

A Practice of Consciousness Transference Involving Amitabha

(The Gateway to Sukhavati)

by
The Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682)



NAMO GURU MAÑJUSHRIYE

The Last Turning: The third major teachings, which Buddha Shakyamuni gave at Vashali.

*I will unfold this method of transference
To the blissful pure land—
A tradition to use sleep skillfully as meditation—
Described in the Prayer of Samantabhadra,
Taken from the essence of the greater part
Of the Last Turning.*

Concerning this, it also says in the Prayer of Samantabhadra,

“When I am about to die...”

The following explains what is meant by the above lines which were conferred by great Manjushri on Acharya Jitari. It is a profound dharma, a guideline from the great mountain of lineages, passed down in a truly unbroken line.

There are four sections:

1. Preparation
2. The actual practice
3. The conclusion
4. The benefits

Preparation

As the great Sakya translator Jamyang Gyaltsan said:

*Go for refuge to the Three Jewels
And then meditate on the bodhi-mind
Meditate on Amitabha before you.
And offer prostrations to him.*

This means:

To purify sin through Amitabha Buddha, the yogin who wishes to be born in the pure realm of Sukhavati should clean his room and set up a painting with Sukhavati in the background, or if this is unavailable, place either a drawing or a model of Amitabha facing towards the east.

Set out whatever offerings have been prepared. Then lie on your right side on a comfortable bed, facing these. Just as you are about to drop off to sleep lying on your right side, turn your head to the west.



OM



AH



HUM

Visualize the Three Jewels transformed into Amitabha as the principal figure and his retinue. They are seated and pervade all of space. Then recite the four-line refuge formula three times, seven times or as many times as you like.

*I take refuge in the Guru
I take refuge in the Buddha
I take refuge in the Dharma
I take refuge in the Sangha*

Generate the Bodhi-mind, thinking, "I will meditate on Amitabha in order to obtain Buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings." Imagine that your house and all around it is really the pure land of Sukhavati. Visualize yourself as the meditational deity.

On a precious throne before you, Amitabha is seated on a lotus, sun and moon cushions. He is red in colour, with one face and two hands in the gesture of meditative equipoise holding an alms bowl full of nectar. His feet are in the vajra posture. His garments are silk and he is adorned with the various ornaments of the Sambhogakaya.

He displays the 32 noble major marks and the 80 noble minor signs. In appearance the deity is void of natural existence, symbolized by a rainbow in the sky above. And he is pleased with you.

Imagine the root and lineage gurus, holy teachers of this dharma, are in a circle surrounding him. Behind them all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are seated, like banks of clouds.

While visualizing this, mentally offer the seven limb prayer three times, or the Ten Preparatory Practices, composed by Sakya Pandit, or simply pay verbal homage by reciting the following lines composed by Pagpa Rinpoche:

NAMO BHAGAVATI AMITEBHYA

(Imagine that you are offering flowers while reciting three times):

*I take refuge in the Buddha Amitabha, who is the perfectly accompanied, completely pure Bhagavan, Tathagata and Arhat.
I confess each and every sin and I rejoice in all merit.
I implore all the Buddhas to turn the wheel of dharma and beg them to never depart to Nirvana.
By the root of this virtue may I acquire the state of Amitabha.*

The Practice

*Generate confidence that one's sin has been purified.
Eliminate all craving.
And accomplish the single-pointed concentration of Amitabha
With a mind unafraid of death.*

That is to say, generate a feeling of certainty that although your sin is a heap as high as Mount Meru, it has been exhausted by the force of the four powers:

1. The power of relying on the circle of gurus, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas around Amitabha,
2. The power of revulsion in the form of regret so great that the sins created up until now become purified,
3. The power of preventing such actions in future by resolving never to do them again, even at the cost of your life,
4. The power of applying all the antidotes in order to collect the necessary merit by offering the seven-limb prayer and so forth.

Eliminate all craving and attachment because when death comes, you must separate from the body of this life, from your wealth, relatives, close friends, servants and so on. Feel with confidence that after death you will go to Sukhavati, and without fear think about cyclic existence and the lower realms. Then three times sincerely pray:

Through Buddha Amitabha, the perfectly accomplished, completely pure Bhagavan, Tathagata and Arhat, I purify all my sins and obscurations.

May he give me the prediction of my full enlightenment when I am born in the pure realm of Sukhavati.

ॐ
HRIH

When exhaling, your consciousness leaves in the form of white light from the left nostril. It enters the right nostril of Bhagavan Amitabha, moves through the channels within his kaya and dissolves into the HRIH at his heart.

Then imagine that the mind of the Victorious Ones and your own mind have become one.

When this has taken your mind inside the seed syllable, from the heart of the Bhagavan white light in the nature of his mind comes from the HRIH at his heart. It separates as would a flame taken from a butter lamp. This light leaves from his left nostril and enters your own right nostril, giving you well-being.

As it dissolves into your heart, imagine that the mind of the Victorious One and your own mind become one.

Continue this as long as possible as there is no recommended number, not deviating from the above instructions and without pauses, like a flame whirling from a torch.

The Conclusions

*The merit field gradually absorbs into your heart centre.
Generate yourself as Amitabha, the Embodiment of Wisdom.
Dedicate your virtue to all sentient beings.
And then meditate on him again.*

Thus at the end of the session, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas dissolve into the root gurus and their lineages. The gurus dissolve into Buddha Amitabha and Amitabha dissolves into light, entering along with the breath, and thus dissolving into yourself.

As you also dissolve into light, your mind mixed with the Buddha and meditational deity, visualize the generation of Amitabha as in the previous meditation.

Recite the mantra, as many times as possible:

OM AMITABHA HRIH SVAHA

If you have the time, to conclude recite the Prayer of Samantabhadra or if not, recite the following:

*May I be born in that happy pure land,
Noble mandala of the Victorious One,
From an exquisitely beautiful holy lotus.
And may I also obtain a prediction
From King Amitabha himself.*

In conclusion, seal it by dedicating the merit with the prayer,

*I dedicate this merit
So that I and all sentient beings
Take birth by Transformation in Sukhavati
And be cared for completely by Amitabha the Protector.*

OM VAJRA MUH

The merit field dissolves into you, and you feel that Amitabha Buddha has gone to Sukhavati.

With your forehead, throat and heart protected by the lights of OM, AH, and HUM, go to sleep keeping the aspiration to be transferred to Sukhavati and faith in this strong wish, not allowing the mind to change to other thoughts.



OM



AH



HUM

In your daily activities imagine your dwelling is the pure realm of Sukhavati and always meditate on being one with Amitabha. When you go out, imagine you are going towards Amitabha Buddha seated before you.

The Benefits

munis = dharma guides. "Muni" literally means a recluse or sage; Shakyamuni, one of Buddha's names, means "sage of the Shakya clan".

*The benefits are that you will not be harmed by evil spirits,
You will not suffer when you die,
In the Bardo you will be cared for by the Munis,
And in future you will achieve liberation.*

This means that in this very lifetime, because of practicing this yoga, you will have no sickness, evil spirits or obstacles, your life will be long, and by the compassion of Amitabha you will be spared the misery of a painful death.

Because you will be free of fear in the Bardo state having left this body behind as a snake discards its skin, when you are reborn from a lotus in Sukhavati, to the west, you will listen to the dharma from Amitabha. Thus it is said in the Ratnakuta Sutra. And because of practicing this guideline you will certainly achieve liberation.

This guideline of the scholars of India and the Translators of Tibet is unmistakable.

*It was passed down from the protector Sakya Pandit Jamyang.
As it is easy to practise, may its virtue
Lead all sentient beings to the Blissful Pure Field.*

Colophon:—

This "Gateway to Sukhavati, a Practice of Sleep Meditation from the "Prayer of Samantabhadra'" was requested by Lozang Paljor of Lhasa. In order to benefit ardent beginners, it was conferred in person by the All-pervasive Lord from Zhalu, The Great Scholar Rinchen Sonam, and the great scholar and abbot Lochog Dorje. Through their kindness, based on the root poem of venerable Sakya Pandit, I have summarized the meaning of Sakya Pandit's own commentary as well as the scriptures of the Noble King of the Doctrine.

The Zahor monk, Jamyang Gaway Shen-nyen (the Fifth Dalai Lama) composed this on the sixth day of the fifth month of the Iron Bird Year (1981). It was dictated to a leading exponent of ritual dance, Bhikshu Ngagwang Gonchog.

This translation by Michael Richards and Achok Rinpoche.

Appendix 1: Seven Limb Prayer

To all the Tathagatas of threefold time, the lions of men,
As many as are in the world of the ten directions,
To all of them, without exception, I bow
With sincerity of Body, Speech and Mind.

By the powers of this prayer of good actions do I,
Bowling with as many bodies as atoms in the Buddha fields,
Before all the conquerors manifest in my mind,
Fully pay homage to all the Victorious Ones.

On each single atom as many Buddhas as atoms
Seated in the midst of their Buddha sons—
So all the Dharma realms without exception
I imagine filled with the Victorious Ones.

With unending oceans of praises for them,
With all the sounds of an ocean of tones,
I fully extol all the Conquerors' virtues
And sing hymns to all the Sugatas.

sugata = literally, "well done" or "well gone". One of the ten epithets of the Buddha. A sugata is a person who has skillfully finished the job; who has completed the work leaving nothing undone.

With fine blossoms and fine garlands,
Sweet sounds and balms and choice canopies,
The choicest lamps and the finest incense,
I make offerings to all those conquerors.

With fine garments and choice fragrances
Sandalwood powders equaling Mount Sumeru,
And all the choicest, most special arrangements
I make offerings to those Conquerors.

Whatever offerings are incomparable, vast,
In imagination I proffer those, too, to all conquerors;
By the powers of my faith in good actions
I bow to and worship all the Victorious Ones.

Whatever sins I have perpetrated
Through the powers of desire, hatred and delusion
By body, voice and my mind as well,
Each one of all of these I confess.

In whatever merits exist of the Victorious Ones
In the ten directions and the Buddha's sons,
Of Pratyekabuddhas, Sravakas, and all sentient beings,
In all of these do I rejoice.

They who are the lights of the worlds of the ten directions,
Winners of non-clinging awakening upon the Enlightened stage,
To all those protectors I offer entreaties to turn
The incomparable wheel of the Dharma.

To those who wish to manifest the passing from sorrow
I fervently pray, with clasped palms
To stay for aeons, as many as the atoms of the Buddha fields,
For the welfare and happiness of all sentient beings.

Whatever little virtue I've gathered,
Through prostrating, offering, confessing,
Rejoicing, requesting and praying,
For the sake of Enlightenment, all that [virtue] I share."

Long Life Prayer for the Lama

Long life prayers for the lama — usually much longer and more elaborate than this one — are always an integral part of Tibetan dharma practice and must be performed at the end of every session.

May the lama live long,
May her good health increase,
May her dharma activity flourish.