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Background

Whenever I heard that a relative or a classmate or a friend had died, I told myself I should write a brief summary of my knowledge concerning death from the sutras and from Buddhist scholars. I want those who are still alive to realize that we have to take death seriously. We should not avoid this subject because it is awkward or uncomfortable to talk about. If we let nature take its course or die of unawareness, the consequence is very grave indeed. For the sake of our destiny in the next life, we owe it to ourselves to have a clear idea of death, to take it with great precaution and be well prepared for it in advance. Our existence as a human being in this life is then not completely wasted.

Brief description of birth and death

Buddha said everyone has eight consciousnesses (八識). The first five are eye, ear, nose, tongue and body. The sixth is yi (意) consciousness. The seventh is manas (末那), also called transporting consciousness. The eighth is alaya (阿賴耶), also called storage consciousness. In birth the eighth consciousness is the first one to come; the seventh, the sixth, and the remaining five come in order later. In death, the eighth consciousness is the last one to leave the body; the

others leave before in order. Then, “the last to leave, the first to come” eighth consciousness is merely giving up its present body form and is reborn into another new body form.

Do you ever wonder where is the actually birth and death of the eighth consciousness? There is none whatsoever. This consciousness is also called the human soul, spirit or ghost. The alaya consciousness will not leave the body until the body is completely cold; usually it takes about 8 to 24 hours after all the vital signs are gone. When the eighth consciousness leaves the body, the body then becomes senseless. If the body feels even a tiny bit of warmth, this consciousness is still there. Any touching of the “dead,” he/she will still feel an unbearable amount of pain. In turn, this touching will result in a great deal of hatred and indignation from the “deceased.”

Dao Zheng Dharma Teacher (道證法師 1956-2003) was an oncologist before she decided to become a Buddhist priest. In her「Learn Medicine and Learn Buddhism」, she told us a story about one of her young female cancer patients who had made a decision to be a vegetarian and asked to be born in the Western Happiest World in her next life. One night, the patient came to her hospital for an emergency procedure;

it failed and she died. When she went to work in the morning, one of the nurses paged her to the patient's room. She noticed the patient, who already was breathless, showed no pulse, and had no blood pressure. She then said to the patient, "Please concentrate and follow me to chant A Mi Tuo Fo (Buddha Amita in Chinese)." After a while of chanting, unexpectedly, tears rolled down all over the patient's cheeks. She called the attention of nurses at once and said to them 「 Buddhist dharma told us "Even when a patient stops breathing, the eighth consciousness is still there." Tears flew down her cheeks as I recited Buddha Amita and also as I talked to her. Was she dead? Her eighth consciousness is still there! Please be sure to treat the so-called "dead" kindly. 」 Therefore when the heart rate has ceased, no pulse is detected, and breathing has stopped, it does not mean the patient is really dead.

Reincarnation in the six divisions of existence¹ (六道) or seeking immortality

In general, if one practices the ten good deeds with one's earnest effort, one will be born to heavens of Lust Realm (慾界, which consists of six stories of heavens) in one's next life, regardless of one's background. If one wants to be born into the heavens of Form Realm (色界, eighteen

stories of heavens) or Formless Realm (無色界 . four stories of heavens), in addition to performing the best of ten good deeds, one has to practice dhyana (meditation). On the other hand, if one carries out the ten worst evil deeds throughout one's life, one will probably be sunk to hell as a result. Therefore, there is no Buddha, no Bodhisattva, and no god to reward one to heaven for happiness or to punish one to hell for suffering. It is all because one reaps what one sows. Sutra says, "If one wants to know what were the causes (因) of one's past lives, everything one is going through, good or bad, throughout the present life are some of the effects (果) of those causes. If one wants to know what will be the effects in one's future life, everything one does, good or bad, in the present life, are to be the future causes of those effects." Thus is the cause, thus is the effects. Sutra says, "Bodhisattva fears cause, secular being is afraid of effect."

There are twenty- eight stories of heaven; the higher story is better. The beings in the twenty- eighth story can enjoy a life of happiness for eighty thousand big eons. However, they are still governed by the suffering of rebirth in the six divisions of existence, just like everyone else once they die. If one decides to terminate the birth and death, one should seek immortality. With no birth, there will be no death. This

is the only way to end one's birth and death permanently.

Buddha Shakyamuni was exceptionally kind and taught us the special Pure Land Dharma School (淨土法門). The essences of this School are: belief, willingness, and chanting only the name of Buddha Amita.

Belief (信): I believe the world I live in is full of suffering and the Western Happiest World is filled with joy. I believe a secular being like me cannot get rid of all the vexations with my own effort and in turn, end the birth and death myself. I trust that Buddha Amita made great vows². If anyone recites the name of Buddha Amita and asks to be born into His World, the Buddha will come to take him/her to His Paradise just before he/she dies. Once one is born there, one will never fall back as a human being or any other divisions of existence again. Not only will one's rebirth thus permanently terminate, but, most importantly, one will live forever.

Willingness (願): I am willing to depart this suffering world and go for the Happiest World as soon as possible.

Practice (行): Constantly recite Buddha Amita³ or namo Buddha Amita with one's utmost sincerity all the time.

Ou Yi Great Teacher (1599-1655) said: “Whether one can be or cannot be successfully born in the West, it is entirely depending on if one has or does not have the belief and the willingness. What kind of status, upper, middle or lower, one will be born into, it depends solely on the practice of the recitation of the Buddha, deeply or shallowly.” At the same time, one must always practice filial piety, fraternity, loyalty, trustworthiness, propriety, justice, incorruption, and a sense of shame. One has to discard the morally bad and keep only the righteous thought. Never commit any evildoing and always perform good deeds. Therefore, to have a no rebirth life, one must have the belief, the willingness, chant the name of Buddha Amita, and offer all the merits (功德) from the chanting, blessings (福德) from the good deeds, to oneself and everyone else as well, for the birth in the West together.

The chance to be reborn again as a human being in the next life is extremely small. One day, Buddha scooped a handful of soil and asked Ananda, “Where has more soil, in my

hand or in the great earth?” Ananda answered, “The great earth.” Then the Buddha said to Ananda, “The opportunity to be reborn as a human being in the next life is like the soil in my hand. The loss to be as a human being in the next life is similar to the soil in the great earth.” The venerable Yin Guang Dharma Teacher (印光大師 1861-1940)⁴ told us, “To ask to be born in the Paradise is easier than to seek again as a human being in the next life. This is because of relying heavily on Buddha Amita’s powerful blessing (加持).”

The existence of Buddhism in this world is about twelve thousand years and is divided into three periods. First is the Proper Dharma Age (正法) which lasts about one thousand years or five hundred years, according to others. Then the Dharma-Like Age (像法) which lasts about another thousand years. The final is the Dharma-Ending Age (末法), whose duration is about ten thousand years. After all sutras vanish, only the Infinite Life Sutra (無量壽經) will stay for an additional one hundred years. After that, there will be no more Buddhism in the world for people to learn and practice. So far, about three thousand years have passed and we have about nine thousand years left in the Dharma-Ending Age. The next Buddha in line will be Buddha Maitreya (彌勒佛) who is now living in the inner

courtyard of the Tushita Heaven⁵ (兜率天) as a Bodhisattva. At 4,000 Tushita Heaven years, which is about 576,000,000 years of our time, he will come down and become a Buddha. Therefore, at the end of nine thousand years of the Dharma-Ending period and before Buddha Maitreya comes down, there will be no more Buddha and Buddhism in this world. It is indeed a very long, long time for people to have a chance to learn Buddhism again.

An ancient scholar said, “Rebirth as a human being again in our next life is definitely very rare, but we are fortunate enough to be a human being now. Buddhism is hard to come by, but we are lucky to have it right now. If one still does not want to terminate one’s birth and death in the present life, then which human life cycle is one really waiting for?”

Preparation before death

If one has not prepared a will, now is the time to do it. Once everything is taken care of and settled, one should never look back. If the illness is not too serious, one can still take the medicine, but do not even wish that the medicine will work. Keep one’s mind only with thoughts of the belief, the willingness, and the recitation of Buddha Amita and ask to

be born in His Paradise. This way, if one is destined to die, one will certainly be born to the West. Or if one is not doomed to die, one may get well sooner than expected from the illness. As a result of chanting the Buddha Amita with one's utmost devotion, some of one's lifetime bad karmas will disappear. If one recites the name of the Buddha, on the one hand, secretly one wishes the medicine will work to one's benefit, and one may have a chance to live a longer life. Then one has no chance to be born to the West because one's belief and willingness are not really that sincere.

If the patient is at its terminal stage, then do not take the medicine any more. If one's life is predetermined to die, how can a doctor and some medicine save one from dying? This action will disturb the patient's concentration to recite the name of the Buddha. Hung-I Dharma Teacher (弘一大師 1880-1942) was once sick, and friends advised him to see a doctor. He said, "Buddha Amita is the supreme physician. If I do not beg Him and beg someone else, that is dumb and idiotic. A chanting of Buddha Amita is the best medicine that can cure all. If I do not do the chanting, I will then make the greatest mistake."

It does not make any difference if the patient is a monk, or a sentient being, or someone who practices the chanting

regularly, or someone who does not do it at all. As long as the deathbed patient decides before his/her last breath to believe the Pure Land Sect wholeheartedly, is overwhelmingly willing to be born there and recites the name of the Buddha sincerely, the Buddha will come to welcome this person to the West personally regardless of his/her background. In case the suffering of the illness, for someone who practices the chanting, becomes unbearable at the last stage of his life, it means a moment of severe suffering now pays up some major punishments for his past bad karmas in the future.

The critical importance of the last thought

The last thought of a deathbed (臨終最後一念) is the determining factor for someone for where he/she will be born: reincarnation in the six divisions of existence or born into the West Paradise. It is an extremely critical time, similar to a thousand-pound rock hanging by a single strand of hair. All the good and evil karmas of past lives of the patient appear in front of him/her simultaneously. At a time like this, the soul is unable to have self-control and is drifting up and down with his/her good or bad karmas. If one is not being careful, with a single misstep, one will end up with a long-lasting suffering. It is absolutely a scary time

indeed. If a Buddhist friend luckily happens to be there at that moment, the friend can persuade the patient by skillfully asking the patient first to get rid of everything in his/ her mind. Then the friend can advise the patient to have a strong belief and the willingness to be born to the West. At the same time, the friend starts to chant the Buddha's name aloud and asks the patient to do the same. This way, the patient is able to break out from the metal-like karmas-formed fence and be born to the West. The mighty karmas are thus unable to hold him/her as a hostage. However, one should practice the chanting of the name of the Buddha when one is still alive all the time, not wait until the last minute to do so. Then one will be automatically doing the chanting oneself, with or without the help of others when the occasion arises. It is similar to training an army for one thousand days for the purpose of only one battle.

Things to avoid at deathbed

Bathing, changing clothes, or moving the patient around:

The body starts to break down at the time when the patient is dying. The pain from this process is the same as to skin cattle alive, or cook a live crab in boiling water. With any kind of touching to the patient at this time, he/she will feel

the pain as his/her bones are being twisted and broken. If one gives the patient a bath or changes the clothes or moves him/her around, it will add more pain to an already extremely suffering body. These maneuvers will certainly cause the dying patient, who has lost the ability to complain to be really furious and very hateful. If the last thought of a near death patient is hate, then in his next life, he will be born into a poisonous animal. One should realize this is a very horrifying outcome; for example, King Ajatashatru who was a devout Buddhist who had accumulated a great deal of blessings by building temples and pagodas. For his good deeds, he was deemed to be born to heaven. Unfortunately, right before his last breath, his servant dropped a fan onto his face and the pain made him really angry. Instead of heaven, he was born as a snake in his next life.

A child slipped from his mother's hands and fell into water by accident when they were ferrying across a river. She tried in vain to rescue her child from the water. They both drowned. She was thus born into heaven because of her kind act. A last thought of kindness or anger made a difference of between heaven and beast, respectively.

Sad face, weep or cry, or carrying on some small

intimate conversation: When the deathbed patient sees sorrowful faces from relatives or friends bidding him/her farewell, weeping or crying aloud, these will cause the patient to start to have the feeling of love and passion. Then the recitation of the Buddha is nonexistent. Thus the soul will be born by following the heart of love and passion. For example, sutra said: There was a couple and they loved each other deeply. They both were faithful Buddhists and practiced Buddhism by observing the Buddhist rules and were meatless. One day the husband died of illness. Right before the husband died, the wife felt very sad and started to cry aloud passionately. The husband naturally developed the thought of love and passion himself. His soul was then born into his wife's nose as a worm. Suddenly the wife saw that a worm dropped from her nose and tried to kill it by stepping on it. A monk by her side stopped her quickly and said, "Do not hurt your husband." The wife was astonished and asked the monk why. The monk said, "When your husband was alive, he followed the Buddhist precepts faithfully and also was a vegetarian. He was destined to be born into heaven. Because of your passionate crying, he started to have the thought of love, and thus was born in your nose as an insect instead."

Things to do at deathbed

When the patient's mind is sound and clear, he/she should decide if he/she wants to apply CPR⁶ at the time of his/her death. CPR is a very violent procedure. Most of the time, electric shock will be used to restart the heartbeat. The patient usually will spring up from the bed when this step is being carried out. For a dying patient, this is an unnecessary extra hurt on top of the unbearable amount of pain he/she is already suffering. As a result, the patient will be really angry and full of hatred. After all the commotions end and the patient fails to survive, then the patient most likely will be born into the three evil divisions of existence, animal, hungry ghost and hell. Once one is in one of these divisions of existence, it will last about 5,000 big eons⁷ before one has a chance to be reincarnated out of it. It will be an awfully long time to have a chance to be reborn as a human being again or in heaven. It is a very frightening event to even think about it. If one decides not to use CPR, the patient needs to inform every family member and to let the hospital know in writing in advance.

When the patient is near death, the family member should ask his/her doctor to stop all treatments. Let the patient stay freely with his/her most comfortable position, laying on a bed or sitting on a chair, or some other position. After the

patient dies, the body should remain there absolutely untouched by anyone for any reason. In case there are some feces or urine on the bed, cover them lightly with a clean sheet. Needles for an IV or other equipment on the patient can be removed when the patient is still alive with minimal disturbance or leave them there. After at least 8-12 hours have passed, the body will be completely cold. Then any medical equipment on the patient can be removed. The family member can start to bathe the patient, change clothes, and then allow crying. If the limbs become stiff, one can wrap hot wet towels around the joints. After a while, the limbs are able to move freely.

When the patient's life is near the end, a painting of Buddha Amitabha should be placed in a location which the patient is able to see. Then gently ask the patient to clear all sorts of thoughts from his/her mind and start to follow the reciting of the name of Buddha Amita with a small voice. In order to save the patient's strength, it is all right to chant only A Mi Tuo Fo, four words. However, every word, each name, must be chanted distinctly, listening to them clearly through one's ears and asking the patient to do the same. In case the patient is too weak to recite, then ask the patient to listen to each word, each name, clearly through his/her ears. This process is called "The heart is working toward a Buddha

(是心作佛).” Let the pure recitation continue (淨念相繼). It will slowly attain the status of “The heart is the Buddha” (是心是佛).” Then a secular heart is thus transformed into a Buddha’s heart (即凡心成佛心). He/she, together with his/her karmas, will certainly be born in the West. Sutra said, “During the Dharma-Ending age of the Buddhism, there are billions and billions of people practicing Buddhism. Very rarely have people succeeded. The recitation of Buddha Amita is the only way to set free one’s birth and death.” Venerable Huang Nian Zu (黃念祖居士 1913-1992) said, 「If one does not practice the ocean-like vows of Buddha Amitabha and wants to terminate one’s birth and death in this present life, I can say it boldly “ Absolutely hopeless.”」The ancient, as well as the modern Buddhist scholars, all made the same conclusion. All of them praise very highly the Pure Land School as well. Grand Master Shan Tao (善導大師 613-681) said, “Buddha Shakyamuni was born with the sole purpose to preach Buddha Amitabha’s ocean-like vows.”

To find an assisting-recitation group nowadays is difficult. If there are not enough people, one may consider playing the pre-recorded Buddha-chanting CD. One has to realize it is necessary that people are needed to chant together along with the recording. People ought to divide into groups and

take turns chanting along with the CD player. It is useless if one plays only the CD by itself. The CD player does not have a heart, and then there is no power that can be generated from a heartless machine. The player is used only for the purpose of reminding people to chant the name of the Buddha. It also helps to control the speed, not too fast, not too slow, and the loudness, not too loud, not too low. For the benefit of the soul, one needs only to recite the name of the Buddha, one does not have to read sutras, perform the ceremony of repentance, or other Buddhist events. Grand Master Yin Guang said, “One chant of the name of the Buddha is equal to the contents of all sutras and nothing less.” The Master also stated, “One chant of the Buddha Amitabha is very mysterious and beyond the capacity of the ordinary people to comprehend. It is only understood completely by the status of a Buddha. Even the highest Bodhisattvas (等覺) are unable to understand fully.” Therefore, we, the secular beings, the only choice we have, is to believe what we have been taught respectfully and practice accordingly. Sutra said: 「Belief is the head ^{OF} Tao and the mother of merit.」

Bardo body and Bardo period

If one has the belief, the willingness, recites the name of the

Buddha and asks to be born in the Western Happiest World, definitely one's wish will become true. Whoever practices the ten best deeds faithfully, he/she will be born in heaven in the next life. Those who committed the most serious sins, certainly he/she will be fallen to hell. The souls in these three cases will be born to their respective places instantly after they die. No bardo bodies (中陰身, an intermediate existence between death and reincarnation), are formed. All others: if one's good and bad deeds are equal or both are relatively bad, the soul is not going anywhere and suddenly becomes a shape-like figure. It is called a bardo body, or more commonly called a ghost, or soul, or spirit. It has a height of three feet and has sharp six roots: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. It moves very fast and can pass all obstacles. However, most of the time, the bardo body is in a dizzy, sleepy, and muddleheaded state. Sometimes the body has a clear mind and knows that he/she is already dead. Thus the soul is in deep anxiety, but has no idea what to do. At the same time, the bardo body sees all sorts of self-karmas-induced frightening situations and conditions surrounding him/her. Therefore, the spirit is extremely scared, agitated, trying his/her best to avoid them, and above all, is trying awfully hard to find a safe place to hide. The bardo period (中陰期) is about forty-nine days for the longest; some are reborn after seven, fourteen, twenty-one

days, depending on each individual's karma.

How to verify the whereabouts of the soul

Sutra stated: "Exit from the top of the head is a saint, and from the eyes is born to heaven. Departure from the heart comes out as a human being, and the abdomen is a hungry ghost. Animal leaves from the knee cap and hell departs from the sole." When a person is about to die, if the warm air in his/her body goes up from below, it is a sign that this person may be reborn in the ascending classes: the West Paradise, heaven, or human. If the warm air goes down from the top, then the person may fall into the descending classes: animal, hungry ghost, or purgatory. After the body has completely cooled down, if the top of the head is the only spot feeling warm, then one is born into the Western Happiest World. If the warm spot is around the eyes or forehead, one is born to heaven. If the spot is around the heart, this soul ends up as a human being again. In case the spot is around the abdomen, then one is born as a hungry ghost. If the spot is in the vicinity of the knee cap, this bardo body is born as a beast. In case the warm spot is in the sole, the soul is sunk to hell. These are all pre-determined according to the good or evil karmas each person has performed. Although one may find the whereabouts of the

deceased in the next life, one should refrain from touching the body too often. Any kind of contact will result in a great deal of hardship to the patient if the soul is still inside the body. These actions will cause a lot of pain and hatred. Thus the person may unfortunately lose a chance to be born in the West.

What to do afterward

Recitation of the name of the Buddha: One should continue to assist the bardo body to be born in the Western Happiest World. Family members and friends should still take turns to chant the Buddha's name for the entire bardo period. If it is possible, the sound of the recitation should be carried out 24 hours a day. Sutra said, "The bardo body will receive one-seventh of the merits gathered from the recitation of the Buddha and/or other Buddhist events performed by the family members. The remaining merits, six-sevenths, belong to the family members who perform these rituals." Therefore, the amount of chanting of the Buddha's name is the more, the better for the deceased. The bardo body can hear the sound of the recitation. Because of this, the scared, agitated, and anxious bardo body is able to transfer into a peaceful and joyous one. From the inconceivable powers of the Buddha, from the dharma, and

from the hearts of these people who do the chanting, the bardo body is then able to be born to the West. For those who were reciting the Buddha's name regularly when they were alive, the assisting-recitation will enable them to gain a higher status once they are born in the Western Happiest World. The merits gathered from the recitation of the Buddha have to offer to the deceased and also toward all. As an example, "We offer all the merits and blessings resulting from the recitation of the Buddha Amita to so and so (name of the deceased) and toward all. We wish everyone will be able to be born in the West as well." Each group should do it once in the beginning and more importantly, when it is finished with the recitation. If the deceased's previous religious belief is Taoism, or Christianity, or Muslim, or any other religion, the bardo body will not be able to receive any benefits from his/her family members who say a prayer or perform any services according to these religions, because human being and heavenly being (attaining goal of other religions) represent two of the six divisions of existence, and are still subjected to reincarnation.

Be a vegetarian, no alcohol, no killing, no sex, and no edible pungent plants⁸: All the offerings to the deceased should all be vegetarian foods. During the bardo period,

there will be no meat, no sex, no alcohol, no killing, and no foods containing pungent plants. Any kind killing related to the funeral service is prohibited. Killing for this purpose will count as a bad karma for the deceased, and in turn, it will worsen the already miserable soul. It will quicken the fall to the three bad divisions of existence.

Those who chant the name of the Buddha are under the constant care and protection from all Buddha. Buddha Amitabha will send twenty five Bodhisattvas⁹ to protect and guard everyone who chants the name of the Buddha. In addition, they are also looked after by the dragons and celestial beings. Therefore, everyone is well protected against any trouble from the evil spirits or devils. The Surangama sutra (首楞嚴經) said, “The five edible pungent vegetables will have a Viagra-like effect when they are cooked. If people eat them raw, it will increase their anger. For those who eat these plants in their meals regularly and also try to attain the status of Samadhi, the Bodhisattvas, heavenly beings, and good gods from all directions will be unable to guard them (They cannot stand the strong, foul, obnoxious smell of those plants). Then the powerful king of the devil will take advantage of this situation and come to preach in disguise as a Buddha.” All Buddhist practitioners should not include these plants in their diet.

Everything involving the funeral service ought to be simple and frugal: Use old clothes for the deceased instead of new ones. It is unnecessary to buy an expensive casket. The family members must treasure and conserve the deceased's hard-earned blessings (惜福). Lavish funeral spending is bad for the dead. Grand Master Yin Guang said, "In case the funeral expenses are extravagant, it may not cause a natural disaster, but it is certainly going to have a man-made tragedy. The offspring should pay much more attention to where the bardo body is reborn into." The family members must not pay too much attention to what other people may think of them. If one can donate the money saved from the service to a charity organization anonymously, it is considered a much better alternative.

Conclusion

For the purpose of brevity and simplicity, the above-edited article may not have all the information to make it clear enough. If there are mistakes in it, respectfully please let me know. In case one wants to know more about this subject, please go to the Amita Society, where one can find books related to this topic to read. Or one can look up in the web site www.bfnn.org (in Chinese, unfortunately) for more information. The painting of the three Western Saints and

CD for the recitation of the name of the Buddha can also be found at the Amita Society, or any monastery, or you can record one yourself if you prefer.

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Notes

¹ The six divisions of existence: human being, heavenly being, asura, animal, hungry ghost, and hell. The first three are good divisions of existence; the other three are bad divisions of existence.

² The vow: Ten recitations and definitely reborn to the West: “When I become a Buddha, all beings who live in the lands of everywhere, upon hearing my name, will believe in and will be happy to hear the name in all sincerity. They will be wholeheartedly ready to dedicate all their good roots (善根) to everyone for their willingness to be born in my land. If they are unable to do so after reciting my name up to ten times, I will not take the Buddhahood (不取正覺).” Buddha Amida has attained the status of Buddha for 10 eons.

³ Amitabha is also called Amita, or Amida, or Amitayus: the first A should sound like the “a” in art, or as “a” in han-yu pin-yin and as “Y” in bopomofo.

⁴ Yin-Guang Dharma Teacher Letter Classics: A letter to Mr. Zhi Jeng’s (智正) mother.

⁵ Tushita Heaven: A 24-hour day of this heaven is equal 400 years of our time. The heavenly being in this heaven has a life span of 4,000 years. Our time for Bodhisattva Maitreya to come down to become a Buddha is $(400 \times 30 \times 12) \times 4,000 = 576,000,000$ years.

⁶ Cardiopulmonary resuscitation

⁷ An Loh Ji (安樂集) stated: A square box with 120-li (里, One li is about one-third of a mile) on each side, fully filled with mustard seeds. A long lived-heavenly being picks up one seed every three years until it is all gone. Or a square rock with 120-li on each side; a long-lived heavenly being wipes the rock with a piece of heavenly fabric, weight of only three zhu (銖, an ancient unit of weight, one zhu equals to 1/48th or 1/24th of a tael by other interpretation), once every three years until it is all vanished. The total time to complete one of these tasks is called a big eon. A medium eon is for the box or rock which has 80-li on each side. A small eon is to have 40-li on each side. One tael (兩) equals to 1.323 ounces, or 37.5 grams.

⁸ The five edible pungent plants are scallion, garlic, chives, leek, and onion.

⁹ Venerable Huang Nian Zu's explanation of the 「Infinite Life Sutra」

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⁴ 印光法師文鈔，復智正居士之母書

⁵ 兜率天：此天一晝夜是人間四百年，此天天人壽長四千年。將來彌勒菩薩來此成佛是距今： $(400 \times 30 \times 12) \times 4,000 = 576,000,000$ 年後了。

⁶ 即 CPR, cardiopulmonary resuscitation

⁷ 安樂集中云：一百廿里城，高下亦然，滿中芥子，有長壽諸天，三年去一，乃至芥子盡，名一大劫。或一百廿里石，高下亦然，有一長壽諸天，三年以天衣一拂，天衣重三銖，為拂不已，此石乃盡，名為一大劫。八十里城或石為一中劫，四十里城或石為一小劫

⁸ 五辛：：蔥，蒜，韭，薤(音械,小蒜也；即英文中之 leek)，及興渠(洋蔥)

⁹ 黃念祖居士所著之無量壽經解

¹⁰ 等覺：等覺菩薩，菩薩中最高的位次，已斷四十一品無明，再斷一品生相無明，就成妙覺，妙覺就是佛了。

¹¹ 逆：是五逆，殺父，殺母，殺阿羅漢，出佛身血，破和合僧。惡：是十惡，殺，盜，淫，妄語，綺語(講或寫淫穢之事)，兩舌，惡口，貪，瞋，癡。與十惡相反的則為十善。墮獄：墮入地獄。

¹² 蓮界：西方極樂世界也。

於張羅者，不有天災，必有人禍。為人子者，宜注重於親之神識得所。」不必在意世俗之稱頌與否。倘能將所省之資，悉數以無名氏捐給慈善團體，則更嘉矣。

結語

為求簡短，所錄難免掛一漏萬。錯誤之處，敬請指教。如想作更深入的研究，很多經典與大德們的著作，可從淨宗學會請到。更多的典籍可從網址：www.bfn.org 中讀到。西方三聖像與各種佛號之錄音也可從淨宗學會或各寺院中請到，或自錄佛號。

附印光大師稱讚淨土法門曰：

淨土大法門，其大無有外，如天以普覆，似地以普載等覺¹⁰欲成佛，尚須作依賴，逆惡將墮獄¹¹，十念登蓮界¹²

註解

¹ 六道：天，人，阿修羅，畜生，餓鬼，地獄

² 十念必生願云：無量壽經云：「我作佛時，十方眾生，聞我名號，至心信樂，所有善根，心心回向，願生我國，乃至十念，若不生者，不取正覺(成佛也)。」阿彌陀佛，於今已成佛十劫。

³ 阿字音從 Amita, 或 Amida, 或 Amitabha 的 A 而來, A 應念如 Art 中之 A, 或如漢語拼音中之 a, 或註音符號中之 Y.

一，六分功德，生者自利。」所以念佛越多，亡者得益亦多。中陰身能聽得到念佛聲音，如此則其徬徨恐怖境相，轉安樂勝境，而得生西。因為佛力不可思議，法力不可思議，眾生心力不可思議，故得此殊勝利益也。對生前念佛者，助念可增高其往生後的品位。一般開始時，尤其是念畢時，都要將念佛之功德迴向，如「願以此念佛功德，回向給某某某（亡者姓名）及法界一切眾生，同生極樂國。」如果中陰身生前信奉其他宗教，如道，耶，回等，此皆是世間人天教乘，家人為其禮拜，禱告，功德是無法達到亡者身上的。

茹素，戒酒，戒辛，戒殺，戒淫：至少應在七七日中，一切供品，飲食，全應是素食。忌飲酒，戒葷，戒五辛⁸與戒淫。殺生，如親人因辦喪事，而殺生，則增加亡人罪業，中陰身會感應到更兇惡的境界，加速墮入三惡道。念佛之人，為一切諸佛之所護念外，還有阿彌陀佛所遣之廿五位菩薩，於一切時，一切處擁護加持⁹，復有龍天護法，故得遠離魔難。而首楞嚴經云：「是五種辛，熟食發淫，生噉增恚（音惠，生怒也）。……是食辛之人，修三摩地，菩薩天仙，十方善神，不來守護（嫌其臭穢）。大力魔王，得其方便，現作佛身，來為說法。」故修行之人，應永斷五辛。

一切從簡：亡者所有穿戴，應以舊者更之，不必用新的，棺木亦不必要用好的，應為亡者惜福。此等奢侈事，皆不利於亡者。印光大師云：「故凡於父母喪葬等事，過

策。善大者自心感生天道。惡深者自心感墮地獄，此三者迅速即去，均不經中陰身。其餘的：如行善作惡，均等者，皆劣者，未即受身，倏然有形，名中陰身，俗呼為鬼魂。身高三尺，六根皆利，去來迅疾，無所隔礙。但時常昏昏沉沉，迷迷糊糊。有時神智清醒，知自己已死，內心焦急，卻又徬徨無主。見到自識業力所變現的種種恐怖境界，東躲西避，惶惶不安，心中急想得一個安穩處藏身。長壽者至七七或稍有過之者，短壽者一二三七，即受生矣。

如何徵驗死者往生何道，

經云：「頂聖眼天生，人心餓鬼腹，畜生膝蓋離，地獄腳板出。」人將死時，熱氣從下至上者超升，從上至下者墮落。待通身冰涼，唯頭頂獨熱者，必生西方聖道，眼及額顱獨熱者，生天道，心獨熱者，生人道，腹獨熱者，生餓鬼道，膝蓋獨熱者，生畜生道，腳板獨熱者，生地獄者。此由人在生時，所造善惡二業，所感現如是。雖然如此，切不可屢屢探之，如神識未離，因此而感有刺激，痛苦，心生煩痛，若念佛之人，致不得往生也。

後事之料理

念佛超薦：死後七七四十九天之中，家屬要專心為亡者念佛，如有可能，佛聲最好是晝夜不斷。經言：「命終之後，眷屬小大，為造福利，一切聖事，七分之一而乃獲

的每一個字，每一句，都清清楚楚的從耳中進入耳根，聽得明明白白，心無二念，這就是「是心作佛」，如是淨念相繼，漸入「是心是佛」的境界。即凡心而成佛心矣。心不顛倒，定蒙佛接引，帶業往生西方極樂世界。故經云：「末法億億人修行，罕一得道，唯依念佛，得度生死。」近代大德黃念祖居士 (1913-1992) 在「心聲錄」中說：「如果不願入彌陀大願之海，要在這一生中出生死，我就可以說一句很大膽的話：“絕無希望”」，古今大德，均如是說，如是讚嘆此法門。善導大師 (613-681) 說：「釋迦所以興出世，唯說彌陀本願海。」

在國外要找助念團，是件很不容易的事。如人少，可播放四字佛號之錄音，但家裡親朋一定要分班輪流跟著念，若只靠機器來念佛號，是無效的，因為機器沒有心，不會產生助念之人的心力。它只是用來督促，提醒大家念佛。跟著念時，就不會念得太慢或太快，太高或太低。超度亡者，只要念佛號，不必還要念經，拜懺及作種種其他佛事。因為印光大師曰：「一句佛號，包括一大藏經，罄無不盡。」又云：「一句彌陀，微妙難思，惟佛與佛，知其究竟，等覺以還，尚有未盡。」我輩凡夫，應當仰信而行之。經云：「信為道元功德母。」

中陰身與中陰期

人生在世，行善作惡，大小不等，隨因受果。如信願持佛名號，求生西方極樂世界者，必蒙佛接引，此是最上

臨終時應作之事：

病者心智清醒時，要決定死時是否要作心肺急救⁶。這是一個非常激烈的操作，很可能還用電擊來促使心臟重啟跳動。電擊時，整個人都會從床上向上蹦起來。對病者來說，真是痛上加痛，定會生起極大的瞋恨之心。如是折騰之後，還是失敗的話，來生恐會墮入三惡道。應知三塗(畜生，餓鬼，地獄)一報五千大劫⁷，復生人天了無期，可怖之極。如決定不作，應告訴家人，同時書面告知醫院。

臨終之前，家屬應當向醫生說明，不要再打針，吃藥，翻身，等等來打攪病人。任病者或躺或坐，皆隨其意。死後，決對不許觸摸，攪動亡者。如床上有污穢之物，亦不要清理，可用乾淨被單蓋上，點滴針管等可在未斷氣前或等身體涼後，小心輕輕拔除，以絕對不使病人增加其痛楚而生瞋心為原則。至少要等到死亡後八或十二小時，待全身通涼之後，才能浴身，更衣，哭泣，或拔除身上之針管等事。如四肢已僵硬，可用濕熱毛巾覆於四肢關節處，少時四肢便可彎曲自如了。

病人在病重時，就應將阿彌陀佛聖像，置於病人眼可看到之處。告訴病者，摒除萬緣，一心小聲跟隨親朋念阿彌陀佛四字，要字字句句從口中念得分明，字字句句從耳中聽得清晰。如不能念，應攝耳諦聽佛號，務使聖號

破鐵圍，往生淨土，非業力能牽住矣。然念佛應行之於平時，才能應用於臨時。養兵千日，用於一遭也。

臨終時切不可作之事：

洗澡，更衣，或搬來搬去：人臨終時，身體開始分離，其痛苦有如活牛剝皮，螃蟹落湯。加以此時身不能自主，稍觸則手足，身體，均受拗折扭桡之痛。若洗澡，更衣，或搬來搬去，則痛上加痛，必生怨毒，瞋恨之心。臨終最後一念是瞋心者，來生多墮毒類，可怖之至。如阿耨達王，信奉佛法，立佛塔寺，福德巍巍，應生天界。臨命終時，侍臣持扇，扇墮王面，王痛起瞋，死墮為蛇身。一婦人渡河失手，其子墮水，因撈子故，與之俱沒，以慈心故，得生天上。夫一念慈，瞋，天，畜遂分。

悲痛，哭泣，安慰，祝福之語：病人若見親朋講些安慰，祝福，生離死別之言，甚至悲痛，哭泣，則情愛心生，佛念便息矣。靈識則隨情愛心去投胎矣。如經上說，有對夫婦很是恩愛，平生同信佛法，奉持齋戒。一日，夫病死。臨終時，其婦悲哀啼哭。夫遂心生愛念，因此夫之靈識，即往生到婦人之鼻孔中為蟲。婦人忽見鼻中墮下一蟲，想用腳將此蟲踏死，旁一僧人急止之，曰：「勿傷害汝之夫君」。婦驚問何故，僧云：「汝夫素奉持齋戒，應生天道，因汝悲哀哭泣，彼心生愛念，而投生為汝鼻中之蟲矣」。

病未重時，可以服藥。但此時應將一切事情於遺囑中交代清楚後，便置之度外。也不要作服藥愈病之想。深信，願切，一心專念阿彌陀佛，求生西方極樂世界。如壽已盡，決定往生。如壽未盡，因至心念佛故，能消除宿世惡業，病反能速癒。如口中念佛，心中卻希求醫藥能治癒病痛，多活幾年，則信願不真切，是往生不了的。

當病重時，可不必服藥了。壽命將盡，醫生與藥物何能救度。在此張羅之下，就會分散念佛之心。弘一大師(1880-1942)昔臥病石室，有勸其延醫服藥者，說偈謝云：「阿彌陀佛，無上醫王，捨此不求，是謂癡狂。一句彌陀，阿伽陀藥(萬病總治)，捨此不服，是謂大錯。」不論病者是僧，或俗，或念佛，或未念佛之人，倘能摒除一切，生起深信，發大願，專心念佛，求生西方，感應道交，都能蒙佛接引。念佛之人，病重時，痛苦甚劇，切勿驚惶，因此病苦，乃宿世業障，以彼篤修淨業，殆轉重報後報為現報輕報耳。

臨終最後一念

病人將終時，其最後一念，是輪迴六道或往生西方極樂世界之生因，要緊之極，故斯時一髮千鈞。這時無始善惡諸業，同時顯現，神識不能把持，則隨業升沈，如若不慎，出苦無日，實可畏也。此時若有善友，善巧開導病人，放下萬緣，一心信願持名，并為助念，則末後一者，定當突

悌，忠，信，禮，義，廉，恥。閑邪存誠，諸惡莫作，眾善奉行。所以要想求取無生，就得要信，願，持名，并要廣修眾善，普皆迴向。願與眾生同生西方極樂世界。

來生再投胎為人的機率，微乎其微。經上說，佛以手拈土，問阿難曰：「我手上土多，大地土多」。阿難對曰：「大地土多」。佛言：「得人身者，如手中土。失人身者，如大地土」。印光大師(1861-1940)云：「求生西方，比求來生做人尚容易，以仗佛力加被故⁴。」

佛法住世，初正法時期約一千年（一說五百年），次像法時期約一千年，後末法時期約一萬年，共約一萬二千年。現已過三千多年，大約還剩九千年，現是末法時期。九千年之後，所有經典都將滅盡，唯獨留無量壽經再住世一百年後，世上從此就沒有佛法可聞了。下尊當來之佛是彌勒佛，現住兜率天⁵內院，在兜率天的四千年，即是地球的五十七億六百萬年（576,000,000）後，才降生到人間成佛。再過大約九千年後，到彌勒佛出生前，這麼漫長的時間裡，世界上是沒有佛法了。故古德云：「人身難得今已得，佛法難聞今已聞，此身不向今生度，更向何生度此身。」

死前的準備

天共有二十八層,縱使生到最高的非想非非想處天,能享壽長八萬大劫的天福天樂,但死後仍然隨業流轉於輪迴痛苦之中。如決定要了脫生死,就應求取無生,無生就無死,這才是究竟徹底圓滿解決生死的辦法。

本師釋迦牟尼佛(1029BC-949BC),無比的慈悲,為我們開示了一個特別的淨土法門。此法門以信,願,行三法為宗。

信:則信我此世界是苦,信極樂世界是樂。信我是業力凡夫,決定不能仗自力斷惑證真,了生脫死。信阿彌陀佛,有大誓願²,若有眾生,念佛名號,求生佛國,其人臨命終時,佛必垂慈接引,令生西方。既生極樂世界之後,則永不退墮於凡夫地。不但永斷生死,并且壽命無量。

願:則願速出離此苦世界,願速往生彼極樂世界。

行:則至誠懇切,常念阿彌陀佛³,或南無(音納莫,Namo)阿彌陀佛,時時刻刻,無令暫忘。

蕩益大師(1599-1655)云:「得生與否,全由信願之有無,品位高下,全由持名之深淺。」再者,信願念佛之人,同時必須敦倫盡分,即敦篤倫常,恪盡己分。即是力行孝,

道證法師(1956-2003,俗姓郭,出家前業醫)在其「學醫與學佛」中,談到她一個病人的往生,簡單的情形是:一個年輕鼻咽癌的女病人,已發心吃素求生極樂。一晚她來醫院急救失敗,往生,已無呼吸,無血壓與心跳。郭醫師早晨去上班時,護士請她去病房,她一看這病人已經斷氣,即對亡者說:「請你提起正念跟我來念佛」,念沒多久,沒有想到,她竟然淚流滿面,隨即告訴護士們說:「佛法所說的『人在呼吸停止以後,「八識」還沒有離開』,為她念佛的時候,她還掉下眼淚,我跟她說話,她也一直一直的掉眼淚,說她已經去世了嘛,八識沒有離去!千萬要善待一個所謂“死掉的人”。」所以我們一定要注意,斷氣,心跳停止,沒有血壓,並不是代表真正的死亡。

輪迴六道¹,還是求取無生

一般來說,如有人在世修上品十善,死後可上生至慾界天(共六層天)。相反的,如作極重之十惡,則墮入地獄。如想升入色界天(共十八層天)與無色界天(共四層天),一定要修不動業:除了修習上品十善之外,還要修習甚深的禪定。不是有個甚麼佛,菩薩,神,在獎賞你,讓你去天堂,享受天樂。或懲罰你,令你下地獄,受無量的苦。都是自作自受。經云:「欲知前世因,今生受者是,欲知來世果,今生作者是。」如是因,如是果,經云:「菩薩畏因,眾生畏果。」

緣起

近來親朋往生者，時有所聞。總是想從佛教經典與古今大德們之著作中，擷錄一些對於死亡的知解，讓還活著的親朋們知道，如果因為忌諱而不真正面對死亡，到時聽天由命，糊裏糊塗的就死掉了，那後果可能十分嚴重。為了來生的幸福與命運，一定要對死亡有個清楚的認識，周詳的準備與慎重的處理，才不會枉來人間這一趟。

生死的簡單情形

佛言人有八識，前五識，名眼耳鼻舌身，第六意識，第七末那，亦名傳送識，第八阿賴耶，亦名含藏識。人之生也，惟此第八識，其來最先，七六五識，次第後來。及其死也，亦此第八識，其去最後，餘識次第先去。

試想「去後來先」的第八識，只是捨棄現在這個身軀，復受生於別種身軀耳，何曾真的有生有死呢？第八識，即人之靈識或神識，俗謂靈魂或鬼魂。此識必待通身冷透，約須八到二十四小時，無一點暖氣時，才會離去。八識去後，則此身毫無知覺矣。若有一點稍暖，彼識尚未曾離去。若稍有觸著，亡者仍會有難忍的痛苦，因此必生起巨大的瞋恨之心。

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As this is a Dhamma text,
We request that it be treated with respect.

If you are finished with it,
Please pass it on to others or
offer it to a monastery, school, or library.
Thanks for your co-operation.

Namo Amitabha!



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