

The Essential Phowa Practice

This practice was adopted from the one suggested by Sogyal Rinpoche in *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. He calls it ‘the essential phowa practice’.

A profound and beneficial practice that can be done for a dying person, or for someone who has passed away is a practice from the Tibetan tradition called *phowa* (pronounced "po-wa"), which means the transference of consciousness. This practice helps the dying person let go into the dying process with ease and confidence. If the person has already died, this practice will help them to fully release from this life, their body, possessions, friends and family and move through the process of dying and rebirth with confidence.

The essential point of the practice is to invoke the principle of awakening and merge that awakened mind with the deceased. At the time of death, when the consciousness has separated from the body, the mind of the dying person is highly sensitive. They can also be afraid to let go, filled with regrets, and clinging to the familiarity of the life they’re leaving behind. Because of your own compassionate intentions it is possible to affect the dying person with the wisdom and love that you invoke during this practice. This allows the dying person to settle, to release from the attachments to this life, and to enter the process of dying and rebirth with ease and intention for a positive rebirth.

How to do the practice:

First, make sure you are comfortable, and assume a meditation posture. Begin by resting in meditation for a few minutes until you feel relaxed and clear.

In the sky in front of you, invoke whatever embodiment of love wisdom and compassion that you have faith in. If you are a Buddhist, invoke a buddha, or bodhisattva with whom you feel an intimate connection. You could invoke your own root guru as the embodiment of that wisdom, or a bodhisattva such as Chenresig, the symbolic embodiment of compassion. If you are a Christian, feel the presence of God, the Holy Spirit, Jesus, or the Virgin Mary. If you don't feel connected to any particular spiritual figure, simply imagine a sphere of pure golden light in the sky before you. The important point is that you consider the being, or presence you are visualizing *is* the essence of the wisdom, and compassion of all the buddhas, saints, masters, and enlightened beings. Don't worry if you cannot visualize them very clearly, just open your heart to their presence and trust that they are there.

Next, bring vividly to mind the presence you have invoked, and pray:

“Through your guidance and blessing, and through the power of the light that streams from you: may all the negative karma, destructive emotions, obscurations, and blockages of my friend (name) be purified and removed, May he/she know that it is time for her to let go into the process of taking a new rebirth. May she know that this life is over and that whatever mistakes may have made have been forgiven and cleansed. May she know that her family and friends love and appreciate her and want her to move

on without regret, and with confidence and ease. May (name) be guided towards a new and beneficial birth in a place that she can accomplish all of her virtuous aspirations”.

Imagine that the light from the heart of the wisdom deity, like the light from a rainbow, streams into your friend’s heart and that they are comforted, cleansed and set free. Imagine that their body and mind dissolve into light and dissolves into the heart of wisdom presence.

Keep this visualization present for as long as you can.

When to do this practice

You can do this practice in the days before your friend, or loved one’s death. You can do it alone, or in a group. If the dying person is receptive to you doing this practice, and knows you are going to do this practice for them, it can be a great source of inspiration and comfort to them. This is especially effective at the very moment of death and in the days immediately after. If you chose, you could do this practice once each week, or daily for the following 49 days. By that time, they will have taken a rebirth.