

Prayers and Practice for the Deceased in Kadampa Buddhism

When someone is dying, or has recently died, we often feel there is little or nothing we can now do for that person. The practice of transference of consciousness, known as ‘powa’, is the most meaningful gift we can give to the deceased. It can be done either by a group of practitioners or individually. The purpose of doing this is to lead countless deceased beings to the Pure Land of a Buddha.

We understand that throughout this world millions of humans and billions of animals die every day from so many different causes. If these living beings have the opportunity to take rebirth in a Buddha’s Pure Land they will attain permanent liberation from suffering and experience pure and everlasting happiness. Our practice of this powa offers them this precious opportunity.

We perform this powa practice on behalf of those who have recently died, traditionally within forty-nine days of their death and involves some simple rituals described in the book *Living Meaningfully, Dying Joyfully* by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, or in the prayer book (sadhana) called *Powa Ceremony*. Traditionally a shrine is set up with offerings (for example, food, flowers, candles). These are ideally purchased with money from the estate of the deceased or by someone with close karma on their behalf. It is helpful to have a photo of the deceased on the shrine as an object of focus.

When we engage in this practice in a group, it can begin with a senior Dharma teacher giving some practical teachings about how to develop compassion for all living beings. When we engage in this practice individually, we should generate compassion for all living beings by remembering how they experience immense suffering. Then, with compassion for all the deceased throughout the world, we perform the following stages of the ceremony:

- 1 On behalf of the deceased, we accumulate a great collection of virtue and merit. We do this by making prostrations and extensive offerings, so that the deceased gather the necessary conditions to take rebirth in the Pure Land.
- 2 On behalf of the deceased, by sincerely making requests to Buddha Vajrasattva with the recitation of the hundred-letter mantra, we purify the four main obstacles to their taking rebirth in the Pure Land of a Buddha.
- 3 Through the power of our compassionate intention, strong prayer, and concentration on the practice, we transfer the consciousness of the deceased to the Pure Land of the Buddha of Compassion so that they will experience pure and everlasting happiness.
- 4 Through the power of our concentration on the final special ritual practice, together with the mantra recitation, we create a special auspiciousness for the deceased to attain permanent liberation from samsaric rebirth.

We then conclude this powa practice with the dedication prayers.

If you would like more information, or wish to schedule a powa ceremony for someone, please contact Kadampa Meditation Center Arizona at 520-441-1617.