati abode. The sphere-protector is invoked to consume the *bali*, and thus to destroy the obstructive demons.

assume the form of the flames.”

One motions the hand outwards in the manner of sending Agni away, recites a prayer requesting for blessing, and then concludes the cremation rite by placing the *vajra* and the bell on a table.

### *7. Disposal of the ashes*

If the bones and ashes are of a pure person, one throws them into some large waters. When living beings drink this water, their mental obscurities become purified. If the bones and ashes are of an ordinary person, they should be placed inside a clean vessel, and disposed at a place which is auspicious and free of serpents. One arranges on the ground a white *bali* and offers it to the earth deity. Finally one recites the *mantras* of the protective deity Hayagriva and of the Buddha Amitābha.

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