

ZCLA OFFERINGS FOR AFTER YOU DIE (and shortly before)

Introduction. In the Zen tradition, we emphasize the intrinsic aspect of death by saying, “When you die, just die.” What happens afterwards? “Don’t know.” The Tibetan tradition, on the other hand, gives a precise description of the death process in the Bardo of Becoming (see the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*).

While the deceased is traversing the bardos after death, there will be a lot to do for those remaining — disposing the body, dealing with coroner or police, finding a funeral home, notifying family and friends, arranging a funeral and/or memorial service, disposing of belongings, and all the many tasks that accompany the passing of a life.

Many people, both known and unknown to us, will have a hand in taking care of things connected with one’s death. Just as in life, death is unique to each of us and, at the same time, is inextricably interfused with all the lives around us. Please practice this interconnectedness now. The more you do, the easier it will be to express gratitude. For those who wish no memorial or funeral, consider that others will want to gather to honor you and express their appreciation for your life.

Often people say that funerals are for the living. The primary spiritual context for Buddhist memorials and/or funerals is the guidance of the deceased to enlightenment and a good rebirth. In addition, those remaining are called upon to face the reality of impermanence, to honor the uniqueness of each life; to express gratitude; to experience the mystery of lives’ interconnectedness, and to celebrate community. Even if no one comes to the funeral, the whole universe bears witness to each passing.

At ZCLA, we offer intimate rites of passage at the time of death. These can range from the simplest of memorial services to more elaborate funerals. These rites are largely

based on those of the Soto Zen School. Adaptations are naturally occurring. For the priests, learning the rites of passage is an ongoing study.

The circumstances of death are unique to each individual. Whether death comes through an accident or after a long illness attended by family, in Buddhism, there is no right or wrong way to die. There is no good or bad death; no dying well or not well. Just as in life, death intimately unfolds in accordance with causes and conditions. It is important for us to remember this.

There are an infinite number of variations in the following procedures and combinations of what can be done and what may be appropriate for any given situation. In Soto Zen, there are also differences in the funeral procedures for those who have received jukai and tokudo.

At ZCLA, we work closely with family members or their representative to create the appropriate arrangements and ceremonies. A simple overview follows.

When someone is ill.

ZCLA’s Prayer List. You may request that a name be placed on the Center’s prayer list in the case of illness or injury. The name is recited daily during the third service from Monday through Saturday.

Your Daily Prayer List. In the case of long-term illness, you may wish to include the person on your daily personal prayer list.

Prayer Chain. In the case of surgeries or medical crises, a prayer chain, using the *Enmei Jukku Kannogyo (Ten Phrase Kanzeon Prolonging Life Chant)*, can be organized among the Sangha members. The chains are on a prearranged day with a time frame particular to the situation.

When near death. A constant and steady practice, right here now, will enable us to continue to return to whatever is happening as the death process unfolds. Practice now to be with life as it is.

If circumstances allow, sangha members may practice in the room by sitting in zazen, practicing quiet breathing, and/or offering chants, such as the *Heart Sutra*, the *Shosai Myo Kichijo Dharani (Disaster-Preventing Dharani)*, a favorite mantra, or whatever is helpful. One may wish to have a Zen teacher and/or Center priest present and make atonement (it's best to make atonement a regular part of your life practice.) One may wish to receive jukai or tokudo before or after death.

Immediately after death. A service can be done at the bedside. If this is not possible at the hospital, the service can be done at home, with or without the body.

The service typically consists of chanting from the last sermon of Buddha and the *Shari Raimon (Homage to Buddha's Relics)* and a dedication of merits to the newly deceased, so that the fading of the elements, of causes and conditions, and the place of one's next life is beautified. The body is regarded as buddha's body. Offerings of incense, flowers, candlelight, food and so forth can be made.

People may sit with the body following a death. Hospitals allow a limited time. Arrangements can be made with funeral homes as well. The traditional Buddhist practice is three days, but it is not always possible to do so. A useful refrain when working with funeral homes is, "It is our religious practice to do such and such."

Washing and clothing of the body. The body can be ritually cleaned with new white wash cloths and water made fragrant with flowers and herbs. Usually this is done by intimate family. Sometimes this can be done at the funeral home, which will provide you with "protective" clothing. A brief service can be done and background music played at the time of washing. The body is then dressed. At this time, it is appropriate to dress the body with rakusu and/or okesa. The body is then placed in a coffin. (Note: there is something very humble about the cardboard coffin,

especially when cremation will follow and the casket will not be carried.)

The night before the funeral. People can gather and share stories about the deceased. A Dharma talk or teaching may also be offered. At this time, jukai can be given. A service can also be held in front of the casket. If this is not done, elements of this service can be incorporated into the funeral service.

The funeral (with the body). In a more elaborate funeral, there is a simple service when moving the casket. The funeral service includes an invocation by the officiant, Dharma words (history of person spoken poetically), a short verse to awaken the dead person in order to go straight to enlightenment and not get lost and confused, chants, incense offerings, eulogies, remarks by family and friends, and whatever other elements the deceased and/or family want. The dedication sends the deceased off and expresses the assembly's respect.

At the cremation or burial site. Before closing the casket, a beautiful practice is to cover the body with flowers. The rakusu and/or okesa may be cremated or buried with person, as well as the kechimiyaku (lineage chart) The brief service includes the Names of Buddha and the *Daihishin Dharani* or the *Verse of the Universal Gateway* chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, with a dedication of merits that the deceased persons next life be beautiful. There is opportunity for family and friends to bear witness (pre-arrange with mortuary) as the casket is slid into the oven or lowered into ground.

In Japan, the family collects the relics from the oven and places it into urns. In actual practice, this is a wholesome and loving act. This is rarely allowed in the United States.

Final place of rest. A service is done after burial or after cremation when the relics (cremains) are collected and brought home. The brief service includes the *Shari Raimon (Homage to Buddha's Relics)* with a brief dedication. This service may also be repeated at the time of scattering of cremains. Please note: ZCLA does not store cremains except for those of Abbots.

Memorial Services. At the time of death, the family may have an intimate funeral and opt for a memorial service at a later time for tributes and remembering. The **basic memorial** includes the photograph of deceased (do you have a good photo of yourself?!), a plaque with name and dates of birth and death (regarded as the body of the person when no cremains are present), the offering of Dharma words, a food offering, chanting the *Daibishin Dharani* (*Great Compassion Dharani*), an incense offering by the assembly, and a dedication. There is an opportunity for family and friends to share reflections and tributes. If the memorial service is the only rite being done, it can include elements of the funeral service, as well as the wishes of the deceased and close family.

During the period following a death, a **memorial service** after disposition of the body usually consists of chanting the *Daibishin Dharani* (*Great Compassion Dharani*), incense offerings by the assembly, and a dedication of merit. We also mention the name of the deceased and number of days of passing in the second service dedication.

In Buddhism, the **49 days following a death** has special significance. This period is the Bardo of Becoming leading to rebirth on or around the 49th day. During this time, the following practices can be offered:

- The family does a daily service at their home altars. This time is also used for reflection on the life of the deceased and, perhaps more importantly, on one's own life and death. When someone intimate to us passes, this can also be a time of integrating the deceased into oneself.
- The mention of the deceased in the second service during the first week and then every 7 days until the 49th day.
- A memorial service at ZCLA on the 49th day. Please note that it does not have to be on the exact day. Other markers include the 100th day, one year, and then annually.

*Should the deceased suffer the unfortunate consequence of falling into the hungry ghost realm, *The Gate of Sweet Nectar*

will lead the deceased back to the karmic realm.

You may wish to enter the name of the deceased in the Center's **Book of the Past**. This ensures that she/he will be perpetually remembered annually on their death month and during the annual obon remembrances. Dana is given for all memorials and entry into the Book of the Past. Please contact the office for the suggested fees.

Costs. Monks traditionally carried their funeral money with them. Even keeping costs to a minimum, your death will incur costs of several thousand dollars. ZCLA's fee depends on how much service is provided and what is reasonable for the family's situation. Just as no one is turned away from practice for lack of funds, sangha members will receive appropriate rites. ☺

Zen Master Ikkyu's Poem

*When I die,
I won't go anywhere.
But when you call me,
I won't answer!*

Homage to Buddha's Relics

(Shari Raimon)

Wholeheartedly pay homage to the ten
thousand virtues of the absolute
Shakyamuni Tathagata.
Buddha's relics are body and mind.
Body-mind is the Dharma body of original
nature,
Is the stupa of the dharma realm.
We reverently bow. Buddha appears for my
sake.
Buddha enters me and I enter Buddha.
Owing to Buddha, we are maintaining it.
I attain enlightenment, and with Buddha's
miraculous powers all creations are
benefited, and raise the enlightened mind.
Practice the Bodhisattva's practice, the great
wisdom of equality.
Now I respectfully bow.