

# WHEN BLOSSOMS FALL

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A ZEN GUIDE FOR DEATH & DYING



## LETTER FROM SAN FRANCISCO ZEN CENTER CENTRAL ABBESS

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Dear members and friends of San Francisco Zen Center:

This booklet is designed to help us face our own death and the deaths of our loved ones with compassion and awareness. It is also intended to help us make some important decisions with the support of Buddhist teachings and practices.

Practicing with our own mortality and the mortality of our family and friends can be very difficult. Many of us put off asking questions, making decisions, leaving instructions, or creating documents in advance. As a result, when death comes, we may be unprepared, confused, and unable to decide what to do. We can convey our personal wishes out of compassion for those who will live after us, who will then be able to make clear decisions on our behalf.

This booklet begins with the teachings of the Buddha and other readings that we offer as guidance. The section that follows, Buddhist Practices and Traditions Regarding Dying, Death, and Mourning, provides a framework for understanding Buddhist values and approaches to the dying process. In the Wise Preparation section, the vital information listings will help you gather necessary information in one place.

It is our hope that this booklet will be a real resource to you and your family and friends. It is a work in progress, and we welcome your suggestions.

Yours in the dharma,

*Eijun Linda Ruth Cutts*

CENTRAL ABBESS EIJUN LINDA RUTH CUTTS

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## BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVES

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*Empty handed I entered the world  
Barefoot I leave it.  
My coming, my going –  
Two simple happenings  
That got entangled.*

— Kozan Ichigyo, 14th century Zen monk

### BUDDHA'S LAST WORDS

*From the Parinirvana Sutra in the Digha Nikaya, a scripture belonging in the Sutta Pitaka of Theravada Buddhism. It concerns the end of Gautama Buddha's life—his parinirvana—and is the longest sutta of the Pali Canon. Because of its attention to detail, it has become a principal source of reference in most standard accounts of the Buddha's death.*

O bhikshus! Do not grieve! Even if I were to live in the world for as long as a kalpa, our coming together would have to end. There can be no coming together without parting. The teaching which benefits both self and other has reached completion. Even if I were to live longer, there would be nothing to add to the teaching. Those who were to be awakened, whether in the heavens or among humans, have all been awakened. Those who have not yet been awakened, all possess the conditions for attaining awakening. If all my disciples practice the teaching from now on through generation after generation, the dharma-body of the Tathagata will exist forever and will not be destroyed.

Therefore, you should know that all things in the world are impermanent. Coming together inevitably means parting. Do not be troubled, for this is the nature of life. Diligently practicing right effort, you must seek liberation immediately. Within the light of wisdom, destroy the darkness of ignorance. Nothing is secure. Everything in this life is precarious... Always wholeheartedly seek the way of liberation. All things in the world, whether moving or non-moving, are characterized by disappearance and instability.

Stop now! Do not speak! Time is passing. I am about to cross over. This is my final teaching.

## BUDDHIST PRACTICES AND TRADITIONS REGARDING DYING, DEATH, AND MOURNING

Buddhists view death as a normal process, a natural part of life, which we all will face. The Dalai Lama says, death is “a reality that I accept will occur as long as I remain in this earthly existence... Yet death is unpredictable: We do not know when or how it will take place. So it is only sensible to take certain precautions before it actually happens.”<sup>1</sup>

The Buddha taught that contemplation of death is the most noble of all contemplations. It's like the elephant's footprint—the footprint of all the other animals fit inside the elephant's. All other contemplations are a subset of the contemplation of death.<sup>2</sup>

Before the Buddha died, he took care of unfinished business. It says in the Parinirvana Sutra that he ordained one last person, and he sent a message to Cunda, who had prepared the Buddha's last meal, assuring him that he was not responsible for the Buddha's death. He met with groups of his disciples to remind them of the essence of his teaching, and he said goodbye. According to the sutra, he maintained a calm, meditative state.

Preparation for a peaceful death includes cultivating peace in our minds and in our way of life. From the Buddhist point of view, the actual experience of death is very important. At the time of death, the Dalai Lama continues, “the most profound and beneficial experiences can come about.” For this reason it may be helpful to engage in meditative practices as we are passing away.

However, we may come to the time of death in pain, or with unfinished business. It may not be helpful to have a fixed idea of what is a ‘good death.’ Katagiri Roshi said, “We shouldn't have a particular idea of what is a happy death. One person is struggling or screaming in his or her last moment. Another person is praying to God, another is chanting the name of Buddha, another is expressing anger and

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1 Foreword to *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* by Sogyal Rinpoche, p. ix

2 Paul Haller discussed this in a Dharma talk on “Death and Dying” at City Center on June 17, 2006

hatred. That is fine. Whatever way a person dies is just fine.”<sup>3</sup>

“Our prime aim in helping a dying person,” says the Dalai Lama, “is to put them at ease.” There are many ways of doing this. In *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Sogyal Rinpoche explains that people who are dying need spiritual care as well as practical and emotional care, because “it is only with spiritual knowledge that we can truly face, and understand, death.”<sup>4</sup>

“Death is treated as a teaching in Zen Buddhism,” according to Robert Aitken. “It reveals and enriches the truths of impermanence, compassion, and interdependency.”<sup>5</sup> Stories about many of our ancestors, including the Buddha, tell that they were able to foresee their own deaths, prepare for them, and find a dignified and appropriate way to die. Even if most of us are unable to predict the moment of our death, our understanding of impermanence and interdependence can help us approach death with greater equanimity. However, even with preparation, at the moment of death things may not go as we planned.

## COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING

*From Eihei Dogen, the Japanese Buddhist priest, writer, poet, and philosopher, who founded the Soto school of Zen in Japan.*

“It is specifically taught in Buddhism that life does not become death. For this reason life is called no-life. It is also taught that death does not become life. Therefore death is called no-death.” It is not a matter of life or death. When death is accepted through and through, it is not death anymore. Because you compare death with life, it is something. But when death is understood completely as death, it is not death anymore. Life is not life anymore.

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<sup>3</sup> *Wind Bell* Volume XXIV, Number 1, Spring 1990. “Dying Together” from a lecture by Katagiri Roshi, January 7, 1989

<sup>4</sup> Sogyal Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, p. 10

<sup>5</sup> Robert Aitken, “Death: A Zen Buddhist Perspective,” in *Original Dwelling Place: Zen Buddhist Essays*, Counterpoint, 1996

## NIRVANA, THE WATERFALL

*By Shunryu Suzuki, excerpted from Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind.*

I went to Yosemite National Park, and I saw some huge waterfalls. The highest one there is 1,340 feet high, and from it the water comes down like a curtain thrown from the top of the mountain. It does not seem to come down swiftly, as you might expect; it seems to come down very slowly because of the distance. And the water does not come down as one stream, but is separated into many tiny streams. From a distance it looks like a curtain. And I thought it must be a very difficult experience for each drop of water to come down from the top of such a high mountain. It takes time, you know, a long time, for the water finally to reach the bottom of the waterfall. And it seems to me that our human life may be like this. We have many difficult experiences in our life. But at the same time, I thought, the water was not originally separated, but was one whole river. Only when it is separated does it have some difficulty in falling. It is as if the water does not have any feeling when it is one whole river. Only when separated into many drops can it begin to have or to express some feeling. When we see one whole river we do not feel the living activity of the water, but when we dip a part of the water into a dipper, we experience some feeling of the water, and we also feel the value of the person who uses the water. Feeling ourselves and the water in this way, we cannot use it in just a material way. It is a living thing.

Before we were born, we had no feeling; we were one with the universe. This is called “mind-only,” or “essence of mind,” or “big mind.” After we are separated by birth from this oneness, as the water falling from the waterfall is separated by the wind and rocks, then we have feeling. You have difficulty because you have feeling. You attach to the feeling you have without knowing just how this kind of feeling is created. When you do not realize that you are one with the river, or one with the universe, you have fear. Whether it is separated into drops or not, water is water. Our life and death are the same thing. When we realize this fact we have no fear of death anymore, and we have no actual difficulty in our life.

When the water returns to its original oneness with the river, it no longer has any individual feeling to it; it resumes its own nature, and finds composure. How very glad the water must be to come back to the original river! If this is so, what feeling will we have when we die? I think we are like the water in the dipper. We will have composure then, perfect composure. It may be too perfect for us, just now, because we are so much attached to our own feeling, to our individual existence. For us, just now, we have some fear of death, but after we resume our true original nature, there is Nirvana. That is why we say, "To attain Nirvana is to pass away." "To pass away" is not a very adequate expression. Perhaps "to pass on," or "to go on," or "to join" would be better. Will you try to find some better expression for death? When you find it, you will have quite a new interpretation of your life. It will be like my experience when I saw the water in the big waterfall. Imagine! It was 1,340 feet high!

### THE RECOLLECTION OF DEATH

*From Buddhist Meditation, edited by Edward Conze.<sup>6</sup>*

As a budding mushroom shoots upward carrying soil on its head, so beings from their birth onwards carry decay and death along with them. For death has come together with birth, because everyone who is born must certainly die. Therefore this being, from the time of his birth onwards, moves in the direction of death, without turning back even for a moment. Just as the sun, once it has arisen, goes forward in the direction of its setting and does not turn back even for a moment on the path it traverses in that direction; or as a mountain stream rapidly tears down on its way, flows and rushes along, without turning back even for a moment.

To one who goes along like that, death is always near; just as brooks get extinguished when dried up by the summer heat; as fruits are bound to fall from a tree early one day when their stalks have been rotted away by the early morning mists; as earthenware breaks when hit with a hammer; and as dewdrops are dispersed when touched by the rays of the sun.

### ..... SPIRITUAL CULTIVATION .....

*I don't want to die. I don't know what it's going to be like when I die. Nobody knows what that's going to be like. But when I die, I'll still be a buddha.*

*I may be a buddha in agony, or I may be a buddha in bliss, but I'll die knowing that this is how it is.*

— Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, quoted in  
*Crooked Cucumber*

Death and dying have central roles in most Buddhist traditions. They are important catalysts for engaging in Buddhist practice and are frequently used as themes of reflection to deepen one's practice. Buddhism encourages people to prepare for death. This preparation is considered part of living a mindful, conscientious life. Preparing helps make the circumstance of dying easier for everyone concerned. There are both practical and spiritual aspects to such readiness. Buddhist practitioners actually contemplate the topic of death on a regular basis. Instead of avoiding the topic, one is encouraged to confront it as directly as possible and to recognize that death is inherent in life.

We don't know what happens after death, according to Zen teachings. In the koan, "Tao Wu's Condolence Call," the student, Chien Yuan, taps on the coffin of someone who has died and asks his teacher, Tao Wu, "Alive or dead?" The teacher won't say. However, during life, while we still have a body, we can develop our ability to see directly, as we do in meditation, the illusory nature of all phenomena. Frank Osteski, founding director of the Zen Hospice Project in San Francisco, notes that a person who is very ill generally has three fears: fear of pain and/or pain medication; fear of abandonment; and fear of loss of self (the way she/he has known herself to be is disappearing).

Buddhist practices may address these fears and engender a sense of connectedness and support. The following are Buddhist reflections for doing so.

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Conze, *Buddhist Meditation*, (New York: Routedledge Library Editions, 2008) 88

## THE FIVE REMEMBRANCES

*From the Anguttara Nikaya, Upajjhatthana Sutta, translated by Thich Nhat Hahn. The Upajjhatthana Sutta (Subjects for Contemplation) is a Buddhist discourse famous for its inclusion of five remembrances, five facts regarding life's fragility and our true inheritance. The discourse advises that these facts are to be reflected upon often by all. According to this discourse, contemplation of these facts leads to the abandonment of destructive attachments and actions and to the cultivation of factors necessary for enlightenment.*

I am of the nature to grow old.  
There is no way to escape growing old.

I am of the nature to have ill health.  
There is no way to escape having ill health.

I am of the nature to die.  
There is no way to escape death.

All that is dear to me and everyone I love  
are of the nature to change.  
There is no way to escape being separated  
from them.

My actions are my only true belongings.  
I cannot escape the consequences of my actions.  
My actions are the ground on which I stand.

## MARANA-SATI: DEATH AWARENESS PRACTICE

*One of the best resources for practicing with contemplations on death is Larry Rosenberg's book Living in the Light of Death (Shambhala, 2000). He offers the death awareness reflections below and he recommends practicing these reflections daily after first calming the mind through breath meditation.*

- A. Awareness of the inevitability of death
1. Reflecting that everyone must die.
  2. Reflecting that our life span is decreasing continuously.
  3. Reflecting that the time for developing our minds is small.

- B. Awareness of the time of death
4. Reflecting that human life expectancy is uncertain.
  5. Reflecting that there are many causes of death.
  6. Reflecting that the human body is so fragile.
- C. Awareness that only insight into dharma can help us at the time of death
7. Reflecting that our possessions and enjoyments cannot help.
  8. Reflecting that our loved ones cannot help.
  9. Reflecting that our own body cannot help.

## THE NINE CONTEMPLATIONS OF ATISHA

*Here is a Marana-Sati practice in verse form by Joan Halifax (used with permission). These contemplations come from Atisha, an 11th Century Tibetan Buddhist scholar who systematized this method for generating an enlightened mind.*

### *The First Contemplation*

Death is inevitable, no one is exempt.  
Holding this thought in mind, I abide in the  
breath.

### *The Second Contemplation*

Our life span is decreasing continuously,  
every breath brings us closer to death.  
Holding this thought in mind,  
I delve deeply into truth.

### *The Third Contemplation*

Death will indeed come, whether or not  
we are prepared.  
Holding this thought in mind,  
I enter into a real sense of practice.  
(or, "I enter more fully into the body of life.")

### *The Fourth Contemplation*

Human life expectancy is uncertain,  
death can come at any time.  
Holding this thought in mind,  
I listen with utmost care to every sound.

### *The Fifth Contemplation*

There are many causes of death—  
habits, desires, accidents can be precipitants.  
Holding this thought in mind,  
I consider the myriad possibilities.

### *The Sixth Contemplation*

The human body is fragile and vulnerable,  
our life hangs by a breath.  
Holding this thought in mind,  
I attend to each inhalation-exhalation.

### *The Seventh Contemplation*

At the time of death,  
our material resources are of no use to us.  
Holding this thought in mind,  
I invest wholeheartedly in the practice.

### *The Eight Contemplation*

Our loved ones cannot keep us from death,  
there is no delaying its advent.  
Holding this thought in mind,  
I exercise non-grasping and clinging.

### *The Ninth Contemplation*

Our body cannot help us at the time of death,  
it too will be lost at that moment.  
Holding this thought in mind,  
I strengthen my capacity for release.

## THE JOURNEY INTO DEATH

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*Everything coming together falls apart.  
Everything rising up collapses.  
Every meeting ends in parting.  
Every life ends in death.*

— Buddhist Scripture: Udanavarga 1.22

### DURING ILLNESS

When you, a loved one, or a family member is ill, you may request that a well-being ceremony be held at a Zen temple. During that formal ceremony, a priest offers incense and the assembly chants the *Enmei Jukku Kannon Gyo*, Kuan Yin's ten-line Sutra of Boundless Life, which invokes the compassion of the Bodhisattva of Infinite Compassion to protect life (*see page 8*). It is appropriate to offer a donation at this time. You can also chant this sutra as an informal ceremony at home.

The Buddha called old age, sickness, and death the heavenly messengers because these events may heighten our awareness of impermanence. Practices that support concentration, mindfulness, and calmness are helpful, such as counting breaths, repeating mantras, chanting, or zazen (either sitting or lying down). These can be done alone or with friends, family, and Buddhist practitioners. It is also appropriate to have a practice discussion with a Zen teacher or priest to attend to unresolved karma, admit one's mistakes, chant the Zen verse of confession and repentance, and explore lay ordination before death.

### FINAL DAYS

During the last days or weeks of life, it is traditional to create an altar within view of the bed, and to put on it images or objects that provide inspiration or comfort. Visitors may be asked to enter the room mindfully, and periods of silence may seem appropriate. Near the time of death, it can help to have seasoned people, like a hospice staff member or Zen teacher, in the room.

Caregivers can create an atmosphere of practice around the dying person. If the person is alert, consult him or her as much as possible in any small



or big decisions about their care. Any supportive practice like metta (lovingkindness meditation), *tonglen* (a Tibetan practice that works with the breath to transform painful emotions), co-breathing (following or accompanying the person's breathing), chanting, or listening to a tape of chanting, can be helpful.

This atmosphere of practice can be maintained up to and after the moment of death. However, there are many ways to die. It's important for the dying person, their family and friends, to know that there is no perfect death. The dying person may be in pain. He or she and friends and family members may not be calm.

Some simple rituals may be done just prior to death. It is helpful to discuss this with the dying person earlier, in order to know their wishes. Such rituals may include chanting, lighting candles, reading sutras or poetry, or playing music.

As death is a mystery, no one knows for certain what day, what moment this will occur. However, as the body gives signs that death is near, such as lack of appetite, inability to swallow, labored breathing, or blueness in the extremities, it is helpful to approach each day as if it is the last. People often simplify what goes on in the dying person's room and ask visitors to maintain a calm presence there. The environment in the room is more important than any words one can offer. Many Zen practitioners wish to continue to practice zazen meditation if they are able, either taking zazen posture when possible, or lying down. Friends can sit with them as well. If meditation is not an option, friends can sit zazen in the room, chant, or sit near the bed, and offer to breathe in synchronicity.

Overall, for Zen practitioners, emotional and practical support and spiritual guidance are important and meaningful. The presence of a Zen teacher or a Buddhist friend can be of great help in remembering the essence of the Buddha's teachings, and the Zen ways of living that are most meaningful. For a Zen practitioner who is dying, an atmosphere of trust and peace are essential. Spiritual friends, Buddhist teachings, and the strength of their own practice can coalesce into a time of love, joy, and transformation for all.

## CARE OF THE SPACE IMMEDIATELY AFTER SOMEONE HAS DIED

The moment of death is a sacred time. Be present for it! There is no need to rush. After death, the room can be cleaned, medications and sickroom equipment removed, fresh flowers brought in. People may be invited to come in and sit zazen throughout the day in the presence of the body. It is helpful to provide zafus and chairs, candles, a place to offer incense. Keep the room cool, with the windows open, in order to keep the body cool. Aim for simplicity. A quiet feeling in the room is appropriate. People may have a need to give immediate expression to their grief or to tell stories.

## RESPECTFUL CARE OF THE BODY IMMEDIATELY AFTER DEATH

When someone dies, call the doctor or hospice nurse involved in the person's care. A doctor or nurse must pronounce that the person is dead. Wait for them to come before caring for the body. There are particular ways to care for a body that will be left undisturbed at home. It is traditional to bathe the body. This is done with deep respect. Lavender oil or an herb may be added to the water. For specific ways of preparing the body, consult a hospice nurse or someone who has had similar experience. The body should be kept cool. After the body is bathed, it is dressed in clean clothing. The person may have specified what they would like to wear. If the deceased has received a rakusu, it would be placed on the body at this time. A deceased priest would wear an okesa and robes. Reliable sources for information about this type of home after-death care are listed at the end of this document.

## CEREMONIES UPON DEATH

A traditional Buddhist practice is to stay with a body after death for up to three days as a way of helping the departed through the intermediate state before the next rebirth. During that time sangha members, friends, and family may practice zazen in the room, perform Buddhist ceremonies such as the refuge ceremony, continue to give instructions to the

departed to help them negotiate the intermediate state, or simply attend the body. Before the body is taken away to be cremated or buried, Zen chanting and meditation are appropriate. At the cemetery or crematorium, it is appropriate for a Zen service to be performed. Also, if the ashes are scattered or interred after cremation, a Zen ceremony may be performed.

There are both traditional Soto Zen funerals as well as other less traditional memorial ceremonies and services. Traditional Soto Zen funerals are performed by Zen Center priests. If the deceased was ordained (lay or priest), a funeral ceremony conducted by a dharma-transmitted priest may be performed. This ceremony includes receiving the precepts. Part of this ceremony occurs at the place of cremation or burial.

Family and friends may request a simple memorial service at City Center, Tassajara, or Green Gulch. Family members and friends are invited to offer incense at the altar while the *Daihi Shin Dharani*, the Dharani of Great Compassion, is being chanted. These services are brief and are usually held at the time of regular evening service. It is appropriate to make a donation to the temple when such ceremonies are requested.

At a later date, a memorial ceremony honoring the person's life is often held. Memorial ceremonies may be conducted by priests or lay leaders. At this time, family and friends may make statements to the deceased. There may be music or readings of favorite poetry or dharma passages. It is also common to collect donations to dedicate a memorial bench or planting, or as an offering to a faith group or organization that was meaningful to the person who has died.

## MEMORIALS

There is a Buddhist tradition that takes place daily during the 49 days after the death. Family and friends keep the name of their loved one and a photograph in a special place or on an altar. Individuals may conduct personal services each week for seven weeks. This includes offering incense to a different Buddha or Bodhisattva each week, chanting, and dedicating the merit to the loved one. These activities help to express the grief of those who are bereaved.

Lastly, many Zen temples conduct annual memorial services, called Seijiki ceremonies, to remember and commemorate loved ones. The names of those who have died that year are read aloud and particular chants and meditations are offered.

## ZEN CHANTS FOR RITUALS

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### ENMEI JUKKU KANNON GYO AND THREE TRANSLATIONS

*Towards the end of his life, the great Zen Master Hakuin (1689-1769) took an increasing interest in life outside the monastery and in the lives and practices of his lay disciples, government ministers, and the aristocracy. In a letter dated 1754, he tells of the virtues and merits attached to recitation of the Enmei Jukku Kannon Gyo (Ten Phrase Life Prolonging Kannon Sutra): "The reason lies in the testing. Give this to those who are seriously ill or have met with disaster for their consolation. If it is recited with sincerity, miracles will without fail be accomplished, and the person who recites it will be free from disease and attain a long life. This applies to anyone at all."*

### 1. ENMEI JUKKU KANNON GYO

Kanzeon  
namu butsu  
yo butsu u in  
yo butsu u en  
buppo so en  
jo raku ga jo  
cho nen Kanzeon  
bo nen Kanzeon  
nen nen ju shin ki  
nen nen fu ri shin

## 2. CHANT OF BOUNDLESS COMPASSION

*Translation by Hogen Bays at Great Vow Monastery*

Absorbing world sounds  
awakens a Buddha right here  
This Buddha, the source of compassion  
This Buddha receives only compassion  
Buddha, dharma, sangha just compassion  
Thus the pure heart always rejoices  
In the light recall this  
In the dark recall this  
Moment after moment the true heart arises  
Time after time there is nothing but this!

## 3. KUAN YIN'S TEN LINE SUTRA OF BOUNDLESS LIFE

*Translation by Kazuaki Tanahashi and Joan Halifax*

Kuan Yin, perceiver of the cries of the world,  
takes refuge in Buddha,  
will be a Buddha,  
helps all to be Buddhas,  
is not separate from Buddha, Dharma, Sangha,  
being eternal, intimate, pure, and joyful.  
In the morning, be one with Kuan Yin,  
in the evening be one with Kuan Yin,  
whose heart, moment by moment, arises,  
whose heart, moment by moment, remains!

## UNIVERSAL GATEWAY OF AVALOKITESHVARA BODHISATTVA

*This sutra from the Lotus Sutra, Chapter 25 is in honor of the Greatest Bodhisattva of Compassion, the Universal Gateway that invites all the “spiritually” poor, all the lost and forsaken, those stricken with suffering, diseases, and addictions—all who are in desperate need of spiritual healing, to come and find spiritual refuge.*

O World-Honored One,  
fully endowed with subtle signs!  
Now again I ask about that  
Child of the Buddha, for what reason  
That child is named the One Who Observes the  
Sounds of the World.  
The Buddha replied:  
Listen to the deeds of Avalokitesvara,  
Aptly responding in every quarter,  
Who with immense vow deep as oceans,  
Throughout kalpas beyond reckoning,  
Has served many thousands of millions of Buddhas,  
Bringing forth this great pure vow.  
Hearing the name or seeing the form  
of Avalokitesvara  
With mindful remembrance is not in vain,  
For the woes of existence can thus be relieved.  
Even if someone with harmful intent  
Should push you into a fiery pit,  
By mindfully invoking Avalokitesvara's power,  
The pit of fire will turn into a pool.  
If cast adrift on a vast sea,  
Menaced by dragons, fish, or demons,  
By mindfully invoking Avalokitesvara's power,  
The billowing waves cannot drown you.  
If from Mount Sumeru's lofty peak,  
Someone were to throw you down,  
By mindfully invoking Avalokitesvara's power,  
Like the sun you would stand firm in the sky.  
If pursued by evil doers,  
Down from Diamond Mountain,  
By mindfully invoking Avalokitesvara's power,  
They could not harm a single hair.  
If surrounded by vicious bandits,  
Each with a sword, drawn to strike,

By mindfully invoking Avalokitesvara's power,  
At once their hearts will turn to compassion.

If persecuted by rulers,  
You face torture and execution,

By mindfully invoking Avalokitesvara's power,  
Their weapons will thereby shatter to pieces.

If imprisoned in shackles and chains,  
Hands and feet bound in restraints,

By mindfully invoking Avalokitesvara's power,  
Suddenly you shall be released.

If by curses or poisonous herbs,  
Someone wishes to hurt your body,

By mindfully invoking Avalokitesvara's power,  
The harmful intent will return to its source.

If you meet evil creatures,  
Poison dragons, or various demons,

By mindfully invoking Avalokitesvara's power,  
None will dare to harm you.

If surrounded by raging beasts,  
With sharp fangs and dreadful claws,

By mindfully invoking Avalokitesvara's power,  
They will quickly scatter in all directions.

If venomous snakes or scorpions,  
Threaten with deadly breath of fire,

By mindfully invoking Avalokitesvara's power,  
At the sound of your voice they will turn  
and depart.

If clouds thunder and lightning strikes,  
Hailstones fall and it rains in torrents,

By mindfully invoking Avalokitesvara's power,  
Instantly they will dissipate.

When living beings suffer hardships,  
Burdened by immeasurable woes,

The power of Avalokitesvara's wondrous wisdom  
Can relieve the suffering of the world.

Fully endowed with miraculous powers,  
Widely practicing wisdom and skillful means,

In every land and in all directions,  
In no realm does Avalokitesvara not appear.

In all the various evil destinies,  
Of hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals,

The sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death,  
Are gradually relieved by Avalokitesvara.

O you of the true gaze, of the pure gaze,  
Of the gaze of broad and great wisdom,  
Of the compassionate gaze and the gaze of goodwill,  
Ever longed for, ever revered,

Unblemished, serene radiance,  
Sun of wisdom, dispelling all darkness,

Avalokitesvara can subdue the wind and fire of  
woes, clearly illuminating all the world.

The precepts of compassion roar like thunder,  
The kind heart is wondrous as great clouds,

Pouring Dharma rain of sweet dew,  
Quenching all flames of troubling passion.

In disputes before judges,  
Or fearful in the midst of battle,

By mindfully invoking Avalokitesvara's power,  
All hostilities will be dispersed.

The wondrous voice of Avalokitesvara,  
Brahma-voice, voice of the rolling tides,

Surpasses all sounds within the world,  
Therefore ever keep it in mind

In each thought with never a doubt.  
Avalokitesvara, regarder of the cries of the  
world, the pure sage,

In pain, agony, or death's distress,  
Will be a refuge

Fully endowed with all virtues,  
Eyes of compassion observing sentient beings,

Assemble an ocean of blessing beyond measure.  
Thus, with reverence, we bow.

At that time the Bodhisattva Earth-Holder straightway rose from his seat and, coming forward, addressed the Buddha, saying, "O World-Honored One! If there is a living being who shall hear this Chapter of the Bodhisattva Who Observes the Sounds of the World, the deeds of self-mastery, the manifestation of the universal gateway, the powers of supernatural penetration, be it known that that person's merit shall not be slight."

When the Buddha preached this Chapter of the Universal Gateway, within the multitude were eighty-four thousand living beings all of whom opened up their thoughts to unequalled anuttarasamyak sambodhi.

## VERSES ON THE FAITH MIND

*This text is often read by or for Buddhists as they prepare for death.*

The Way is perfect like vast space, where there's no lack and no excess. Awakening is to go beyond both emptiness as well as form.

All changes in this empty world seem real because of ignorance.

The Great Way is without limit, beyond the easy and the hard.

Just let go now of the clinging mind, and all things are just as they are.

In essence nothing goes or stays.

To seek Great Mind with the thinking mind is certainly a grave mistake.

If mind does not discriminate, all things are as they are, as One.

When all is seen with a mind of equality we return to our most intimate nature.

When the mind is fully with the Way, all ego-centered strivings cease; doubts and confusion disappear, and so true faith pervades our life.

There is no thing that clings to us, and nothing that is left behind.

In this true world of emptiness both self and other are no more.

The Way is beyond all space, all time, one instant is ten thousand years.

Not only here, not only elsewhere truth is right before your very eyes.

One thing is all, all things are one— know this and all is whole and complete.

When faith and the mind are not separate, this very reality is beyond all words, all thought.

For here there is no yesterday, no tomorrow, no today.

## ZEN VERSE OF CONFESSION

*Although unfamiliar to most, Zen does have the practices of confession and repentance. It is not so different from those found in other religions. The following is recited regularly in community, under the assumption that we all have something to confess all the time. The confession is followed by a recommitment to the precepts.*

All my ancient twisted karma  
from beginningless greed, hate, and delusion  
born through body, speech, and mind  
I now fully avow.

## PRAYER OF SHANTIDEVA

*From the Bodhisattvacharyavatara, translated into English as A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, written c. 700 AD by Shantideva, a Buddhist monk at Nalanda Monastic University in India.*

May I be a protector to those without protection,  
A leader for those who journey,  
And a boat, a bridge, a passage  
For those desiring the further shore.

May the pain of every living creature  
Be completely cleared away.  
May I be the doctor and the medicine  
And may I be the nurse  
For all sick beings in the world  
Until everyone is healed.

Just like space  
And the great elements such as earth,  
May I always support the life  
Of all the boundless creatures.

And until they pass away from pain  
May I also be the source of life  
For all the realms of varied beings  
That reach unto the ends of space.

SOTO ZEN TRANSITION  
MEMORIAL VERSE

*Performed soon after a person dies for the attainment  
of perfection through the power of the Buddha.*

For our great, abiding friend  
(name)

Who is passing from this world to the next.

S/he is taking a great leap.

The light of this world has faded for h/er.

S/he has entered solitude with h/er karmic forces.

S/he has gone into a vast Silence.

S/he is borne away by the Great Ocean of birth  
and death;

May s/he, together with all beings, realize the end  
of suffering,

And the complete unfolding of Buddha's Way.

SHARI RAIMON, VERSE OF HOMAGE  
TO BUDDHA'S RELICS

*from Soto School Scriptures for Daily Services  
and Practice, 2001*

With wholehearted reverence we bow  
to the relics of the true body  
of the Tathagata Shakyamuni  
who is fully endowed with myriad virtues;  
to the dharma body which is the fundamental  
ground; and to his stupa, which is the  
whole universe.

With deep respect we venerate the one  
who manifested a body for our sake.  
Through the sustaining power of the Buddha,  
which enters us even as we enter it,  
we verify awakening.

By means of the Buddha's spiritual power,  
we benefit living beings,  
arouse the thought of awakening,  
cultivate bodhisattva practice,  
and together enter perfect peace,  
the knowledge of the equality of all things.  
Now let us reverently bow.

MEMORIAL SERVICE

- Usual flower offering and incensing  
of the name card
- Small bell rolldown and three bows
- Second flower offering and bows:  
three big bells and stop

DAI HI SHIN DHARANI ~ ●

Namu kara tan no tora ya ya namu ori ya boryo ki  
chi shifu ra ya fuji sato bo ya moko sato bo ya mo  
ko kya runi kya ya ○ en sa hara ha ei shu tan no  
ton sha namu shiki ri toi mo ori ya boryo ki chi  
shifu ra rin to bo na mu no ra kin ji ki ri mo ko ho  
do sha mi sa bo o to jo shu ben o shu in sa bo sa  
to no mo bo gya mo ha te cho to ji to en o bo ryo  
ki ru gya chi kya rya chi i kiri mo ko fuji sa to sa  
bo sa bo mo ra mo ra mo ki mo ki ri to in ku ryo  
ku ryo ke mo to ryo to ryo ho ja ya chi mo ko ho  
ja ya chi to ra to ra chiri ni shifu ra ya sha ro sha ro  
mo mo ha mo ra ho chi ri yuki yuki shi no shi no  
ora san fura sha ri ha za ha za fura sha ya ku ryo ku  
ryo mo ra ku ryo ku ryo ki ri sha ro sha ro shi ri  
shi ri su ryo su ryo fuji ya fuji ya fudo ya fudo ya mi  
chiri ya ○ nora kin ji chiri shuni no hoyo mono  
somo ko shido ya somo ko moko shido ya somo  
ko shido yu ki shifu ra ya somo ko ○ nora kin ji  
somo ko mo ra no ra somo ko shira su omo gya  
ya somo ko sobo moko shido ya somo ko shaki ra  
oshi do ya somo ko hodo mogya shido ya somo ko  
nora kin ji ha gyara ya somo ko mo hori shin gyara  
ya somo ko namu kara tan no tora ya ya ● namu  
ori ya boryo ki chi shifu ra ya somo ko ● shite do  
modo ra hodo ya so mo ko ■

## MEMORIAL SERVICE DEDICATION

The immaculate light reaches everywhere leaving no place unilluminated, in tranquility embracing all emptiness.

Returning from oneness into the world of discrimination, the affairs of the mundane are seen as but a dream.

Humbly we invoke the guidance of the Three Treasures.

Respectfully we have offered fragrance, flowers, light, and chanted the Dai Hi Shin Dharani

Offering the merit for the sake of  
(name)

on this occasion of his/her memorial service.

Kindly we pray that in the realm of life and death this one person,  
(name)

like the precious Dragon Jewel, shine as the emerald sea, clear and complete as the clear blue sky, in the Dharma everywhere guiding the world in ascending the path to enlightenment.

We pray for his/her peace, for his/her contentment, for his/her freedom.

May he/she together with all beings realize the Buddha Way ●

All Buddhas, ten directions, three times ●

All Honored Ones, Bodhisattva Mahasattvas ●

.....

Wisdom beyond Wisdom,

Maha Prajna Paramita

(three prostrations—exit bows - doshi leaves)

## WISE PREPARATION

Proper planning for end-of-life can help ensure your wishes are honored and can provide useful direction to your loved ones. Below are the basics. There are myriad resources for getting one's affairs in order. See the Relevant Resources section of this document for a sampling.

### VITAL INFORMATION

Keep important papers in one designated place. Note the location of keys and the combinations of locks. Secure account passwords in a format accessible by another. If using a safe deposit box, be sure that you, as well as your designated co-signer, have authorization to enter the box, and that both of you have keys.

### WRITE DOWN YOUR IMPORTANT LIFE DATA

- Full legal name
- Nickname
- Dharma name(s)
- Social Security number
- Street address
- City, state, zip
- Telephone numbers
- Email addresses
- Online accounts, names, and passwords
- Birthplace
- Date of birth
- For Zen practitioners (if applicable):
  - Lay initiation: date, preceptor/teacher
  - Priest ordination: date, preceptor/teacher
  - Dharma transmission: date, root teacher
- Dates of military service and places served
- Date of military discharge and location
- Veteran's Administration claim number
- Education
- Membership and affiliations in faith groups, organization committees, etc.

## PLAN AHEAD FOR HEALTHCARE AT THE END OF LIFE

- Get the information you need to make informed choices about end-of-life care, including hospice and palliative care providers.
- Discuss your choices with your family and healthcare providers, especially when your medical condition changes.
- Establish advance directives (a living will and medical power of attorney/healthcare agent).
- Assess your financial situation and determine what end-of-life goals you want to accomplish that involve money.
- Learn about the cost of end-of-life care and how medical bills and expenses will be paid for if you are not able to.
- Make financial decisions such as how you want to give your money and possessions to others upon your death.
- Plan your funeral/memorial service.

## LIST OF IMPORTANT PEOPLE

- Life partner/spouse, children, parents, siblings
- Other relatives and close friends  
*(use additional paper if needed)*
- Clergy
- Attorney
- Accountant

## LEGAL AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS:

- Create an estate, will, and or trust for real property and disbursement of estate assets.
- Prepare for the time when you cannot handle money matters; appoint an agent/durable power of attorney.
- Choose an executor to collect or settle debts, sell estate property, and disburse your property.

## WRITE DOWN YOUR PLACES OF SAFE KEEPING:

- Safe deposit box(es)
- Location of tangible property
- Locations of legal documents:
  - Wills
  - Deeds
  - Insurance policies
  - Royalties, patents, and copyrights
  - Bank records
  - Mortgages
  - Tax papers
  - Business agreements
  - Pension information
  - Vehicle titles
  - Birth, marriage/divorce certificates
  - Passport

## WHO TO CONTACT AFTER DEATH

- Social Security Administration
- Financial institutions
- Veteran's administration
- Companies to whom the deceased owed money
- Pension plan administrator
- Insurance companies
- Utility companies
- Mail
- Publications
- Mortgage and title companies
- Department of Motor Vehicles
- Email and social media accounts



## OTHER WISE PREPARATIONS

It is important to plan what you want to have happen with everything you own—in legal terms your “property”—after you die. This is called estate planning. Generally if you die without a will (or other legal means of transferring your property), what you own will be distributed under the state’s “intestacy” laws. These laws require that all your property pass to certain specified relatives, namely, a legally-recognized spouse, children, parents, and siblings—in that order.

Add at least one of your heirs as a signer on your checking account and on your safe deposit box. It makes things really easy at the bank if your heirs’ signatures are already on the documents. This action may have some tax implications, depending on the size of the account.

If there’s a vehicle to be inherited, the California DMV provides a downloadable “Affidavit of Transfer of Title without Probate” PDF form to fill out that does not require a notary. Vehicles and vessels may be transferred if 40 days have elapsed since the death of the registered or legal owner.

If there’s real estate property to be inherited, your heirs should immediately file the form to not have the property reassessed. Otherwise, they will have to pay the assessed tax on the current value of the house, which could be vastly different than what you paid for it. Even if your heirs do not sell the property, a real estate agent can assist with the steps involved in inheriting property.

If you have substantial amounts of property, you can often obtain significant benefits for your surviving beneficiaries by more extensive estate planning than simply writing a will. You may wish to consider establishing a revocable living trust or a charitable trust. A lawyer can help you with this.

Should you wish to make a bequest to San Francisco Zen Center, please call the Development Office at 415-354-0354 for further information.

## RELEVANT RESOURCES

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### BOOKS

*A Graceful Farewell: Putting Your Affairs in Order* by Maggie Watson, Cypress House, 2006. A workbook/DVD with simple instructions to help organize important practical and emotional decisions—made together with loved ones—about death and dying.

*A Year to Live: How to Live this Year as If It Were Your Last* by Stephen Levine, New York: Bell Tower, 1997. If you only have one year left to live, what would you do differently? Drawing upon his experiences as a counselor for the terminally ill, the author relates his own experiences and emotions in a yearlong experiment in “conscious living.”

*Awake at the Bedside: Contemplative Teachings on Palliative and End-of-Life Care* by Koshin Paley Ellison and Matt Weingast, Wisdom, 2016. This collection of essays and poems by pioneers of palliative and end-of-life care offers wisdom that will challenge, uplift, comfort, and change the way we think about death.

*Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End* by Atul Gawande, Metropolitan Books, 2014. A practicing surgeon addresses his profession’s ultimate limitation, arguing that quality of life is the desired goal for patients and families. Gawande offers examples of freer, more socially fulfilling models for assisting the infirm and dependent elderly, and he explores the varieties of hospice care to demonstrate that a person’s last weeks or months may be rich and dignified.

*Being with Dying: Cultivating Compassion and Fearlessness in the Presence of Death* by Joan Halifax, Shambhala, Boston, 2008. A source of wisdom for all those who are charged with a dying person’s care, facing their own death, or wishing to explore and contemplate the transformative power of the dying process from a Zen Buddhist perspective.

*Buddhist Care for the Dying and Bereaved* by Jonathan S. Watts and Yoshiharu Tomatsu, Simon and Schuster 2012. Contains comprehensive overviews of the best of Buddhist hospice programs, drawn from diverse Buddhist traditions, and written by practitioners who developed and applied traditional Buddhist practices to preparing for death, attending the dying, and comforting the bereaved.

*Dying Well: The Prospect for Growth at the End of Life* by Ira Byock, Penguin & Putnam, 1997. A hospice doctor's stories of dying patients and their families, which dramatically illustrate his belief that the transition to death can be one of life's most meaningful experiences. Includes descriptions of the important emotional work that can be accomplished in the final months, weeks, and even days of life.

*Facing Death and Finding Hope: A Guide to the Emotional and Spiritual Care of the Dying* by Christine Longaker, New York: Doubleday, 1998. Identifies the typical fears and struggles experienced by the dying and their families. Presents the "Four Tasks of Living and Dying," using the Tibetan Buddhist perspective on death to provide a framework of meaning that can be widely applied.

*How We Die*, Sherwin Newland, A. A. Knopf, 1993. The author, an experienced surgeon, believes that we will be less frightened by the prospect of death if we understand it as a normal biological process. He describes the death process for six major killers: heart disease, stroke, AIDS, cancer, accidents/suicide, and Alzheimer's disease.

*Japanese Death Poems Written by Zen Monks and Haiku Poets on the Verge of Death*, Yoel Hoffman, editor, Tuttle, 1986. Consciousness of death is very much a part of life in Japan, where the approach of death has given rise to a centuries-old tradition of writing *jisei*, or the "death poem." Such a poem is often written in the very last moments of the poet's life. Here are hundreds of Japanese death poems, many with a commentary describing the circumstances of the poet's death, translated into English.

*Journeying East: Conversations on Aging and Dying* by Victoria Jean Dimidjian, Parallax Press, 2004. Buddhist spiritual leaders discuss aging and dying, including original interviews with Ram Dass, Frank Ostaseski, Norman Fisher, Thich Nhat Hanh, Joan Halifax, Rodney Smith, and others. Contains nine meditations on aging and death and a reading list.

*Living by Vow: A Practical Introduction to Eight Essential Zen Chants and Texts* by Shohaku Okumura, Wisdom Publications, 2012. Explores Zen's rich tradition of chanted liturgy and the powerful ways that such chants support meditation and walking the Zen path in daily life.

*Living in the Light of Death: On the Art of Being Truly Alive* by Larry Rosenberg, Shambhala, 2000. Rosenberg, a Vipassana teacher, teaches the practice of *marana-sati*, or death awareness. Rosenberg brings forth some of his best anecdotes from his stays in foreign lands (and other painful experiences) to illustrate that aging, illness, and death can not only try us, but liberate us as well.

*No Death, No Fear, Comforting Wisdom for Life* by Thich Nhat Hanh, Riverhead Books, 2002. With simplicity and clarity, Thich Nhat Hanh presents his understanding of death along with teachings on transforming grief and accompanying the dying.

*The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* by Sogyal Rinpoche, Harper Collins, 1994. This commentary on the ancient classic, *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, provides a Tibetan view of the process of death and describes practices for conscious dying.

*What Is Zen? Plain Talk for a Beginner's Mind* by Norman Fischer and Susan Moon, Shambhala Publications, 2016. An accessible and enjoyable introduction to Zen Buddhist practice in question and answer format. Makes Zen especially easy to understand and also useful as a reference.

*When Breath Becomes Air* by Paul Kalanithi, Deckle Edge, 2016. A moving chronicle of a naïve medical student "possessed," as he wrote, "by the question of what, given that all organisms die, makes a virtuous and meaningful life?" who becomes a neurosurgeon, and finally a patient and new father confronting his own mortality.

*Who Dies? An Investigation of Conscious Living and Conscious Dying* by Stephen Levine, Anchor Books, 1992. This is one of the first books to show the reader how to open to the immensity of living with death, to participate fully in life as the perfect preparation for whatever may come next. Levine provides calm compassion rather than a frightening melodrama of death.

*Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* by Suzuki Roshi. Edited by Trudy Dixon. Published April 1973 by Weatherhill. Published June 2011 by Shambhala. In the 40 years since its original publication, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* has become one of the great modern spiritual classics, much beloved, much reread, and much recommended as the best first book to read on Zen.

## FILMS

*Departures* by Yojiro Takita and starring Masahiro Motoki, Ryoko Hirose, and Tsutomu Yamazaki, 2008. Loosely based on *Coffinman*, a memoir by Shinmon Aoki, the film follows a young man who returns to his hometown after a failed career as a cellist and stumbles across work as a 'nokanshi'—a traditional Japanese ritual mortician.

*Ram Dass Fierce Grace* offers an engrossing, poignant meditation on consciousness, healing, and the unexpected grace of aging. Features intimate glimpses of Ram Dass today, as he continues to remake his life since being—in his words—"stroked" in 1997.

*States of Grace*, a documentary film by Helen S. Cohen and Mark Lipman, 2014. This film intimately captures the profound transformation of an esteemed physician and her family in the wake of a life-changing accident. Filmed in their home community, Green Gulch Farm Zen Center.

## WEBSITES

CELEBRATIONSOFLIFE.NET describes ways to share your values and life lessons with your friends, family, and community.

DEATHCAFE.COM gathers people, often strangers, together to eat cake, drink tea, and discuss death.

FINALPASSAGES.ORG is an educational institute and resource center dedicated to conscious dying, and a holistic, green, compassionate, and dignified alternative to conventional funeral and after-death practices.

METTAINSTITUTE.ORG provides innovative educational programs and professional training that foster mindful and compassionate end-of-life care.

NHPCO.ORG advocates for the terminally ill and provides educational materials to enhance understanding of hospice and palliative care.

NOLO.COM provides self-help legal books and forms for wills and estate planning.

SEVENPONDS.COM is a website which contains comprehensive resources for options around death and dying.

SFEOL.ORG is a membership and networking group open to organizations, individuals, and students involved in end-of-life care in the San Francisco Bay Area.

SFZC.ORG is a Zen practice place for a diverse population of students, visitors, lay people, priests, and monks guided by teachers who follow in Suzuki Roshi's style of warm hand and heart to warm hand and heart.

SZBA.ORG facilitates trust, respect, communication, ethical conduct, and education among the many sanghas of Soto Zen in the western world.

ZENHOSPICE.ORG offers services in end-of-life care, volunteer programs, and education.

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