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## Funeral Rites for Rebirth in the Sukhāvātī Abode

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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 cycles of *saṃsāra*.

Buddhism fundamentally recognises two types of death. The first type, which coincides with the attainment of *nirvāṇa*, represents a complete dissolution of the five *skandhas*. When this type of death takes place, there are no further rebirths. The final dissolution and peace have been attained, and there is no need for any ritual intercessions. In fact there is no way of coming into contact with the departed who has passed into *nirvāṇa* because their personal identity has become dissolved and ceased to persist in any perceptible form within phenomenal existence (*saṃsāra*). 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 or content of *nirvāṇa* remains one of the undetermined matters (*avyākṛtavastu*). Consequently, most of the existing 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 remains an open question whether such attributes of *nirvāṇa* can be actually real or functional in the state of *nirvāṇa* after the final dissolution of the five *skandhas*. When one takes into account the teaching that all the *saṃskṛta* and *asaṃskṛta* dharmas are *anātma*, the answer must be definitely negative. It is however certain from the position of Buddhist doctrines, that the death, which coincides with the attainment of *nirvāṇa*, transcends and dissolves the force of karma and eliminates the recurrence of further rebirths in *saṃsāra*.

The doctrinal interpretation of *nirvāṇa* as a complete dissolution of the five *skandhas* (*nirupadiśeṣa-nirvāṇa*) is somewhat weakened by certain incongruous accounts and statements found in Buddhist texts. In the case of the Buddha, we have for example an account that shortly before his body was cremated, he

protruded his feet from the silk shroud so that Mahākāśyapa could render him the final act of veneration. However, the most remarkable and incongruous thing about the Buddha's complete dissolution and severance of all contacts with the world is the worship of his relics as being alive and endowed with his presence. In his commentary on the Aṅguttara, Buddhaghōṣa asserts the identity of the Buddha while alive with his relics after death. And again in his commentary on the Dīgha, he says that the monk who fails to worship at a caitya is guilty of negligence comparable to a failure to attend on the Buddha.<sup>1</sup> The inscription on the lid of the relic casket from Shinkot, as translated by Gregory Schopen, refers to the Buddha's relic as: “(this is) a relic of the Blessed One Śākyamuni which is endowed with life.”<sup>2</sup> In his comments on the above inscription, Schopen makes an observation that “regardless of what some canonical texts might occasionally suggest and some scholastic texts definitely state — the Buddha was and continued to be an actual living presence in the midst of the Buddhist community.” Thus in Buddhism, at least in the case of the Buddha, there exist two contrasting positions about the state after passing into nirvāṇa, namely a complete dissolution and a state of tangible existence of some kind. In terms of the rites relating to the dead, the worship of the Buddha's relics have provided an inspiration for the preservation and veneration of the relics of Buddhist monks and teachers who are believed to have attained the state of Buddhist sanctity. The relics of Buddhist saints are also used as amulets.

The second type of death is controlled by the law of karma, and it reoccurs repeatedly and uninterruptedly in cyclic waves in saṃsāra until one reaches the state of 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 skandhas acquired at birth as a retribution for the past actions, and an acquisition of a new configuration of the five skandhas in conformity with the retributive force of karma. The law of karma as a moral law or the law of dependent origination inherent in all things do not basically permit any external interference, although the force of karma can be brought to a halt through the practice of the Buddhist path. The fundamental and unadulterated doctrines of Buddhism teach the path of reaching deliverance through one's own effort, but they do not teach that the process 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 one of the four inconceivable things. In other words, the pathways of karma are difficult to discern and should not be speculated about. However, although Buddhism places

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<sup>1</sup>. K. Trainor, *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, 93.

<sup>2</sup>. G. Schopen: “Burial at Santos”, *Religion*, 1987, 204.

an emphasis on the inevitable course of karma and the law of dependent origination, right from the early period, there were progressively introduced certain elements, which eventually served as doctrinal justifications and provided theoretical 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 are devised to channel tangible and concrete powers, and which can alter or even eliminate the karmic flux of the departed people. All Buddhist traditions have their own specific customs and ways of executing the funeral rites. However, when one puts aside such elements as indigenous customs and externally perceptible ritual activities, and when one considers the essential elements of ritual texts, broadly speaking, there are three main types of funeral rites, namely rituals related to the ancient Indian and Buddhist mythologies of Yama, rituals based on the transfer of merit gained through donations or recitations of sacred texts, and rituals based on the tantras and certain teachings about the intermediate existence. None of these three types is entirely independent, but they all include other elements and borrowings from one another.

#### Rituals relating to the mythology of Yama

The mythology of Yama is complex and we consider here only the issues relevant to the formation of funeral rituals. In the early brahmanical texts, Yama has two major identities.<sup>3</sup> First, in the earlier 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 is in that place that men hope to become immortal. Yama welcomes the ancient ancestors (pitṛ) to his abode where he drinks with the gods, and where the pitṛs participate in the life of the gods. Thus, Yama is the one who accommodates the dead in the place described as 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. In addition to that, Yama has two dogs as his messengers, who search for men and bring death to them. In the Purāṇas Yama becomes the judge and ruler over the hells where the wicked endure sufferings. As judge, he sends the good people to heaven (svarga), the wicked people to the 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 who acts as the judge of the departed, and Māra, the lord of either the Paranirmitavaśavartin abode or the entire Kāmadhātu. In some Buddhist texts,

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<sup>3</sup>. A. Bergaigne, trans. by V.G. Paranjpe, *Vedic Religion*, Delhi, 1978, vol. I, 85ff.

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Yama and Māra become merged together into a set of four Māras: Māra as the five skandhas, Māra as defilements (kleśa), Māra as Mṛtyu, and Māra as a divine but ill-disposed manifestation (devaputra). 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 saṃsāra, and to assure that they revolve in the cycles of birth and death. Yama is also presented in Buddhist texts as a judge administering his judgement in accordance with the Dharma. In the Devadūta-sutta of the Majjhima, the Buddha describes how the guardians of the hells seize people by their arms and lead them before the king Yama, and request him to pass a judgement. Prior to passing a sentence, Yama examines the dead, and then he passes 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 formal judgement. This type of ritual is represented by the rites performed in China during which the ten kings, including Yama, preside over a formal judgement, while the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha tries to secure the release of the departed undergoing the judgement. Some funeral rites incorporate certain elements, which reflect the story about crossing the dangerous river Vaitaraṇī. In this case, certain items such as money are deposited with the dead to help them to cross that river safely.

#### Rituals based on the transfer of merit

In early Buddhist texts, the validity of the transfer of merit to other people remain an unresolved issue. Some Buddhist masters argued that it was valid and some postulated that it was contradictory to the basic Buddhist doctrine on karma. So far as the Mahāyāna and tantra teachings are concerned, the transfer of merit is fully endorsed and constitutes one of the essential elements of Mahāyāna and tantra practices.

Putting aside the doctrinal controversies about the transfer of merit, in real life practically all Buddhist traditions, including the Theravāda countries, profess and practise the transfer of merit to other living beings whether alive or dead. Some inspiration for sharing merit with the dead is seen in the brahmanical tradition relating to ancestor worship. The transfer of merit to the dead in the form of material things donated to the Saṅgha is seen as a replacement of the brahmanical food offerings deposited for the dead. The scriptural justification for making donations to the monks and Saṅgha on behalf of the dead is provided in the stories narrated in the Pāli Petavatthu and the Sanskrit avadāna literature. Most of such stories are located during the Buddha's time. In the Aṅguttara,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>. Aṅguttara, V, 269ff.

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after being asked whether there accrues any benefit to the dead from the gifts (dāna) and the śrāddhā ceremonies, the Buddha explains that there is no ground for any benefit in the case of those reborn in hells, as animals, humans, or devas. There is however, the ground of benefiting the pretas who feed on whatever food is proper to such beings. The pretas subsist on whatever offerings are conveyed to them by kinsmen and blood relations. If the immediate dead relative is not reborn among the pretas, then the benefit goes to other relatives in that state.

The funeral rites based on the transfer of merit are performed in all Theravāda countries. The merit that is transferred to the dead on such occasions is largely derived from donations to Buddhist monks, and from the recitation of the parittas. In the Mahāyāna countries such as China, Korea and Japan, most funeral rites are also based on the transfer of merit derived from reading Mahāyāna sūtras such as the Sukhāvativyūha or certain Prajñāpāramitā sūtras. The transfer of merit is also incorporated into some tantric funeral rituals.

#### Rituals based on the tantras

The funeral rites based on the tantras are complex and include a number of elements, some of which are shared with the above two types of funeral rites, and some of which 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 consecrations, homa rites, and sādhana practices. They also incorporate some Mahāyāna practices such as raising the thought of enlightenment and the Bodhisattva bhūmis. Among the tantras, the teachings concerning the disposal of the dead people given in the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana are perhaps the most comprehensive. In Tibet, this tantra has provided a basis for a number of funeral rites.

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 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 achieve 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 different possibilities, and aim to secure the best possible result for the departed people.

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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 state<sup>5</sup> focus on explaining to the dead their actual situation, and directing them how to strive for the state of final liberation. If this fails, they are advised and guided to gain the best possible rebirth. This particular type of instructions is widely established in Tibet, but its origins go back to India. It is assumed that at the moment of death there appears a beam of clear light, which epitomises the state of liberation. If the departed consciousness aims for it without any hesitations and succeeds to merge with it, then one becomes freed from the bonds of karma. If there is any hesitation, a second beam of darkness appears and the process of returning to rebirth begins. It is taught that the intermediate state can last for up to seven weeks or forty nine days.

The guidance of the dead through the stages of the Buddhist path and the bestowal of the tantric consecrations are incorporated in the ritual known in Tibet as the rite with an effigy-card (byang chog). The prototype of this type of ritual is explained in the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana. The name of the departed is inscribed on a piece of paper and the departed consciousness is summoned to rest in it. After that, the ritual performer gives instructions and guides the consciousness through the entire Buddhist path, which includes 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 incorporates the basic elements of homa rites and appropriate sādhanas. The funeral pyre is constructed on the pattern of the appropriate homa hearth, which often also incorporates a drawn design of a particular maṇḍala, which is inserted at the bottom. The corpse is deposited on the top of the piled up heap of wood. Next, the ritual performer proceeds to execute an appropriate sādhana, presents offerings to the deities of the relevant maṇḍala in the same way as it is done in homa rites, and invokes them to take the departed with them to the sphere of purity. The cremation ceremony and other rites discussed here very briefly are translated below as part of the rites for rebirth in the Sukhāvātī abode.

The funerary rites for rebirth in the Sukhāvātī abode

The funeral and related rites, which are translated below, were composed by Karma chags med, also known as dGe slong Rāgāsya (Rā ga a sya) and dGe slong brTson 'grus. He was a Karma Kagyupa (bKa' brgyud pa) master who lived in the seventeenth century. His collected writings include a set of funeral rituals for rebirth in the Sukhāvātī abode. The characteristic and somewhat

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<sup>5</sup>. bar do (bar ma do'i srid pa) / antarābhava.

unusual features of these rites are that they combine the Pure Land teachings about the rebirth in the Sukhāvati abode with the tantric funeral rites performed in Tibet on the basis of Indian sources.

The larger Sukhāvativyūha and the Amitāyurdhyāna provide the fundamental teachings on the ways of becoming reborn in the Sukhāvati abode, the pure land of lasting happiness. It is said in those texts that the people, who profess faith in and invoke the name of Amitābha, will become reborn in the Sukhāvati abode. Amitābha is said to have promised that at the time of their death, he will personally collect his faithful believers and lead them to his abode. It is also said in the Sukhāvativyūha that Amitābha assists his devotees, who behold him in an ecstatic vision and leave this world to become reborn in his land.

In Japan, the Jōdo priests recite the Sukhāvativyūha as part of the funeral ceremonies. Unlike in other sects, the Jōdo Shinshu does not give posthumous names because the person is believed to have passed into Amitābha's Sukhāvati. 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 (zōri), and a wallet with money to pay for the boat passage across to the other side.

Immediately after the death, at the bedside, the Jōdo priest invokes the names of Amitābha, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, and the names of the Buddhas of the ten directions. Next, he offers flowers, recites the confession of sins, performs a ceremonial tonsure and administers the three refuges and the vow of morality (śīla). After that, he chants the Sukhāvati and Amitāyus sūtras. The chanting focuses on the relevant passages, which speak of gaining merit through hearing the name of Amitābha. He further recites an invocation for rebirth in the Sukhāvati abode and the nembutsu.<sup>6</sup> Finally, he transfers the acquired merit to the departed person. When the body is placed in a coffin and on the day of 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 a request addressed to the departed to leave. When the ashes are collected into an urn, the priest recites certain sūtra passages and the so-called Śarīra-sūtra. 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 the Prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya, and chants the nembutsu.

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<sup>6</sup>. The terms nien-fo 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 and recitation of Amitābha's name.

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The funeral rites composed by Rāgāsya are fundamentally modelled on the tantric funeral rites used in Tibet, but at the same time, they also incorporate the concept and relevant instructions for rebirth in the Sukhāvātī abode. In all his funeral rituals, Amitābha, the Buddha of the Sukhāvātī lokadhātu located in the western region of the universe, 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 abode.

Out of the four rituals translated here, the first one details the practice of the transference of consciousness and consists of three integral parts, which explain how to learn during one's lifetime the method of transferring consciousness, how to execute it personally at the moment of dying, and how to perform 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. As such, it is a short text, but it does cover the main stages in the intermediate state, which are explained in more detail in the full version of the *Bar do thos grol*. There is a tradition in Tibet that originally the text on the intermediate state was composed by Padmasambhava and recorded by his Tibetan wife Yeshe Tshogyal (*Ye shes mtsho rgyal*). Initially, this text was hidden by Padmasambhava and eventually rediscovered in the fourteenth century by the rNying ma pa master Karma gling pa.<sup>7</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, the cremation rites (*ro sreg*), includes a group of integral rituals such as the consecration of the dead body, the purification and preparation of the cremation site, the actual cremation of the dead body, and the disposal of the ashes. Essentially, the cremation ceremony combines the *homa* and *sādhana* rites.

The fourth ritual, like the previous one, also includes several integral rituals. First, the ritual performer summons the departed consciousness of the dead person into an effigy-card, and then 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 abode.

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<sup>7</sup>. 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 London, Shambhala, 1975, xi.

TRANSFERENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Prior to his exposition of the transference of consciousness,<sup>8</sup> Rāgāsya provides an introduction of eight folios in which he briefly outlines the general history of 'pho ba and discusses some relevant issues. In the paragraphs that now follow, I give a résumé of the main content of his introduction.

Rāgāsya says that his exposition of 'pho ba is based on the oral tradition and certain texts which are linked with the teachings of Padmasambhava. At the time of death, the 'pho ba can be performed by oneself or it can be performed for the dead by the lamas (bla ma) who know how to perform it. It is recommended that people should learn to perform it because it can be helpful in gaining the state of purification from sins or even the state of complete liberation from saṃsāra. It is also said in some sources that the 'pho ba performed at the time of death can secure the state of complete liberation or happy rebirths in heaven (mtho ris), even if one is guilty of the five heinous sins (ānantarīya).

Rāgāsya says that there are many different types of 'pho ba, but he provides the names and briefly explains only the following types: dharmakāya 'pho ba, saṃbhogakāya 'pho ba, nirmāṇakāya 'pho ba, forced 'pho ba (btsan thabs kyi 'pho ba), routine 'pho ba (tha mal pa'i 'pho ba), and the 'pho ba of entering into another body (grong du 'jug pa'i 'pho ba).

What is the dharmakāya 'pho ba? If during one's lifetime one has studied and practised the Mahāmudrā and the rDzogs chen practice known as “cutting through substantial reality” (khregs chod), at the time of death, the mother and son meet in the realm of clear light ('od gsal). One remains there for seven or more days. In this state, the object and the performer of the 'pho ba are separated because it is the ultimate 'pho ba.<sup>9</sup> It is also said that in this state there are no auspicious or evil pathways. When one gains the dharmakāya 'pho ba, the external sign, which indicates its attainment, appears in the form of a clear sky. There are also signs which appear on the dead body. The body does not lose its lustre and brightness for a long time, and on the secret part, there emerges a white letter A, a blue syllable Hūṃ or some other similar sign.

In the case of the saṃbhogakāya 'pho ba, the sky becomes filled with light and rainbows. Blood or red water oozes from the Brahma's aperture<sup>10</sup> on the top of the head. A kind of dew or vapour emerges on the body, and on the secret part, there emerges the symbol of an appropriate deity or the relevant Buddha family.

In the case of the nirmāṇakāya 'pho ba, the body falls down towards the right side, and the vital wind flows out from the left nostril. One envisages or places

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<sup>8</sup>. 'pho ba / saṃkrānti, cyavana, saṃcāra, saṃkrama.

<sup>9</sup>. don dam pa'i 'pho ba / paramārthasaṃcāra.

<sup>10</sup>. tshangs pa bu ga / brahmarandhra.

the Buddha's image at the front, and then one transfers one's consciousness into it through the left nostril. One should pray and generate the thought of inducing a *nirmāṇakāya* for the benefit of living beings. On this occasion, there appear such signs as clouds, a rainbow, a wish-granting tree, or a shower of flowers falls down from the sky. As for the signs on the body, it is said that blood, red water, or the *bodhicitta* emerge from the left nostril, or a kind of dew appears on the body. On the secret part, there emerges the shape of a vase or the symbol of an appropriate deity and small relics (*ring bsrel*).

The deliberate or forced 'pho ba should not be performed. Even when the signs of death are present, one should attempt three times to avert one's death. If one does not do it and executes the 'pho ba, then there results the so-called harm of killed deities (*lha bsad pa'i nyes pa*). Even if one has been sentenced or is afflicted by disease and pain, the 'pho ba should not be performed. Similarly, even when someone is dead but the subtle veins are not fully cut off, it is inappropriate to perform the 'pho ba. If one performs the 'pho ba when the period of life is not completed and there is still some movement, then one harms the bodily deities. In this particular context, the term deities refers to the group of the holy deities of one hundred families (*rigs brgya'i lha*) who abide in the body. All these deities become inert as if being killed. When the 'pho ba is performed before the period of someone's life expires, it brings no benefit and the person becomes reborn in evil destinies. It is said in a text entitled *rDo rje gdan bzhi* that the 'pho ba should be only performed at the right moment, and that when the time is not ripe, the deities become inert. If one takes one's own life, one commits a greater sin than the five heinous sins. Thus, before one performs the 'pho ba, one must always attempt to avert one's death.

The 'pho ba of entering another body is known in Tibet in the oral teachings (*bKa' ma*), but there is no living transmission of its practical performance.

It is said that on certain occasions, when the cause of death is sudden, the routine 'pho ba is referred to as instant 'pho ba (*skad cig ma'i 'pho ba*). When a constant radiance (*skrag sdangs*) appears, one should direct one's awareness towards *Amitābha* or *Padmasambhava* positioned over the top of one's head. If the cause of death is fierce and sudden, one leads one's consciousness towards the top of the head, and then directs it towards one's teacher. Otherwise, the indicative signs of the routine 'pho ba are such as the head faces towards the north and the body falls down towards the right side. It is said that if one recites prayers and invokes the names of certain Buddhas over the head of the dead person, that person does not become reborn in any of the three evil destinies.

According to some sources, eight bodily apertures (*sgo brgyad*) serve as passages of *saṃsāra*, and one aperture constitutes the path of the *Mahāmudrā*. Furthermore, it is said in the sources derived from the highest tantras that when

the vijñānālaya (rnam shes kun gzhi) emerges from the Brahma's aperture, it does not have any form. When it emerges from the seminal point (thig le), it assumes the form of a great deity. When it emerges through the navel, it assumes the form of a god in the Kāmadhātu. When it emerges through the eyes, it assumes the form of a powerful human (mi dbang po). When it emerges through the nostrils, the rebirth takes place among the yakṣas. When it emerges from the ears, it assumes the form of one's meditational deity (grub pa'i lha). When it emerges through the so-called passage of existence (srid pa'i sgo), it becomes reborn as a preta. When it emerges from the urinary passage, it becomes reborn as an animal, and when from the anus, it falls to one of the eight hells.

One tradition maintains that when someone does not learn the 'pho ba yoga<sup>11</sup> and the departing consciousness is transferred through the Brahma's aperture by means of ritual power (las dbang), then that person becomes reborn in the Ārūpyadhātu. And again, when the consciousness is transferred through the Brahma's aperture in accordance with the 'pho ba yoga, one becomes reborn in the pure sphere of the sky (mkha' spyod).

According to the instructions of Padmasambhava, there are nine different paths through which the departing consciousness can pass: three excellent paths, three average paths, and three inferior paths. The Brahma's aperture on the head constitutes the path which leads to the pure sphere of the sky (mkha' spyod), and hence when the awareness (rig pa) is passed through it, one gains the state of liberation (thar pa). It is the best path, which one should cultivate and purify. When the departing consciousness emerges through the eyes, one becomes reborn as a cakravartin, and when through the left nostril, one gains a pure human body. These are the three excellent paths. When the consciousness emerges through the right nostril, one becomes reborn among the yakṣas, when through both ears, one becomes reborn among the gods of the Kāmadhātu, and when through the navel, one becomes reborn as a kāmadeva. These are the three average paths. When the consciousness emerges through the urinary passage, one becomes reborn as an animal. When it passes through the region of the so-called passage of existence (srid pa'i sgo) or through the white or red seminal points (thig le), one becomes reborn as a preta. Finally, when it passes through the anus, one becomes reborn in one of the hells. These are the three inferior paths.

Next there follows Rāgāśya's exposition of the 'pho ba practice, which is translated below.

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<sup>11</sup>. 'pho ba'i gdams pa / saṃkrāntiyoga.

(.9a) The exposition of the transference of consciousness ('pho ba) is divided into two major parts: the preparatory practice and the actual application.<sup>12</sup>

Preparatory practice of 'pho ba

First, in order to ask for a suitable meditational disposition of practising the transference of consciousness, you should present a maṇḍala offering and then recite this:

“Having transformed this maṇḍala of bronze 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 guru. May he look upon me with compassion.”

Next, you should take the tree refuges and raise the thought of enlightenment:

“Homage to the Three Jewels and to the three root deities. 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.”

You should recite this three times. After that, in an instance, you should duly envisage yourself as the lord Mahākāruṇika, white in colour, peaceful and smiling, and having one face. Out of his four hands, the two principal ones are folded at the heart, and the two lower ones 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 surmounted with five small crests made of jewels. His body is covered with silk and jewel ornaments, and it is radiant with the lustre of the thirty-two major marks (lakṣaṇa) and the eighty minor marks (anuvyañjana).<sup>13</sup> The outer surface of Mahākāruṇika's body is like a propped up tent of white silk, and its inside is empty like an inflated bladder. Inside this totally empty space, there is the central vein (avadhūtī), which is endowed with four qualities. On the outside, it is white to symbolise happiness. 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, (10a) its lower opening beneath the navel is sealed. In order to advance along the path leading to heaven (mtho ris), its upper extremity at the top of the head, the Brahma's aperture, constantly vibrates.

Above the crown of your head, you should envisage the protector Amitābha. He is red in colour, wears monastic robes, and sits on his lion throne consisting of a lotus and a moon. He has one face and two hands placed in the meditation

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<sup>12</sup>. gNam chos thugs kyi gter kha las bDe chen zhing du 'pho ba'i gdams pa rgyas par bsgrigs pa. The translation of this and the remaining funeral rites included here is based on a block print acquired in Nepal.

<sup>13</sup>. For a list of the major and minor marks of a mahāpuruṣa, see The Buddhist Forum, Volume III, 391-93.

#### Funeral Rites for Rebirth in the Sukhāvati Abode

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.

Lokeśvara stands to the right 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 in the right and left hands respectively. He is standing on a lotus and a moon.

Vajrapāṇi Mahāsthāmaprāpta stands to the left of Amotābha. 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.

The (above three deities) are surrounded by countless Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, śrāvakas and arhats.

Dispersing rays of light from the three seed syllables (Om Āḥ Hūṃ) placed on the three bodily spots of the above three lords, you should summon them from the Sukhāvati abode and dissolve them into their envisaged bodies.

Next, you should recite the following supplication<sup>14</sup> for the transference of consciousness:

“E ma ho. O supreme protector Amitābha, Mahākāruṇika and Vajrapāṇi Mahāsthāmaprāpta. I beseech you with my one-pointedly focused mind to grant me your blessing for perfecting 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 Sukhāvati abode.”

You should recite this supplication as many times as you can. After that, you should envisage your heart inside the central vein (avadhūti) in the form of a red eight-petalled lotus resembling a sealed knot of a bamboo tube. On the top of it, there is a lunar disc, which is similar in size and shape to a halved pea. On the top of it, there rests the white seminal drop<sup>15</sup> together with a red syllable Hrīḥ similar to a punctuation mark (l).<sup>16</sup> They have the nature of the combined vital wind of awareness and consciousness. They are lustrous with light, restless and vibrating upwards.

Next, you should envisage the following process. From the above syllable Hrīḥ, there disperses light, which assumes the form of a similar syllable Hrīḥ, and then closes the aperture below, the entry into the hells. Another syllable Hrīḥ disperses and blocks the urinary passage, the entry into the realm of animals. Next, two syllables Hrīḥ disperse and block the mouth and the secret part, the entry to rebirth in the realm of the pretas. After that, one syllable Hrīḥ disperses

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<sup>14</sup>. gsol 'debs / adhyeṣaṇa.

<sup>15</sup>. thig le / bindu.

<sup>16</sup>. tsheg drag.

#### Funeral Rites for Rebirth in the Sukhāvātī Abode

and seals the navel, the entry into the realm of the kāmadevas. Then again, two syllables Hṛīḥ disperse and block the ears, the entry to rebirth in the realm of the asuras, the world of form, and that of the kumbhāṇḍas. The next two syllables Hṛīḥ 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. After that, three syllables Hṛīḥ disperse and block the aperture between the eyebrows,<sup>17</sup> the entry to rebirth in the world of form, then the right eye, the entry to rebirth as a human king, and finally, the left eye. Once more, one syllable Hṛīḥ disperses and blocks the entries to rebirth in the formless world, the Brahmāloka.

When one performs the above visualisation, it is also appropriate to pronounce the syllable Hṛīḥ verbally and to count it.

Next, pronounce Hik and envisage your mind (sems) in the form of a white bindu marked with the syllable Hṛīḥ, which rises upwards along the path of the central vein to the top of the head, and touches the toes of Amitābha's feet. Pronounce Ka and envisage it falling down, and resting on the lunar seat inside the heart. While doing it, breathe in three times the remains of the vital winds. Hold and retain them, and then fix them firmly for a long time. Next, pronounce Hik in your mind, and envisage the winds of the right and left veins<sup>18</sup> as having the form of blue dust and rising upwards along the central vein, and at the same time the white bindu touching Amitābha's toes. Next, pronounce Ka in your mind and envisage it descending and resting on the seat in the heart. (12a) When you are raising it upwards, place the vajra-fists on the sides of the head, and heap up 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 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,<sup>19</sup> you should recite the following words:

“E ma ho. O excellent Buddha Amitābha, the lord Mahākāruṇika to the right, the Sattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta to the left, with countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in attendance. The buddhakṣetra called Sukhāvātī is the abode of happiness and limitless wonders. May I, upon my death, become reborn there at once without being obstructed by another rebirth. May I behold there the countenance of Amitābha. I recite my prayer in

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<sup>17</sup>. smin mtshams / ūṛṇā.

<sup>18</sup>. right vein: ro ma / rasanā, left vein: rkyang ma / lalanā.

<sup>19</sup>. smon lam / praṇidhāna.

#### Funeral Rites for Rebirth in the Sukhāvataḥ Abode

these words and ask all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, who reside in the ten directions, to bestow their blessing and unimpeded success.

O enlightenment of the five faculties Svāhā.<sup>20</sup>

While reciting this prayer, you should envisage your body as becoming pervaded with the ambrosia of immortality, which trickles from the alms bowl held in the hands of Amitābha.

As for the invocation for (long) life, you should recite as follows:

“E ma ho. O perfect Buddha Amitābha, Mahākāruṇika, Mahāsthāmaprāpta, and countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. I bow and praise you with devout mind. I ask you to bestow upon me the attainment of life. Oṃ Amitābha, the attainment of life Hūṃ.”<sup>21</sup>

You should recite this prayer one complete round on a rosary (13a) or as many times as you can. You should envisage the threefold group of the lord Amitābha as melting into light, and then dissolving into you, and the syllable Haṃ and a crossed vajra blocking the Brahma's aperture.

After practising in this manner at regular intervals, six or four times, or as many times as necessary, the signs of perfecting the method of transferring consciousness should appear on the Brahma's aperture. They appear as 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 occur, one should examine carefully the spot, which is eight fingers from the edge of the hairline. It overflows and aches when one inserts a blade of kuśa grass. When this happens, one should not train any further. 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 should stop 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 should generate Amitābha one cubit above the head, and one should visualise 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 their descent into the heart inside the central vein. When one executes this visualisation during several sessions, the Brahma's aperture should open. Blood and yellow water should ooze out from it. This concludes the exposition of the method of executing the transference of consciousness.

Transference of consciousness at the time of death

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<sup>20</sup>. tadyathā pañcendriya-avabodhanāya svāhā.

<sup>21</sup>. oṃ amidheva āyusiddhi hūṃ. The Sanskrit name of Amitābha is consistently given in his mantras as Amidheva.

#### Funeral Rites for Rebirth in the Sukhāvati Abode

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

“Kye ma. 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 nature 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 should present one's body, possessions and relatives in a maṇḍala offering to the Buddha Amitābha. Once this offering is completed, one should abandon all thoughts motivated by desire. Acting in the same way as one did at the time of practising the meditation of transferring consciousness, one blocks the nine 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 should recite them personally. Otherwise, one should entrust their recitation to a relative, a friend or someone else. (14a) In the end, having emerged on the crown of the head, the consciousness should certainly become reborn later on in the Sukhāvati abode.

#### Administering the transference of consciousness to other people

When a sick man is definitely dead and his outer breath is cut off, one should arrange the top of the corpse'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 veins of one's throat for recitation, and lifting one's mind to the meditational state appropriate for the transference of consciousness, one recites in a soft and melodious voice the following text:

“Kye ma. O noble son who has 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 deity's) heart there is the red syllable Hriḥ similar to a punctuation mark (I). 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 a lotus and moon throne surmounted by the lord Amitābha, red in colour, wearing monastic robes, seated with his

Funeral Rites for Rebirth in the Sukhāvati Abode

legs crossed, having one face and two hands placed in the meditation posture and holding an alms bowl. The white Lokeśvara is positioned to Amitābha's right. He has one face and four hands. Two of his hands are folded together and two hold a rosary and a lotus. He stands over a lotus and a moon. Vajrapāṇi Mahāsthāmaprāpta is positioned to Amitābha's left. He is blue in colour and has one face and two hands, holding a vajra in the right hand and a bell in the left hand. He also stands on a lotus and a moon. The three of them are surrounded by countless Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, śrāvakas and arhats. Next, from the seed syllables positioned on the three bodily spots of these three lords, there disperse rays of light, which summon their corresponding appearances from the Sukhāvati abode, and dissolve them into the envisaged images. 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.

E ma ho. O wonderful 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 Sukhāvati abode.” (15a)

One meditates and recites this prayer seven times or twenty-one times. One pronounces many times the syllables Ka and Hik. Next, pronouncing a fierce Phaṭ, one pulls out uprightly one single hair from the spot on the crown of the head, which is located some eight fingers from the edge of the hairline. The hair disperses like a rotten matter. A sudden noise and vapour emerge. A swelling appears and a kind of dew or yellow liquid comes out, or warmth and heated grease coemerge. In the case of people who are bald, the flow of lymph and swelling are induced by pressing with the forefinger. One does it repeatedly until the appropriate signs appear.

Next, dispersing rays of light from Amitābha's heart, one envisages the whole retinue together with the aggregates (skandha) of the dead person as becoming completely melted into light, and then dissolved into the heart of Amitābha. Next, one recites the prayer for rebirth in the Sukhāvati abode,<sup>22</sup> repeating it three, five, seven or more times. After that, one indicates the path. One chants the following verses:

“E ma ho. O wonderful protector Amitābha, Mahākāruṇika and Vajrapāṇi Mahāsthāmaprāpta. I supplicate you with the one-pointedly focused mind

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<sup>22</sup>. As given above in the first section, which explains the method of 'pho ba. Rāgāśya's long prayer for rebirth in the Sukhāvati abode is translated in *The Buddhist Forum*, volume 3, 391-409.

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of the departed person to bless and transfer his consciousness to the Sukhāvātī abode.

Kye ma. O noble son who has departed from this life. Have no desire for this sorrowful saṃsāra, and do not hesitate but proceed to the sphere of the Sukhāvātī abode. Phaṭ Phaṭ Phaṭ.” (15b)

While pronouncing the above verses, one should envisage Amitābha departing to the realm of the Sukhāvātī abode like a discharged arrow. Finally, one recites some prayers, concluding with the prayer for the transference of consciousness.

“E ma ho. O wonderful protector Amitābha, Mahākāruṇika and Vajrapāṇi Mahāsthāmaprāpta. I pray to you with one-pointed mind and ask you to bless and transfer this consciousness to the Sukhāvātī abode.” (17a)

#### LIBERATION THROUGH HEARING IN THE INTERMEDIATE STATE (BAR DO THOS GROL)

Kye ma kye hud. 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 imbued with the colours of the six spheres 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 singed odours. If you are not given, there is no way of getting 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 are deceived and wander on. In one single moment, you go round the three thousand worlds without your reflection 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 willing, how strong is your heart, it cleaves. Now you have great regrets for not accomplishing the holy Dharma. Since you recall the sins and offences you have committed, your mind is unhappy. 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 talk back 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 you are definitely dead.

#### Funeral Rites for Rebirth in the Sukhāvataḥ Abode

You approach the gurus 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, the *ḍākinīs* and the protectors of the Dharma (*dharmapāla*). They wear the requisites of the eight dreadful graveyards and resound with a thunder of one thousand cymbals and *Hūṃ Phaṭ*. The whole world quakes, rocks, trembles and shakes. They come to lead you out from the path of the intermediate state. Do not be afraid! If you recognise your chosen deities, they will lead you to the realm of the *Sukhāvataḥ* abode.

Later on, there arrive the hosts of the bloodthirsty Wrathful Deities to lead you out from the path of the intermediate state. They are terrifying and unbearable to look at, and they roar in unison with one thousand thunders of *Hūṃ Phaṭ*. All the projections in the sky, on the earth, and in the intermediate state become filled with wrath. Showers of ‘kill! kill!’ and luminous weapons fall down. In a way, you are similar to a great sinner locked up in a prison. You cannot free yourself by trying to escape. Whichever way you turn, they all are there. They did not come from another place. The hosts of the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities are the deities of your own body. In a way, it is like being confused amidst the friendly and enemy armies standing on the site 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 a white, red and black abyss. One thousand mountain peaks crumble down; one thousand oceans billow and roar; crackling flames gain ground over a

### Funeral Rites for Rebirth in the Sukhāvātī Abode

great 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, abyss, earth, fire or water. Therefore, adhere to your mind and abandon these fears. The Sage (thub pa) said that these are the Buddha manifestations, which know how to benefit all living beings by various means of conversion. Your thoughts about the unholy and impure gurus 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 search for a body while wandering about in saṃsāra. This is the sign that you have made an error of judgement. Abandon the thoughts of desiring to acquire the sorrow 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 abode in the west, the sphere of lasting happiness, the abode from which there is no turning back.

### THE CREMATION CEREMONY<sup>23</sup>

Treatment of the body

(1a) Salutation to Amitābha.

In order to block the entries leading to rebirths in the six spheres of existence in the case of the helpless beings faring in the intermediate state, one should recall those beings in the same way as it is done in the ritual with an effigy-card.<sup>24</sup> One writes down three times the long mantra<sup>25</sup> of Amitābha in such a way that it looks like a garland. On the lower ends, one adds three fringes. One pronounces and writes down the mantra “Om Amitābha Hrīḥ” and one attaches it on the crown of the corpse's head. Next, one writes down the six syllables “Om maṇi padme Hūṃ” and attaches them on the right shoulder. Finally, one

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<sup>23</sup>. bDe chen zhing gi ro sreg cho ga ngan song gnas 'dren sdug bsngal mtsho skem gtan bde rab 'bar zhes bya ba.

<sup>24</sup>. Translated later on.

<sup>25</sup>. Amitābha has three root mantras, long, medium and short. The long one: om āḥ hūṃ amidheva āyuḥ siddhi hūṃ, om bhrūṃ svāhā, bhrūṃ bhrūṃ. The medium one: om amidheva hrīḥ. The short or condensed one: hrīḥ.

#### Funeral Rites for Rebirth in the Sukhāvataḥ Abode

writes the mantra “Om Vajrapāṇi Hūṃ” and attaches it on the left shoulder. This is an abridged way of sealing the bodily places.<sup>26</sup>

#### Preparation of the cremation site

If one is not able to perform the activities of purifying the soil and removing all evil in accordance with the general and secret tantras, then one simply touches the ground with one's hand and recites an appropriate mantra, and the place becomes purified and excellent. (2a) Once the ground is recited over with mantras, it should not be dug. One should place over it such things as a stone slab, leaves or green grass, and one scatters over it some earth taken from another place. One touches the spot with one's hand and pronounces about one hundred times “Om amṛte Hūṃ Phaḥ.” On the top one deposits one bali consecrated by reciting the “Akāro” mantra.<sup>27</sup>

“I, with my memory instantly clear, 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 a goddess surrounded by a group of soil-masters (sa bdaḡ). She is golden in colour and adorned with silk and jewels. She is benign, well disposed, and holds a treasure vase in her hands.

O earth-goddess, you are the queen of the world, the earth's sovereign, who frequents the paths of all the Buddhas of the three times. O earth-master (sa bdaḡ) of this visible world, and the earth-masters who reside in this place, please come here and receive this ransom bali (glud gtor ma). Surrender this place to me. Abandon it and go somewhere else.

Om. Goddess Pṛthivī, together with the retinue of the earth masters, please consume this bali... receive this water for the face...”<sup>28</sup>

The earth-goddess, happy and smiling replies:

“As I grant this place, I act for the benefit of living beings.”

As the earth-goddess sinks into the ground, the earth becomes transformed into a mass of gold. After that, one should recite:

“All the remaining soil-masters, please disperse to your places.  
Every soil-master please depart.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>. In more extended procedures one places mantras on more parts of the body just as it is explained in Sarvadurgatipariśodhana, Delhi, 1983, pages 83-4 and footnote 27.

<sup>27</sup>. om akāro mukhaṃ sarvadharmāṅgāṃ ādyanutpannatvāt om āḥ hūṃ phaḥ svāhā.

<sup>28</sup>. om pṛthividevi bhūmipatisaparivara idaṃ baliṃ kha kha khāhi khāhi arghaṃ pratīccha etc.

<sup>29</sup>. sarvabhūmipati gaccha.

#### Funeral Rites for Rebirth in the Sukhāvātī Abode

Next, one proceeds to draw the hearth. On the inside of the hearth, one draws a white vajra positioned at the centre of an eight-petalled lotus. The eight petals have the beautiful colours of the corresponding 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.<sup>30</sup> One rings the bell and surveys the hearth with one's eyes. One circumambulates it, and then covers it with a piece cloth. Above that, one erects a container for the corpse (gdung khang), or as it is usually done, one piles up wood into a square heap. On a piece of paper, one draws an eight-petalled lotus to serve as the corpse's seat, and an eight-spoked wheel to serve as its cover. In the vicinity, one arranges all the articles for burning and for worship, two balis for the fire-god, and one triangular bali for the Dharma-protectors. One envisage Hayagrīva, recites his mantra, and then deposits him inside the mentally perfected operative vase (las bum). One prepares the offertory wood, the kuśa grass and all the remaining articles, which are required for the cremation homa.

#### The cremation homa

Following the Sukhāvātī rite of evocation, one envisages oneself as Amitābha. One sprinkles the items for worship and the casket containing the corpse (spur khang).

“Oṃ amṛte Hūṃ Phaṭ Oṃ pure by nature are all dharmas, pure by nature am I.”<sup>31</sup> The clouds of worship, magically produced from the sky forever pure, pervade the sky and the earth. May the medicinal articles, balis (gtor ma) and different items for burning become countless in number. Worship (pūjā) Hoḥ.”

One holds together the spoon and the ladle, and as one touches with them all the articles, one says: “Oṃ Āḥ Hūṃ. Oṃ Thaḥ Thaḥ Thaḥ Thaḥ Thaḥ Thaḥ Thaḥ.” One envisages the articles as being washed. Next, touching the individual articles, one says: “Oṃ Svāhā” — for the offertory wood; “Oṃ Śṛīṃ Svāhā” — for the melted butter; “Oṃ Āḥ Svāhā” — for all the grain articles; “Oṃ Jriṃ Svāhā” — for all articles; “Oṃ kuru kuru Svāhā” — for the all-operative vase, the kuśa grass, and the fire.

Holding a fan together with a piece of silk (me dar) and a fine piece of cloth, one circumambulates the cremation site. (4a) One purifies it with the kuśa smoke and recites:

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<sup>30</sup>. zla phyed rdo rje.

<sup>31</sup>. oṃ svabhāvaśuddhāḥ sarvadharmāḥ svabhāvaśuddho 'ham.

Funeral Rites for Rebirth in the Sukhāvataḥ Abode

“O blue-green kuśa born from the syllable Oṃ, become endowed with protection and excellence. Oṃ Vajrasattva Āḥ.”

One takes two kuśa straws with the lotus gesture and says:

“Oṃ. This kuśa grass, pure and virtuous, performs the works for the pure gods and delights the Three Jewels. In essence, it represents leaves grown from the soil. May it pacify for me all the obstructions and make the things prosperous. Oṃ Vajrasattva Āḥ.”

One arranges the kuśa grass on the outer border of the hearth in a clockwise order. One binds two bunches of it into a crossed vajra and places it at the centre with its top ends turned inwards. One purifies it by sprinkling it with the water from the all-operative vase. One rings the bell and recites in a melodious voice as follows:

“From emptiness there arises the syllable Hūṃ, and from it this peaceful hearth endowed with its appropriated characteristics. Inside, it is filled with firewood. Above a lotus and a moon, there is the syllable Raṃ from which there arises Agni, the fire-god. He is white and has the appearance of a mendicant. He has four hands and one face with three eyes. His long hair is matted into a bundle on the top of his head. In one right hand, he holds a wand, and with the second right hand, he makes the gesture of fearlessness. In his left hands, he holds a water pot and a rosary. He sits on a goat with one leg drawn in and one pending down. He is surrounded by one thousand tongues of blazing flames. The syllables Oṃ Āḥ Hūṃ are on the three spots of his body, and his heart is sealed with the syllable Raṃ. All these articles for burning emerge from emptiness. They will become transformed into a heap of blazing fire permeated with the five colours of wisdom, which epitomise the five Buddha families emerged from the syllables Oṃ Hūṃ Trāṃ Hrīḥ Āḥ.”

Next comes the visualisation of the blazing fire:

“The blue base of the flame represents the wisdom-fire of Vajrasattva. The red section of the flame above the base represents the wisdom-fire of Amitābha. The yellow waist of the flame represents the wisdom-fire of Ratnasambhava. The white flame above that represents the wisdom-fire of Vairocana. The black summit of the flame represents the wisdom-fire of Amoghasiddhi. Such are the flames of the five victorious families. (O departed one), may you become completely purified from the five poisons, and acquire the five bodies of wisdom. May your five bodily aggregates become purified with the massive flames of the five wisdoms. Oṃ Hūṃ Trāṃ Hrīḥ Āḥ.”

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After that, one lights the fire while one sings the following mantra for kindling the fire: “Om vajra blaze blaze Hūṃ.”<sup>32</sup>

Next, one waves a fan and recites:

“Hūṃ. O fire-mass of knowledge, do not disperse, divide or twist (5a) towards the cardinal or intermediate quarters, below or above. In order to prevent any harm and trouble to gods and demons, I keep down your blazing head with this piece of silk. Om. O noble flame pacify Svāhā.”

Next, one summons Agni, the fire-god:

“May Agni together with his host of hermits become summoned from the south-western direction by means of the rays of light dispersed from the heart of the fire-god inside the hearth.”

While ringing the bell with the left hand, one holds the right hand in the gesture of fearlessness, bends the thumb towards the base of the ring-finger, and moves the hand from the left nostril towards the right side.

“Om. Come here, come here great spirit, divine hermit, twice born and supreme. Duly approach this place in order to consume this burnt libation and food. Om ṭakki Hūṃ Jaḥ Hūṃ. O fire-god radiant with the flames of splendour, I invite you to take residence inside these flames in order to swiftly accomplish all aspirations by acting with compassion for the benefit of living beings. Om. O fire-god abide in your pledge.<sup>33</sup> O knowledge-fire and your retinue, I ask you to rest on this kuśa seat to the south-east of the hearth.

O Agni and your retinue, receive this water for the face Svāhā. Receive this water for the feet Svāhā.”<sup>34</sup>

After offering the two kinds of water, one holds the vajra in the right hand and pressing the little finger with the thumb, one makes the pledge-gesture:

“Hūṃ. This vajra is a mighty vajra. If you duly abide in this pledge sanctioned by all the Buddhas, approach the Buddha families without any delay. Om hana samaya Hūṃ Phaṭ. O knowledge-fire become merged with the pledge-fire into one perfect union. Jaḥ Hūṃ Vaṃ Hoḥ.

Dispersing once again the rays of light from their hearts, I summon the five Buddha families and execute the consecration. The water, which fills their bodies and overflows on the top, becomes transformed into the head ornament of Vairocana.”

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<sup>32</sup>. om vajra jvala jvala Hūṃ.

<sup>33</sup>. om agnideva samaye tiṣṭha.

<sup>34</sup>. om agnāye saparivara arghaṃ pratīccha svāhā. pādyaṃ pratīccha svāhā.

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One recites the relevant mantras and presents the offerings, beginning with flowers and concluding with the presentation of sound. After that one recites:

“Om̐. O fire-god all in lustrous splendour. You are adorned (6a) with blazing bodily ornaments, full of splendour and zeal to work. As I present this burnt libation, you should perform all the appropriate works. O son of Brahmā, the world's protector, the noble god of pacifying and other rites, I bow down and praise you, the sovereign of splendour. You duly accomplish all the desired tasks. The burnt articles are served as ambrosia with the ladle and the spoon marked with the syllable Hūṃ, and they are consumed by the fire-god whose tongue is sealed with the syllable Raṃ and protrudes from his slightly gaping mouth.”

One holds the spoon and the ladle, and one pours seven spoonfuls of the liquid butter into the ladle while reciting once the mantra “Om̐ agnaye Svāhā.” Next, without stretching the elbows beyond the knees, one holds together the ladle and the spoon, and one makes a clockwise circular gesture over the hearth. One envisages doing it three times. After that, one recites “Om̐ agnaye havyakavya-vāhanāya Svāhā” and one pours the liquid butter into a container. One acts in this manner three or seven times. The auspicious signs in the fire are such as a cluster of blue smoke, a white tongue of fire, absence of unpleasant smell and the like. When bad omens appear, such as black flames or masses of smoke, one recites many times the mantra of Hayagrīva and sprinkles water from the all-operative vase.

“Having summoned the departed one with the rays of light issued from the fire-god's heart, I extract the obstructions of his sins (pāpavarāṇa) with these rays of light. May his sins become dissolved into the burnt offerings and be consumed by the fire-god.”

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

The articles for burning should be offered with the thumb and the middle finger. At the beginning of all the mantras for the burnt articles, one prefixes “Om̐ agnaye deva.”

Grasping one piece of the offertory wood,<sup>35</sup> one envisages it as a bodhi tree, and pointing its top upwards, one offers it reciting: “Om̐ tree of enlightenment Svāhā.”<sup>36</sup> Pacify for the departed one all the evil obstructions which hinder his splendour and perfect state Svāhā.”

For the other articles, one recites the following mantras:

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<sup>35</sup>. yam shing / samidh.

<sup>36</sup>. om̐ bodhivṛkṣāya svāhā.

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For the liquid butter: “Oṃ agnaye Svāhā. Pacify for the departed one, (or for myself and other living beings), all the obstructions of sins Svāhā.”

For all the articles, one recites: “Pacify all the impediments, which hinder the life of prosperity and excellence in different paternal rebirths.”

For the black sesame: “Oṃ vajra consuming all sins Svāhā.<sup>37</sup> Pacify for the departed one all the obstructions of sins Svāhā.”

For the white mustard: (7a) “Oṃ fulfilment of all goals Svāhā.<sup>38</sup> Pacify for the departed one all the fears and terrors of the intermediate state Svāhā.”

For the excellent food consisting of butter and different white articles mixed together: “Oṃ every accomplishment Svāhā.<sup>39</sup> Pacify for the departed one all the obstructions of sins, which hinder his perfect happiness Svāhā.”

For the dūrvā grass or its substitute: “Oṃ vajra-longevity Svāhā.<sup>40</sup> Pacify for the departed one all the obstructions of sins, which hinder a state of perfect life in another rebirth Svāhā.”

For the barley: “Oṃ great vehemence Svāhā.<sup>41</sup> Pacify for the departed one all the obstructions of sins, which hinder his strength to reach the sphere of the Buddhas Svāhā.”

For the wheat: “Oṃ vajra-eagerness Svāhā.<sup>42</sup> Pacify for the departed one all the obstructions of sins, which hinder his happiness and healthy life in another rebirth Svāhā.”

For the unhusked barley: “Oṃ vajra-seed Svāhā.<sup>43</sup> Pacify for the departed one all the obstructions of sins, which prevent an abundance of cattle and grain in another rebirth Svāhā.”

For the peas: “Oṃ great vajra-strength Svāhā.<sup>44</sup> Pacify for the departed one all the obstructions of sins, which diminish strength in another rebirth Svāhā.”

For the rice: “Oṃ vajra-prosperity Svāhā.<sup>45</sup> Pacify for the departed one all the obstructions of sins, which hinder an acquisition of perfect merit.”

For the kuśa: “Oṃ indestructible vajra Svāhā.<sup>46</sup> Pacify all the obstructions of sins, which hinder a state of perfect protection of the departed one Svāhā.”

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<sup>37</sup> . oṃ sarvapāpaṃ dahanavajrāya svāhā.

<sup>38</sup> . oṃ sarvārthasiddhaye svāhā.

<sup>39</sup> . oṃ sarvasampade svāhā.

<sup>40</sup> . oṃ vajrāyūṣe svāhā.

<sup>41</sup> . oṃ mahāvegāya svāhā.

<sup>42</sup> . oṃ vajraghmare svāhā.

<sup>43</sup> . oṃ vajrabījāya svāhā.

<sup>44</sup> . oṃ vajramahābalāya svāhā.

<sup>45</sup> . oṃ vajrapuṣṭāya svāhā.

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For the bilva nuts, or if not available for the rose-bush or juniper seeds: “Om̐ vajra-benevolence Svāhā.<sup>47</sup> Pacify for the departed one all the obstructions of sins, which hinder a perfect family lineage Svāhā.”

For the three sweet things or the three white things: “Om̐ vajra-garland prosperity Svāhā.<sup>48</sup> Pacify for the departed one all the obstructions of sins, which hinder perfect wisdom Svāhā.”

When white flowers are not available, (one substitutes them with) barley: “Om̐ vajra-flower Svāhā.<sup>49</sup> Pacify for the departed one all the obstructions of sins, which hinder perfect colours and splendour in another rebirth Svāhā.”

For the scent, betel, tea and other articles (8a) included within the category of drinks: “Om̐ vajra-betel Svāhā.<sup>50</sup> Pacify all the obstructions of sins, which hinder a perfect welfare of the departed one Svāhā.”

For the different kinds of medicine: “Om̐ medicine Svāhā.<sup>51</sup> Pacify for the departed one all the obstructions of sins, which hinder a state of perfect health in another rebirth Svāhā.”

For the silk and different pieces of cloth: “Om̐ vajra-garment Svāhā.<sup>52</sup> Pacify for the departed one all the obstructions of sins, which deprive of excellent ornaments and garments in another rebirth Svāhā.”

If at this point, one wishes to offer the unfinished grain articles, food, drink and so forth, one recites “Om̐ agnaye deva,” adds the deity's mantra, affixes Om̐ Āḥ Hūṃ, and then continues: “Pacify all the obstructions of sins of the departed one Svāhā.” When one offers the sesame, one recites the mantra twenty-one times, and for the remaining articles three or seven times.

Next, one offers the articles of worship, which are placed before oneself. One offers them individually one by one.

“Whatever water for the face is procurable in the boundless sphere of the entire world, and the water arranged here by me with devotion, I offer it to the hosts of the hermit fire-god. Receive it and perform the work of pacifying.

Om̐. Fire-god together with your retinue, receive this water for the face. The concurrence of dispersing an ocean of clouds of worship Āḥ Hūṃ.”

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<sup>46</sup>. om̐ apratihatavajrāya svāhā.

<sup>47</sup>. om̐ vajraśivāya Svāhā.

<sup>48</sup>. om̐ vajramāle puṣṭaye svāhā.

<sup>49</sup>. om̐ vajrapuṣṭe svāhā.

<sup>50</sup>. om̐ vajratāmbūlāya svāhā.

<sup>51</sup>. om̐ oṣadhi svāhā.

<sup>52</sup>. om̐ vajravastrāya svāhā.

#### Funeral Rites for Rebirth in the Sukhāvātī Abode

One recites similar verses for the remaining articles of worship: water for the feet (pādyā), flowers (puṣpa), incense (dhūpa), light (āloka), scent (gandha), food (naivedya), and sound (śabda). One duly presents the articles of worship, butter lamps, food and all the remaining articles. At the time of presenting the offering of sound, one should scatter flowers and ring the bell. If it is an elaborated performance, one strikes loudly the big cymbals (rol chen).

“Om. O son of Brahmā, the world's protector, the king of the fire-god and the supreme hermit. O supreme hermit perfected by means of the relevant vidyā and mantra, which have assumed a bodily form through the power of great compassion for the sake of protecting all the spirits. O great powerful master of the efficient works, you blaze with lustre similar to the final conflagration. You are surrounded by a retinue of wisdom and magical feats. You ride a goat, a perfect vehicle of expediency. You hold a rosary and recite vidyās and mantras. Holding a vessel filled with the essence of ambrosia, you refresh us all with the ambrosia of the Dharma. You purify and remove the impediments of sins. Although present in the world, you are transcendent, and in spite of being determined to pacify the things, you have great compassion. I bow down before you and recite praises. Accomplish the work of pacifying and remove the obstacles on the path. Originally, the great hermit fire-god made a promise and took this oath: ‘The fire is the face of the gods and resides in the fire of these burnt libations.’ O fire-god, you and the mass of flames abide together and act in a non-dual manner. Perform the task of placing this burnt libation and all the articles of worship into the mouths (10a) of the divine host of the Sukhāvātī abode. The hermit fire-god emanated from the fire-god's heart is born from the mind. Since he resembles himself, he has assumed the function of the fire-place in order to worship the divine host.”

Next, one follows the text of the Sukhāvātī evocation, starting with the words: “The large and vast belly of the fire-god becomes a palace generated from the rays of light. At the centre of the palace there is the lord Amitābha seated on a lotus and moon throne, red in colour...” and so forth and up to: “partake of this bali.

If the departed was an ordinary person, one envisages his bodily remains and the offered articles as being the same, namely they are envisaged as offerings for the divine host of Amitābha. If the departed was a holy person, one envisages his bodily remains and the divine host as being the same.

The articles for burning and those for worship should be offered in a correct sequence. One recites “Om Amitābha Hrīḥ” and affixes the above given mantras of all the articles offered for burning. When one counts the number of offerings,

#### Funeral Rites for Rebirth in the Sukhāvati Abode

the deity's mantra, the mantra of each article and a desired prayer, these three taken together, count as one. The presentations to the chief deity should be offered one hundred times. Next one recites “Om maṇi padme Hūṃ” affixed with the mantras of the individual articles, and one offers the articles twenty-one times to Mahākāruṇika. Similarly one recites “Om Vajrapāṇi Hūṃ” and offers the articles to Mahāsthāmaprāpta, also twenty-one times. After that, one recites “Om all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas together with your retinue” and one presents the articles to all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the Sukhāvati abode. One does it either seven or twenty-one times.

“Whatever water for the face is procurable in the limitless expanse of this world... Om Amitābha together with your retinue receive this water for the face, (water for the feet, flowers, incense, scent, (11a) food, and sound).”<sup>53</sup>

Up to this moment, one has performed an extended worship. Next, one lifts the large bali for the fire-god, smears it with melted butter, and blesses it by reciting the “Akāro” mantra. After that, one recites seven times, “Om Amitābha Hrīḥ together with your retinue partake of this bali.”<sup>54</sup> One offers the bali and then recites:

“O Lord together with your retinue. Having partaken of this offered bali, please bestow the attainments of the pacifying, enriching and other rites. Provide me with protection through your pledges. Remain my constant companions in all my endeavours. Prevent untimely death and diseases, and destroy demons and obstructive spirits. Dispel bad dreams, inauspicious omens, and evildoers. Bring mundane happiness, rich harvests, plenty of grain and large herds of cattle. Bestow all possible attainments of happiness and prosperity.”

At the end of the above verses, all those who are present should repeat them while focusing their body, speech and mind. After that, the bali should be disposed into the cremation kiln (gdun khang). One should recite the passage starting with “Om vajra-body” and concluding with the words “Vajrasattva Hūṃ,” just as it is given in the ritual text.

Next, one sprinkles the bali for the protector of the Dharma.<sup>55</sup>

“I disperse rays of light from their hearts and summon the sphere-protector<sup>56</sup> and his consort clasped round his body. I envisage them seated

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<sup>53</sup>. One recites here the verses of the individual articles of worship in the same way as it was done when presenting them to Agni, except for substituting Agni's mantra with that of Amitābha.

<sup>54</sup>. om amidheva hrīḥ saparivara idaṃ baliṃ kha kha khāhi khāhi.

<sup>55</sup>. chos-skyong / dharmapāla.

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in the vicinity of Vajrapāṇi on the fire-god's belly epitomising the Sukhāvātī abode.”

Next, one offers the articles of worship. One recites the passage starting from “Om̐. The protector of Amitābha's orders” and up to “I top up (bkang) with the articles which are appropriate to you. Partake of this burnt libation and the articles of worship. Om̐ receive this water for the face” and so forth.<sup>57</sup> Upon concluding this passage, one should recite the protector's mantra<sup>58</sup> affixed with the mantras of the articles, and one should offer seven times all the articles for burning.

“Hūṃ. In ancient times, and in front of the Victorious Ones, you made a promise to protect the Buddha's Word. I praise the sphere-protector and his retinue, whose power and might expand to the limits of the sky. (12a) Accept these pure articles of burnt libations and worship, accomplish the works of the Four Rites, and fulfil all that has been entrusted to you.”

Next, one sprinkles the bali with melted butter and recites the relevant verses,<sup>59</sup> and then one recites the following verses:

“Hūṃ. O noble sphere-protector, accept this bali. Support the departed one right from the start and follow him behind towards the sphere of great happiness. Avert the obstructions from this place and the path. For those who are alive and well, please remove all diseases and obstructive demons. Bring blessings and happiness.”

The bali is disposed into the hearth.

When one performs an extended version of this rite, one generates the Sukhāvātī abode inside the heart of the fire-god, and on the edge of it, one envisages the departed person. Next, one performs the rite for non-returning according to the ritual with an effigy-card. If one performs a shorter version, one generates the deities and continues the evocation up to the vase consecration, following the ritual with an effigy-card. After that, one executes the blessing of food, following the same ritual. The articles of food are offered into the hearth. The rite of showing the path and the benediction

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<sup>56</sup>. zhing skyong / kṣetrapāla.

<sup>57</sup>. This particular passage is to be recited from another text entitled “Zhing skyong” which contains an evocation of Nag po Seng ge'i gdong and the relevant recitations for presenting offerings.

<sup>58</sup>. om̐ siṃhamukha hūṃ phaṭ. om̐ sinarama hūṃ phaṭ. tri hrid draḥ phaṭ. tri hrid jaḥ.

<sup>59</sup>. The text refers the performer to the text mentioned two notes above. At this point, one summons into the bali the fierce demons who cause obstructions and difficulties to the departed one on his journey towards the Sukhāvātī abode. The sphere-protector is invoked to consume the bali, and thus to destroy the obstructive demons.

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follow the ritual with an effigy-card. With this concludes the essential part of the cremation ceremony.

#### Concluding rites

Next, one offers seven times the articles for burning while reciting Amitābha's mantra affixed with the mantras of the individual articles. After that, one offers the articles of worship while reciting the same mantra affixed with “Om receive the water for the face” and so forth.

“Hūṃ. I bow down and praise Amitābha seated in meditation. He turns the Dharma-wheel in the Sukhāvati abode, always beholds living beings with compassion, upholds his promises, and protects living beings.”

Such are the words of praise. Next, one asks for forgiveness.

“Om. Whatever imperfections and faults I have committed with my obscured mind, and whatever deficiencies I have inflicted upon this excellent performance, I beseech to be forgiven for all of them.”

At the conclusion of reciting the above lines one time, one recites the one-hundred syllables of Vajrasattva. After that, one recites:

“Om. Accomplish all the beneficial goals of living beings and grant them appropriate attainments. At this moment, I request you to depart to the Buddha sphere. However, although you depart to the Buddha sphere, I beseech you to return once again (in the future). Om vajra Muḥ. O knowledge-deities depart to your places. O pledge-deities dissolve within me.”

After that, without counting them, one offers the remaining articles for burning to the mundane fire-god in the same way as it was done above. (13a) Next, one sprinkles the melted butter over the bali for the fire-god. The benefactor, standing to the left, takes the bali and holds it up. One consecrates it with the “Akāro” mantra and blesses it three or seven times with the mantra “Om Agni together with your retinue” and so forth.

“O fire as the god consuming the burnt offerings, the king of hermits and the master of demons, I bow down, praise and worship you together with the host of the fire-god from the south-east direction. Accept this bali and perform the pacifying, enriching and other rites. Bestow all desired attainments.”

The prayer for the fulfilment of desired intentions is repeated by the benefactor. One offers the remaining articles for worship with Agni's mantra affixed with the mantras of the articles of worship.

“O son of Brahmā, the master of the world and mighty protector, you are empowered by Ṭakki, the sovereign of the fire-god. Consume all

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defilements with the fire of the supreme wisdom. I bow before the very fire-god of steadfastness.”

Next, one repeats the above request for forgiveness starting with the words “Om. Whatever imperfections and faults” and concluding with the words “I beseech to be forgiven for all of them.” After that, one recites the hundred syllables of Vajrasattva, and then the following verses:

“O Agni,<sup>60</sup> leave this place for my own and other people's benefit. Come back once again on a similar occasion. Bestow upon us all attainments. Om agnaye saparivara vajra Muḥ. O Agni of knowledge, depart towards the south-east direction. O pledge-being assume the form of the flames.”

One motions outwards the thumb of the summoning gesture. One recites a prayer for blessing, shows the way, recites three times the hundred syllables, and then pronounces in a clear voice the mantra of dependent origination. One stops reciting and puts down the vajra and the bell.

#### Disposal of the ashes

While reciting “Om vajrasamaya Jaḥ Jaḥ Hūṃ Vaṃ Hoḥ,” one collects the bones, ashes and charcoals. If the ashes and charcoals are of a pure person, one throws them into some large waters. When living beings drink this water, their obscurities become purified. If the ashes and charcoals are of an ordinary person, they should be disposed at a place, which is free of serpents, and which is prosperous and auspicious. The bones should be placed inside a clean vessel. One should wash and induce them to come back (phyir ldog). This is called “the rite of the bones.”<sup>61</sup> One arranges before oneself a white bali, and following the meditational procedure explained in connection with the rite of taking possession of the ground, one blesses the bali and offers it to the soil-deity (sa lha). One takes the acquired soil, places it down and makes a heap at the front.

“I instantly recollect the nature of the letter A. Rays of light disperse from the heart of Amitābha's radiant body into the ten directions, (14a), and arouse the hearts of all the Victorious Ones. Next, the rays of light emanated from their bodies pervade and dissolve into the soil, and the soil assumes the nature of the five wisdoms. Om Bhrūṃ Svāhā.”

One recites this twenty-one times.

“From the letter A placed on the palms of my hands there arises the syllable Hūṃ positioned on a lunar disc. Next, from the syllable Hūṃ there emerges a white five-pronged vajra, which melts and dissolves into

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<sup>60</sup>. byin za.

<sup>61</sup>. rus chog.

#### Funeral Rites for Rebirth in the Sukhāvataḥ Abode

the palms. The hands acquire the vajra-nature and the fingers become one-pointed vajras. Oṃ Vajrasattva Hūṃ.”

The bones should be ground by a disciple of the deceased or by a person, who is not a relative, and who is free from great sins. One washes the bones with water and mixes them with soil into a clay mass. In order to remove all impurities, one sprinkles them with the water from the all-operative vase and recites the mantra of Hayagrīva. One purifies them in emptiness by reciting “Oṃ pure by nature are all dharmas, pure by nature am I.”<sup>62</sup> After that, one recites: “May these bones become a jewel aggregate (skandha) through the syllable Bhrūṃ.”

One presses the thumbs on the little fingers, joins together one's hands, and touching the clay mass twenty-one times, one recites twenty-one times the long mantra of Amitābha. Then one places the hands on the clay-mass once more and recites: “May different bodily forms arise from the nature of the dharmakāya and emptiness. Oṃ dharmadhātugarbhe Svāhā.”

This concludes the rite of the bones.

#### Casting tsha tshas

After that, many people recite “Oṃ Bhrūṃ Svāhā” and the six or two syllables, whichever they prefer. This is called the rite of casting (tsha tshas). When the tsha tshas have become dry, it is good to execute the so-called perfecting prayer over the white wash<sup>63</sup> (for the tsha tshas), but if it is not available, there is no impediment. One arranges all the tsha tshas in an orderly way and prepares butter lamps for worship. Next, one recites the following mantra and verses:

“Oṃ pure by nature are all dharmas, pure by nature am I. From the nature of emptiness there emerges a stūpa. The red lord Amitābha sits on a lotus and moon throne in the magnificent palace of jewels inside this vase which has become large and many.”

One follows here the Amitābha evocation except for the rite of summoning life. After that one continues:

“O lord who are present before me, please dissolve into light and assume the form of a stūpa.”

One consecrates the tsha tshas by reciting twenty-one times the heart mantra of dependent origination and by scattering barley. If the bone tsha tshas<sup>64</sup> are made from the bones of an ordinary person, they are placed in a cave, which is dry and free from the earth demons, and which cannot be circumambulated. Finally, one offers a white bali to the deity of that place.

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<sup>62</sup>. oṃ svabhāvaśuddhāḥ sarvadharmāḥ svabhāvaśuddho 'ham.

<sup>63</sup>. dkar rtsi gsol grub.

<sup>64</sup>. rus tsha.

Relevant instructions

The cremation fire of the departed person should not be kindled by his religious confrères or by his relatives. The kindling of the fire should be entrusted to a young monk (grva pa). Some people say that setting the fire to the dead body of an ordinary person has evil effects. So one should give money and request a person who knows how to kindle this kind of fire. (15a) The saying that “upon calling the dead person's name, the fire and ashes become scattered” is interpreted in the sense that since the soul (bla) is present in the corpse, some frightening visions appear. However, although there exist such erroneous ideas, one should not imitate them. The fire should be kindled by the master himself.

When the bodily remains are of a good person, one generates his chosen deity, whichever it may be, presents offerings, recites verses of praise, and then invites it to depart. One generates the remains as a pledge-deity. One offers it worship, recites praises, and then dissolves it. It is said that if one does not do this, the guru's remains are similar to a broken golden image. However, if one does it, the remains will persist. There is also a burnt libation for the bodily remains and the chosen deity united together so that no evil incidents can affect it.

Above the cremation place (gdung khang) or over the head of the remains of a good person, one places a consecrated image. If one does not do it, the relics<sup>65</sup> and other supports will attract the ḍākinīs. These oral instructions are of great importance. (...)

When one wishes or when the living benefactor requests to pour out some burnt libations in order to remove all obstructions and to purify the teeth, nails, hair or old garments, all the ritual activities are performed in the same way as above. One should induce the so-called dead person to become endowed with life. One should make him return and gratify his faculties. One should execute the rite of summoning life using his substitute. One should summon the sphere-protector and offer a bali. The rest of this rite is performed in the same way as in the ritual with an effigy-card. It is good if one makes tsha tshas and the rest.

RITUAL WITH AN EFFIGY-CARD (BYANG CHOG)<sup>66</sup>

(1a) Hatara. Salutation to the divine host of the lord Amitābha.

Arrangement

As for the effigy, one arranges before oneself the departed person's corpse or a piece of bone, a tuft of hair, his image inscribed with his name, or one just writes

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<sup>65</sup>. ring bsrel / śarīra.

<sup>66</sup>. gNam chos thugs kyi gter kha snyan bryud zab mo'i skor las bDe chen zhing sgrub gi byang chog thar lam dkar po.

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the syllable Nri<sup>67</sup> on a piece of paper. On a dish<sup>68</sup> one arranges one or three lcog rdog (cones made of dough), one or three changs bu (pellets made of flour), and a ting lo (lamp made of dough), black sesame or mustard seeds, sand, and the five articles for gratifying the senses.

Summoning the consciousness

One focuses one's mind on the bright host of the deities in the vase already perfected through the Sukhāvataḥ evocation. One venerates many times the meditational repository,<sup>69</sup> and then while sprinkling the meditational support,<sup>70</sup> one recites as follows:

“Oṃ katimanāya Hūṃ Phaṭ. Oṃ pure by nature are all dharmas, pure by nature am I. (2a) O departed one 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. Vajrāṅkuśa Jah.”

One recites this three times.

Removal of obstructive spirits

Having arranged the lcog rdog, changs bu and ting lo, one sprinkles them while reciting the following verses:

“May this bali inside this jewel-dish produced from the syllable Bhrūṃ become an immeasurable enjoyment congenial to everyone's expectations. Oṃ Āḥ Hūṃ.  
Hūṃ. For the sake of this departed person, O demons and tormentors of the living and the dead,<sup>71</sup> please carry away your bali. Do not cause any obstructions to the liberation of this departed one. If you behave with disobedience, I myself, assuming the pride of a deity, will split your heads to pieces. Therefore, do not stay here but go away.”

While turning the lcog rdog in a clockwise manner in front of the effigy stand, one recites “Oṃ namaḥ sarvatathāgata avalokite. Oṃ saṃbhara saṃbhara Hūṃ.” After that, one places it on a plate. One repeats this activity three times, performing thus the rite of pacifying and purifying. Next, while holding the ting lo and changs bu, one recites the following verses:

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<sup>67</sup>. Sanskrit nṛ, man.

<sup>68</sup>. theb rtse.

<sup>69</sup>. dmigs pa gtad la mang du bsnyen.

<sup>70</sup>. dmigs rten = effigy card.

<sup>71</sup>. gson po'i bdud dang shi ba' gshed.

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“Hūṃ. O demons, obstructive spirits and demons in bodily and ethereal forms, who cause obstructions to the susceptibility, hearing, touch, and perception of this departed person, take this changs bu and ting lo, leave this place and go (3a) somewhere else. If you do not go away, I, as a mighty king of wrath, will reduce you to dust and condemn you to death in hells. Therefore, go away immediately.”

Circulating the changs bu and ting lo in an anticlockwise direction, one recites three times “Oṃ sumbhani sumbha Hūṃ” and so forth, and one offers them by placing them on a plate. This concludes the rite of purification, which is half-peaceful and half-wrathful. After that, one performs the fierce rite of purification:

“Hūṃ. I, through the meditation on the deities, pervade the ten directions with rays of light, and I bring back a mass of rays of light from the ten directions and from the Sukhāvātī abode. It is with these rays of light that I expel you, who cut off and steal the life-force (srog) and vitality (mdangs), and who cause obstructions to this departed person. Leave this place and go away to another place. Hūṃ Hūṃ sumbhani sumbha Hūṃ.”

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

#### Demarcating a protective boundary

Next, one demarcates a protective boundary and produces a protective circle:

“Hūṃ. May the sphere above (the effigy-card) 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 flames. May this (effigy-card) rest unobstructed by the wicked demons. Oṃ vajranemi rakṣa Hūṃ.”

#### Purification from sins

Next, having arranged before oneself sesame seeds, fire, and water, one recites the following passage:

“Inside the heart of the departed one, there rests a black syllable Paṃ. All his evil obstructions become dissolved into the syllable Paṃ and assume the form of a scorpion. A wind blows from the syllable Yaṃ resting on his soles, and heat glows from the syllable Raṃ resting on his navel. The 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 devouring Vajraḍākinī.<sup>72</sup> She is blue in colour, holds a vajra and a bell, and wears wrathful attires. The sins become burnt by being offered into her mouth.”

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<sup>72</sup>. rDo rje mkha' 'gro.

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

“Oṃ Vajraḍākinī consume consume Hūṃ. Burn all the sins and reduce them to ashes Svāhā.<sup>73</sup> O Vajraḍākinī depart into space. Vajra Muḥ.”

Next, while scattering some soil or sand, one recites the following mantras:

“Oṃ Padmoṣṇīṣa-purity Hūṃ Phaṭ.

Oṃ burn every cause of rebirth in hells Hūṃ Phaṭ. (4a).

Oṃ consume every cause of rebirth among the pretas Hūṃ Phaṭ.

Oṃ destroy every cause of rebirth among the animals Hūṃ Phaṭ.<sup>74</sup>

Oṃ Āḥ Hriḥ Svāhā. Pacify all the obstructions of sins of the departed person Svāhā.”

Lustration

After that, one recites the supplication for the divine ablution.<sup>75</sup> One holds a vase in one hand and reflecting a mirror towards the table with the offerings, one recites as follows:

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

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

“Hūṃ. 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. Hūṃ, I put this beautiful and yellow garment on the body of the Victorious One. Although the cold has no sway over his body, I perform this function of intensifying his lustrous appearance. Oṃ vajravastra Āḥ Hūṃ.”

The water used for the ablution should be poured into another vase. If the second vase is not available, one uses just one vase. One reflects the mirror against the departed one and recites:

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<sup>73</sup>. oṃ vajraḍāki khakha khāhi khāhi hūṃ. sarvapāpaṃ dahana bhasmiṃ kuru svāhā.

<sup>74</sup>. oṃ padmoṣṇīṣavimale hūṃ phaṭ. oṃ daha daha sarvanarakagatihetuṃ hūṃ phaṭ. oṃ paca paca sarvapretagatihetuṃ hūṃ phaṭ. oṃ matha matha sarva-tiryagatihetuṃ hūṃ phaṭ.

<sup>75</sup>. lha khruṣ gsol ba.

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“Hūṃ. This vase is a 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 (pāramitā). It removes the six kinds of impurities and gives rise to the six perfections. This water truly purifies as I perform this act of washing.

As I execute this ablution of the six rivers, the six kinds of passions become washed away. I bow before the actual performer of this ablution, who is free from the power of sins.

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 (5a) all the Buddhas, who are endowed with all the excellent qualities, which are free from the six kinds of impurities.

Om Amitābha Hrīḥ. Purify and cleanse all the sins of the departed one Svāhā.”

The above mantra should be inserted between all the above stanzas while one washes the Buddha's image reflected in a mirror.

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

“Hūṃ, O departed one, I beseech the host of Amitābha to purify and remove for you the obstructions of the three, five and eight 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. Om Amitābha Hrīḥ. Pacify for the departed one all the obstructions of the three poisons Svāhā.”

As one recites the above verses, one should throw some sand (at the effigy-card). Next, one takes the kuśa grass from the 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 poisons.  
The four primary elements are also the mother of the poisons.  
May the poisons of the departed one become neutralised  
Through my enunciation of these words of truth.”

One waves a fan in a circular way over the effigy-card.

“Om Amitābha Hrīḥ. Purify for the departed one the primary elements, and remove all the poisons that derive from them Svāhā.”

As one recites the above mantra, one pours water into a plate.

“May through the Buddha's merit and power, and through the applied minds of all the gods, all your desired goals, whatever they are, become

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fulfilled this very day. O two-footed one, become happy. O four-legged one, become happy. May your pathways become happy. Be also happy when you return here. Be happy during the day and during the night. Be also happy in the middle of the day. Remain constantly happy, day and night. May no evil come your way.”

While scattering flowers and barley, one recites:

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

Instructions and consecrations

Next, one explains the Dharma and gives the following instructions:<sup>76</sup> (6a)

“O departed one of such and such a name. As you wander about in the places of the six families, pray to the six powerful sages and protectors of the six families, and become liberated. Oṃ maṇi padme Hūṃ.”

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

“E ma ho. I bow with the devout mind of the departed person before the perfect Buddha Amitābha, Mahākāraṇika and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, and before the host of countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. I bow before the six victorious sages, the guides on the path to the Sukhāvati abode, the Sugatas who had abandoned all adherence to the six miseries, the teachers of the six perfections, the purifiers of the six miseries, and the manifested bodies as the sages of the six families. I ask you to destroy the entrances to the six spheres of rebirth.”

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

“Kye ma. O protector Amitābha, please listen. This sinful dead person is similar to me. Being oppressed by the sorrow of saṃsāra, I take refuge in you. Although I am sheltered by your compassion, I request you to grant me the consecrations.”

One repeats this three times. After that, one gives instructions to take the three refuges and raise the thought of enlightenment, envisaging that these things are actually done by the departed person:

“Homage to the Three Jewels and the three root deities. 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.”

One recites this three times and envisages the departed person repeating it.

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<sup>76</sup>. chos bshad gdams ngag ston pa.

#### Funeral Rites for Rebirth in the Sukhāvati Abode

“Above there is a flower, the water-born lotus. Inside it, there is the departed one in the form of the White Being (Avalokiteśvara) marked with Om̐ Āḥ Hūṃ on the three bodily spots. Rays of light disperse from these three seed syllables and bring down from the Sukhāvati the body of Amitābha, his mantra garland and attributes, and the attendant hosts, all of whom arrive like a whirling snow storm. They gently pervade and dissolve into the body of the departed one. (7a) Hūṃ. O entire host from the Sukhāvati abode, I summon you to come to this place, and I beseech you to bestow great blessings. Bestow the highest consecrations upon this devout person. O guides, please dispel all the obstacles to his liberation.”

One rings the bell and recites the following mantra three or seven times: “Om̐ Amitābha Hrīḥ vajrāveśāya Aḥ.” Next, acting in the manner of placing the vajra on the head (of the departed one), one says: “Tiṣṭha vajra.” Holding the vase in one's hand one recites:

“Hūṃ. O disciple who has departed from this life, listen to me. This vase having such a simple external appearance is nothing else but a vase made of jewels. Inside it there is a palace made of jewels. Within that palace, there resides Amitābha and the host from the Sukhāvati abode. They dispense blessings like showers of rain. As they become dissolved into your body, receive the four perfect consecrations.

Om̐ Amitābha Hrīḥ. Consecrate his body, speech and mind Hrīḥ.”<sup>77</sup>

#### Presentation of food and auspicious emblems

At this point, one proceeds to bless the food. One blesses it by reciting “Om̐ nātha” and “Namo devapañcāya.” The food is administered in the following way. One holds a tsakali (a card on which there are drawn the items of food), and one reads the following words inscribed on its back:

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

The beings in the intermediate state are satiated with mere smells. One invites them to a feast by scattering different kinds of food and reciting these words:

“Kye ma. O noble son who has departed from this life. You survive by craving for food and drink. If you are set for rebirth as a preta to repay the debt of your previous existences, here are the very things which I have

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<sup>77</sup>. kāyavākcittam sarvaṃ abhiṣīṇca.

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just blessed. May you gain hold of these things blessed by the truth of the three root deities. Sarvatathāgata Hūṃ.”

Holding a tsakali with the eight auspicious symbols,<sup>78</sup> one reads the text inscribed on its back:

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

One holds up the next tsakali with the seven insignia of a universal monarch<sup>79</sup> and (8a) reads:

“E ma. O noble son, please listen. Here are the seven insignia of royalty. Receive them from me as a token of blessing. May you fare like a universal monarch. Ratnadravayamaṅgalaṃ Hūṃ.”

Holding a tsakali with the image of the four classes of dākinīs, one reads:

“Om. Adhere to the essence of the four joys like a mighty hero in a tantric embrace. May you abide in the stage of Vajradhara. Om buddha vajra ratna padma karma hariṇi samaṅgalaṃ Hūṃ.

Kye ma. O noble son who has 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 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 Sukhāvati abode. Om Āḥ Hūṃ Svāhā.”

One places before oneself a butter lamp and performs a visualisation of blazing fire (me sbar ba).

“The melted butter and the mantra-garland rotate clockwise on the top of this dish perceived as a lotus and a moon. The wick has the form of a red syllable Hrīḥ and it blazes with the flame of the five wisdoms. This lamp removes the obstructions of the five poisons and the five impure aggregates of the departed one. May he become endowed with the body of Amitābha, which is pure and adorned with the major and minor marks of distinction.

Hūṃ. 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

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<sup>78</sup>. bkra shis rtags brgyad / aṣṭamaṅgala.

<sup>79</sup>. rgyal srid rin chen sna bdun / saptaratna.

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wisdom-fire of Amoghasiddhi. Such are the fires of the five victorious families. May your five bodily aggregates become purged by the massive fire of the five wisdoms. May you become free from the bonds of the five poisons (9a), and may you obtain the five wisdom-bodies. Oṃ Hūṃ Trāṃ Hrīḥ Āḥ.”

If, at this moment, one does not dissolve the name-syllable (ming yig), one should merely display it before the butter lamp, and one should discharge the consciousness (rig pa) in the direction of the departed person. If one dissolves it, one calls the name of one's teacher and recites: “There is no form, no sound, no touch, no taste and no dharmas.” One releases the consciousness towards the departed one in the same way as one dispenses ḍhāraṇīs and mantras, and one dispels it from one's memory and vision.

Final instruction

Finally, one shows the path. One envisages the departed one in the form of Amitābha's body, facing the west and seated on a lunar disc positioned in the brightly radiant space at the front:

“Hūṃ. O departed one, the realm of the Sukhāvātī abode lies towards the west. Since it is the sphere of great blessing, it is a pure land. In the south-western direction, there is the country of the flesh eating rākṣasas (srin-po) and the residence of Guru Padmasambhava. Although rebirth in that country is easy, it brings limited blessings. Apart from that, there are various buddhakṣetras, such as the realms of the four victorious families. Since rebirth in those realms is extremely difficult, turn away from them and proceed to the Sukhāvātī abode. As I blow a mighty and fierce wind from the nostrils, and strike the lunar disc in the bright space, O consciousness of the departed one seated on that lunar disc in the form of Amitābha's body, please speed away to the Sukhāvātī abode like a discharged arrow. Phaṭ.” (9b)