

A Passage To Light

A simple ceremony for when someone close dies

Refuge and Awakening Mind

namo

I take refuge in all the sources of refuge,
The three jewels — buddha, dharma and sangha, and
The three roots — guru, deity and protector.
In order to lead all beings to buddhahood
I bring to mind the mind of awakening.

(Repeat three times.)

Creating the Presence of Amitabha

e ma ho

Wonderful Buddha Limitless Light,
And Great Compassion, Great Power, and others,
Buddhas, bodhisattvas beyond reckoning,
I pray to you with single-minded devotion.
Inspire in me the awakening of Limitless Light.

om amidheva hri

(Repeat the mantra 21 or 100 times.)



PRAYER OF GUIDANCE

*(Light candles and hold while repeating this prayer.
Afterwards, place the candles on the shrine.)*

om ah hum

In this sacred and joyful setting, Realm of Joy,
Our family has gathered,
Brought together by noble wishes made long ago.

Here we present beautiful offerings, real and imagined,
And to them we add our profound thoughts of good will and well-being.
Great good and understanding come from these thoughts
And give power to these wishes we make.

When those close to us die and they see
The bewildering projections of confusion in the intermediate state,
May they recognize the unity of experience and awareness,
The mother and son clear light.
May they find a path free from fear, panic, and alarm
And be received by Lord Limitless Light
With his retinue of bodhisattvas.

Free from the threats and distress of ordinary existence,
May they be born in a lotus bud and meet the Buddha
In the lotus land of the Realm of Joy.
Receiving guidance, may they complete all the stages of the bodhisattva path,
Come to full awakening and develop the ability
To help all beings without discrimination become free of pain.

May this light that shines with the brilliance of intelligence and awareness
Clear away the darkness of conditioning, confusing emotions,
and the distortions of reactions and concepts.
May it illumine the path of total purity
And reveal the way to a never-fading joy.

Dissolution

(Set a flame to the picture of the deceased.)

The fire that burns your form Is the fire of pristine awareness.
Its blue base is the fire of Pure Being,
Its red foundation the fire of Limitless Light,
Its yellow light the fire of Source of Prosperity,
Its white intensity, the fire of Total Brilliance,
And its black tip, the fire of Effective Action.
The five buddhas, with their fires,
Burn away your five aggregates,
Remove forever the five poisons,
And lead you to the five aspects of timeless awareness.

(Read the Heart Sutra.)

The Sutra of the Heart of the Lady Perfection of Wisdom

I bow to Lady Perfection of Wisdom.

Thus have I heard. At one time Lord Buddha was staying at Vulture Peak Mountain in Rajagriha, with a great gathering of the monastic sangha and the bodhisattva sangha.

At that time, Lord Buddha entered an absorption, called Profound Radiance, in which all elements of experience are present.

At the same time, noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, was looking right at the experience of the profound perfection of wisdom and he saw the five groups to be empty of nature.

Then, through the power of the Buddha, venerable Shariputra said to noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, “How does a son or daughter of the noble family, who wishes to practice the profound perfection of wisdom, train?”

Addressed in this way, noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, said to venerable Shariputra, “O Shariputra, a son or daughter of the noble family who wishes to practice the profound perfection of wisdom looks in this way: see the five groups to be truly empty of nature.

Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.
Emptiness is not other than form; form is not other than emptiness.

In the same way, feeling, concept, mental formation, and consciousness are emptiness.

Therefore, Shariputra, all experience is emptiness. It is not defined. It is not born or destroyed, impure or free from impurity, not incomplete or complete.

Therefore, Shariputra, in emptiness, there is no form, no feelings, no concepts, no mental formations, no consciousness; no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind, no appearance, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no mind object; no eye element up to no mind element and no mind consciousness element; no ignorance, no end of ignorance up to no old age and death, no end of old age and death; no suffering, no origin, no cessation, no path; no pristine awareness, no attainment, and no non-attainment.

Therefore, Shariputra, because, for bodhisattvas, there is no attainment, they rest, trusting the perfection of wisdom. With nothing clouding their minds, they have no fear. They leave delusion behind and come to the end of nirvana.

All the buddhas of the three times, by means of the perfection of wisdom, fully awaken to unsurpassable, true, complete awakening.

Therefore, the mantra of the perfection of wisdom, the mantra of great awareness, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra equal to the unequalled, the mantra that completely calms all suffering, is not a ruse: know it to be true.

Thus, the mantra of the perfection of wisdom is said in this way:

om gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha

Thus, Shariputra, do all bodhisattva mahasattvas train in the profound perfection of wisdom.”

Then Lord Buddha arose from that absorption and confirmed noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, with these words, “Well done, well done, o son of noble family; thus it is, thus it is. One practices the profound perfection of wisdom just as you have taught. Those Who Have Gone This Way also rejoice.”

Then venerable Shariputra and noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, that whole assembly and the world with its gods, humans, titans, and sky spirits, rejoiced and praised the words of Lord Buddha.

Dedication

Wonderful Buddha Limitless Light
With Great Compassion on his right
And Great Power on his left,
All surrounded by innumerable buddhas and bodhisattvas,

In the happy and joyous realm
Called Realm of Joy,
Through the power of the goodness done here today,
As soon as we leave this life,
Without any interruption in other lives,
May we immediately see the face of Limitless Light.

Thus, simply by my giving voice to this wish,
May the buddhas of the ten directions
Inspire in me its fulfillment
Free from impediments and obstacles.

Awaking mind is precious.
May it arise where it has not arisen.
May it not weaken where it has arisen
May it ever grow and flourish.

Notes

When someone close to us dies, our connection with that person is broken and cannot be restored. Yet the web of connections does not disintegrate right away. It gradually unravels — strands releasing one by one. Each strand is a memory or a recollection, arising in no particular order, triggered by a word, a thought, a familiar object, or just arising on its own in the quiet of the night.

Grief can be understood as the pain we experience as those strands unravel. It usually comes in waves, and those waves may continue to roll in for some time, months or even years after the person we were close to has died.

People react to death in different ways. Some go into shock, some become numb, some go about their lives as usual, some feel a release. However death affects us, there comes a time when we begin to let go of what was and to move into the next phase of our own lives.

The purpose of this ceremony is to complete our relationship with the person who has died and, in doing so, to allow the process of letting go to begin.

To this end, we create a sacred space, a small shrine perhaps. We place a picture, if we have one, of Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of Limitless Light, not as a figure to be worshipped, but as a symbolic representation of mind nature, the clear and unrestricted knowing that is our human heritage. In front of the picture, we set traditional offerings, or offerings of flowers, candles, incense, and food. And then we place a picture of the deceased, arranged in such a way that it can be lit with a candle and it can burn and the ashes can fall without endangering anything else.

The ceremony opens with refuge and awakening mind, traditional reflections that renew our connection with the direction of our practice and our motivation.

Then we imagine that Buddha Amitabha is present in front of us, attended by Avalokiteshvara on the right and Vajrapani on the left. Amitabha, the Buddha of Limitless Light, is red. He wears the traditional monastic robes, sits in lotus posture with his hands in meditation position holding the traditional mendicant's bowl. For us, he represents mind nature, the clear, empty knowing that is present in all experience. He also embodies compassion, the wish that all sentient beings find a relationship with life that allows them to be completely at peace, whatever they encounter in life. Avalokiteshvara, he who sees the pain of the world, and Vajrapani, the embodiment of power, appear as bodhisattvas, the former white in color, the latter blue. They represent how mind nature takes expression in life, as infinite compassion on the one hand, and as the power of fearlessness on the other.

Recite the mantra for Limitless Light a number of times, feeling your own yearning to be completely at peace with your life. Then light a candle, think of the deceased and say the prayer of guidance. The lighted candle symbolizes the clarity of mind nature that enables us to be at peace in the turmoil of our own reactivity and confusion. The lotus bud symbolizes buddha nature, the potential for awakening that unfolds naturally when the conditions are right. Here you are praying for the spiritual welfare of the deceased, praying that he or she recognizes mind nature and thus finds peace and freedom from the confusion of emotional reactions.

Then, bring the flame of a candle to the photograph of the deceased. The flame represents timeless awareness in its five aspects: presence, balance, discernment, effective action and completeness.

In today's world, we often do not see the actual body of this person who meant so much to us. With the burning of the photograph, we recognize clearly that the physical connection is no more. While the photograph burns, recite The Heart Sutra, which speaks to the emptiness of all experience.

Then repeat the dedication prayers, praying that the good of performing this ceremony serves to help all beings in their spiritual paths.

After the ceremony, sit quietly for a few minutes and let your mind, body and heart absorb what has transpired. There may well be a mixture of feelings, sadness, joy, regret, relief, and so on. Don't try to sort them out. Instead, let them all be there, swirling around like autumn leaves in the wind, and know that, whatever thoughts, feelings with sensations may arise, you are at peace, and your relationship and the deceased is complete.

This ceremony for when someone close to you dies was created by Ken McLeod in 2018 in Windsor, California in response to numerous requests for a simple ceremony that people could do on their own. The prayers are adapted from Karma Chakmé's Amitabha practice texts. The commentary is nothing more than a simple guide to a possible way of approaching this ceremony. If there is any merit in what I have written here, may it help others find a path to freedom.