

Phowa — the transference of consciousness at the moment of death'

Life's most awesome event is death, and death comes to all without regard to wealth, beauty, intelligence or fame. One could say. "We all have a terminal illness, it's called life."

*Death is inevitable, but how you die -terrified and confused,
or with confidence and spiritual mastery is within your control.*

Phowa, or 'transference of consciousness at the time of death' is the simplest and most direct method to attain enlightenment. One of the six Yogas of Naropa, it is taught by all Tibetan Buddhist traditions; the Drikung Kagyu Lineage, however, holds the special power to transfer one's consciousness to the Pureland of Buddha Amitabha. In Tibet, the famous Drikung Phowa was given every twelve years by the two Head Lamas of the Drikung Lineage. HE Choeje Ayang Rinpoche first started to teach Phowa in India in 1963 and the west in 1975 following the instructions from his root master HH the 16th Gyalwang Karmapa Rangjung Rigpe Dorje.

It is also one of the methods to enable one to reach Buddha Amitabha's pure land. Through a combination of breath, mantra and visualization techniques applied at the time of death, the consciousness is ejected from the crest aperture, circumventing the Bardos and avoiding rebirth in the six realms of cyclic existence. From this gate one's consciousness can be transferred directly to the domain of Amitabha Buddha (Dewachen, the western Buddha field). Naropa said, "There are nine gates (ordinary aperture called buga) which are of the world, but there is only one which is the gate of Mahamudra (nirvana). If you shut the nine gates then you will get the path of liberation without any doubt."

In the words of the Marpa the translator, "If you study Phowa, then at the time when death is approaching, you will know no despair. If beforehand you have become accustomed to the path of phowa, then at the time of death you will be full of cheerful confidence." It is taught that one does not return to the samsaric realms after entering Dewachen, and that one can quickly and easily achieve enlightenment from that realm. Thus, Phowa is alike an insurance that this attainment will follow death.

This practice is especially relevant in the present day, when most of us lack the luxury of lengthy solitary meditative practice. Because of this lack, as well as the overwhelming path that is simple and direct, and which enables us to transform the stresses of modern life into a vital force that cuts through attachment to illusory objects and awakens in us the realization of our own Buddha nature. Life is very short and can end suddenly without warning. When death comes we have no escape, neither our accumulated wealth nor our dear ones can help us ... Nothing can, except the precious teaching.

This comprehensive course on both the Nyingma and Drikung Phowa practices include extensive teachings on the moment of death, the intermediate state (Bardo), purification practice of Vajrasattva and many other important related topics as well as detailed meditation instructions, empowerments and practice sessions. The blessings of all these auspicious circumstances combined with the profound practice, the special Phowa transmission lineage, the sacred place and the confidence and devotion of the students causes many people to have powerful and transformative experience that deeply enrich their spiritual lives.

In 1983, the 11th IARP Convention was held in Japan on the theme of 'Karma and Reincarnation'. One of the speakers was HE Ayang Rinpoche who was sent to represent HH the 14th Dalai Lama. Rinpoche gave a lecture on the Tibetan Phowa Practice. He agreed to participate in an experiment to scientifically investigate this meditation. The experiment was conducted at the Institute for Religious Psychology. Rinpoche's EEG, GSR and meridian functions were monitored before, during and after the performance of Phowa. Reports on the experiment were written by Dr H Motoyama and Dr .T Fujiki, chief researcher at the Institute and also an EEG specialist in the Department of Psychiatry at the Nippon Medical School. A very interesting book has been compiled and is available in English and Japanese. A sampling of their conclusion follows:

"It is empirically known, that super consciousness and enlightenment can only be attained by breaking through the conscious mind, the latter functions in close connection with the cerebral cortex. The frequent emergence of slow 0 waves at the time of the phowa meditation seems to validate this. Breaking off the conscious function to awaken in the superconscious."

Dr Fujiki supports Dr H Motoyama's view after explaining the changes in Rinpoche's EEG: "The suppressed function of the frontal lobe suggests that conscious function is stopped during the phowa meditation. Concentration and meditation alters the state of consciousness and enables the individual to awaken in a super conscious state beyond the limitations of individual experience."

According to Dr. Motoyama, when the mind which has been functioning within the framework of individual existence stops its total dependence on the physical body (especially the brain), it starts to function in the wider realm of being beyond time and space. The psycho-physiological changes which Rinpoche showed during the Phowa meditation suggests that mental function in the non-physical realm must be taken into consideration in the field of psychosomatic medicine.