



The Heart's Utmost Need

*Urging Myself and Others
to Remember Impermanence*

by

Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo

Translated by Lama Zopa Rinpoche



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- Oh dear! Oh no! Kind guru,
Please look at how I, a pitiful one, behave,
And look with compassion at mindless me,
Who has cheated myself my whole life.
- I must keep this heart advice for myself—
The Heart's Utmost Need—in the core of my heart.
Don't be distracted! Don't be distracted!
I'll reflect upon the state of my life from the depths of my heart.

- From beginningless saṃsāra, which hasn't ended up to now,
Though I've experienced numberless cycles of rebirth—
Just variations of happiness and suffering—
I haven't achieved even the slightest benefit for myself.
- Though at present I've obtained the freedoms and riches so
difficult to find,
Until now they've been meaningless, empty, and wasted.
Now, if I really love myself, it's time to practice virtuous activities,
The essence of my happiness beyond this life up to enlightenment.
- A fool who pretends to be capable, smart, and clever
While clinging to the child's play of this life's appearances,
Suddenly I'm overcome by the terrifying Lord of Death
And, filled with despair, I'm unable to bear it.

This is going to happen to me!

- Thinking “I won’t die, I won’t die for quite some time,”
While I’m distracted by the never-ending activities of this life,
Suddenly the terrifying Lord of Death arrives
And announces, “Now it’s time for you to die.”
This is going to happen to me!
- Though I put effort into making arrangements saying “tomorrow”
and “tomorrow,”
Now, suddenly, I have to go.
This is going to happen to me!
- Without freedom, leaving behind in disarray
All my unfinished work, food, and drink, I have to depart.
This is going to happen to me!

- I fall like an old tree trunk upon my last bed,
Which I made and slept on just today,
And, unable to turn over,
I tug convulsively at my clothing and friends.
This is going to happen to me!
- Though I'm completely wrapped in my last inner and outer clothes,
I lack freedom to wear them other than just today.
When I become as rigid as earth and stone,
I see the beginning of my own corpse.
This is going to happen to me!
- Though I struggle pitifully to say
My final words and last testament, and to express my sorrow,
When, with my dry tongue, I can't make others understand,
I'm overwhelmed by intense despair.
This is going to happen to me!

- Though others put my last food—holy substances and relics—
Into my mouth with a trickle of water,
Since I'm unable to take even a single sip,
It remains in the mouth of my corpse.
This is going to happen to me!
- Though encircled by loving and distressed relatives and friends—
Those close to my heart, heart friends, and those I keep in my heart—
Crying and clinging sadly to me at the ending of our being together,
Now I have to separate from them forever.
This is going to happen to me!
- Though I'm tossed by waves of horrific hallucinations
And overwhelmed by excruciating, unbearable torment,
In this pitiful state where there's nothing I can do,
The appearances of this life disappear.
This is going to happen to me!

- With unbearable compassion, my guru and spiritual companions
Remind me to generate a critical virtuous thought.
Even when with loving minds they do so in my ear,
It only adds to my intense despair.

This is going to happen to me!

- With a rasping exhalation from my throat,
The movement of my breath builds to a frenzy
And then breaks like the string of a violin;
The end of this life comes to a close.

This is going to happen to me!

- This cherished and dear lovely body
Is called “corpse,” disgusting, rotten, and putrid.

This is going to happen to me!

- It's time for this body, which can't bear even rough bedding,
To be laid out naked on the cemetery ground.
This is going to happen to me!
- It's time for this body, which can't bear even [the prick of] a thorn,
To have its flesh cut to pieces [and thrown to vultures and dogs].
This is going to happen to me!
- It's time for this body, which can't bear even tiny fleas and lice,
To be devoured by vultures and dogs till there's nothing left.
This is going to happen to me!
- It's time for this “holy corpse,” clothed in fine [tantric] dress,
To be placed inside the cremation oven.
This is going to happen to me! *

* In the Tibetan tradition, a high lama's holy corpse is clothed in tantric dress and then cremated.
Here Phabongkha Rinpoche is referring in particular to himself.

- It's time for this body, which can't bear even the fire of [a stick of] incense,
To be burned amid a mass of flames.

This is going to happen to me!

- It's time for all my flesh and bones, entering into the roaring flames,
To be burned and then just the ashes of the bones to be gathered together.

This is going to happen to me!

- It's time for this body, which can't bear even thick clothing,
To be buried in a narrow pit in the earth.

This is going to happen to me!

- It's time for "the late" or "the deceased" to be said
At the beginning or end of my sweet name.

This is going to happen to me!

- It's time for [my room] to be filled with the sounds of the weeping
Of my affectionate close friends and my servants.

This is going to happen to me!

- It's time for my hats, clothes, and possessions
To be distributed in every direction, with nothing left.

This is going to happen to me!

- It's time for me, in total despair, to reach alone
The treacherous passage of the intermediate state.

This is going to happen to me!

- It's time for the terror of the four frightening enemies—
The four elements turning against me—to suddenly strike me.

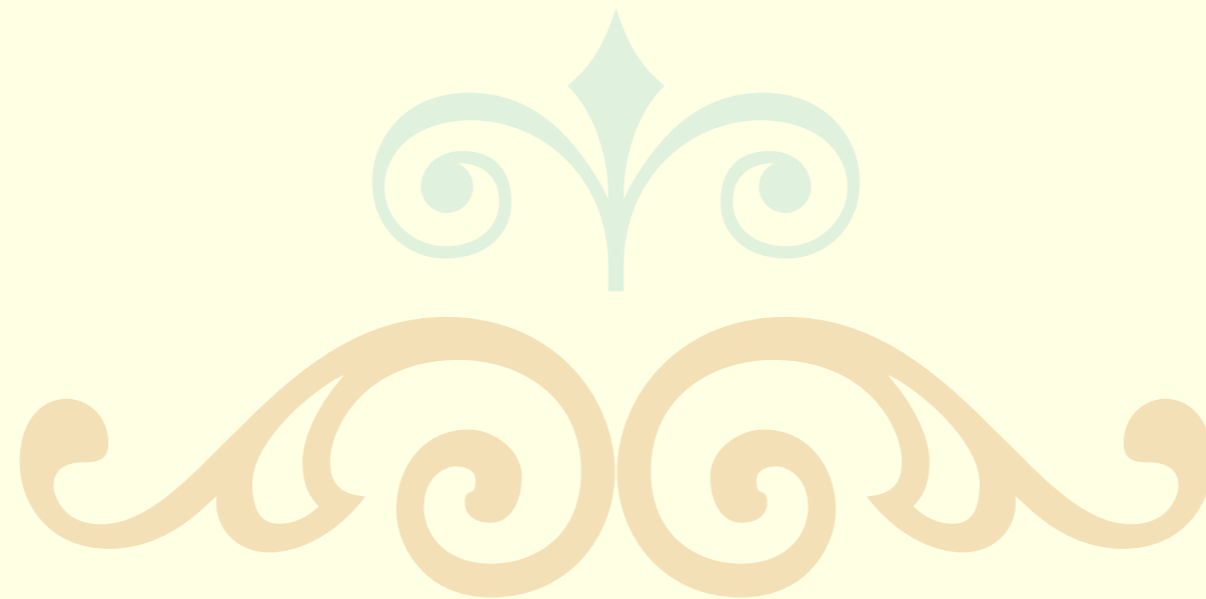
This is going to happen to me!

- When trapped in darkness at the bottom of a mountain gorge,
I have the appearance of being crushed by a furious rain of earth
—*what to do?*
- When caught in the whirlpool of a vast ocean,
I have the appearance of being swept away by violent, swirling
waves—*what to do?*
- When I experience my heart and ears being split open
By the roaring and raging of a great fiery inferno—*what to do?*
- When enveloped in the dark winds of the end of the eon,
I have the terrifying appearance of being blown away—*what to do?*
- When driven by the fierce red winds of karma,
I'm swallowed up by terrifying darkness—*what to do?*

- When bound with a lasso by Yama's messengers,
I'm led away trembling in despair—*what to do?*
- When I'm tortured in so many detestable ways
By ox- and scorpion-headed karmic guardians—*what to do?*
- When I'm before the Lord of Death, the King of Yamas,
As he weighs up the white and black, my virtue and nonvirtue
—*what to do?*
- When Yama exposes the deception of my having spent
My human life in attachment, hatred, and hypocrisy—*what to do?*
- When, at Yama's court of law, the punishment that is the ripened result
Of the negative actions I have done is meted out—*what to do?*

- When my body is stretched out naked
On the red-hot iron ground in the fires of hell—*what to do?*
- When my body is cut to pieces by a rain of sharp weapons,
Still I have to experience it without dying—*what to do?*
- When I'm cooked in molten iron until my flesh falls away and my
bones disintegrate,
Still I have to experience it without dying—*what to do?*
- When my body and fire burn inseparably,
Still I don't die—*what to do?*
- When struck by a fierce blizzard in frozen wastes,
My body cracks into a hundred thousand pieces—*what to do?*

- When I fall into the miserable state of a hungry and thirsty preta, I have to remain there starving for many years—*what to do?*
- When I become a stupid, mute, unfortunate animal, I'm eaten alive or eat others alive—*what to do?*
- When the extremely unbearable sufferings of the lower realms Actually befall me—*what to do?*



- Now, don't be distracted! Quickly, quickly, right this moment, It's time to steel myself from the depths of my heart.
- Since it's not only the right time [to practice] but almost too late, Right now, right now, quickly focus [on Dharma]!
- The instructions of the sole father, the kind guru;
The essence of the views and writings of Victorious Pure Wisdom,
Tsongkhapa;
The practice of the complete pure path of sūtra and tantra:
It's time to place authentic experience of them in my mindstream.
- I'll one-pointedly apply my three doors to practice to see who is faster:
Me in my practice to reach the essence of my final goal—
The works of self and others—as much as I can each day,
Or Yama, the Lord of Death.

Colophons

Original Colophon:

In dependence on earlier being urged by Ngawang Nyandrag, who single-pointedly dedicated his life to practice, and being persistently urged by the treasurer of the Potala, the supreme Pelzhi Kungo Sonam Kunga, who recently once again urged me with a melodious voice, I, with the incarnation name of Phabongkha, wrote *The Heart's Utmost Need: Urging Myself and Others to Remember Impermanence* at Tashi Dechen Monastery at Thru in the district of Kong. May the aims of transmigratory beings succeed!

Publisher's Colophon:

Translated by Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Gelong Jampa Gendun at Chenrezig Institute on the auspicious occasion of its twentieth anniversary, September 1994. May whatever merit has been accumulated through the translation of these profound holy vajra words of Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo–Heruka in human form—immediately and completely fulfill all his vast and profound wishes. May anyone who touches, sees, hears, remembers, or practices this text receive the blessings of holy Phabongkha in their mindstream. May they and all other sentient beings realize impermanence and death—the basis of the Hīnayāna, Pāramitāyāna, and Vajrayāna. By quickly actualizing bodhicitta, may they all swiftly reach buddhahood. May goodness and virtue increase!

Edited by Ven. Ailsa Cameron, 1994 for Wisdom Publications and originally published as *Heart-Spoon: Encouragement through Recollecting Impermanence*. Extensively revised by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Kopan Monastery, Nepal, 2020. Edited by Ven. Joan Nicell and Ven. Ailsa Cameron with the help of Ven. Tenzin Gache, and further reviewed by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, 2022.

