

Journey of the Soul

Lesson 9

Conscious Death and Rainbow Bodies

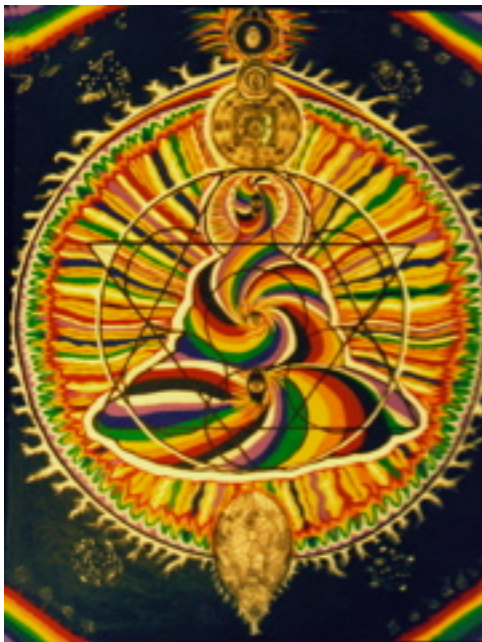
Elizabeth Carman, Ph.D.

The most beneficial inner experiences can occur at death according to Tibetan Buddhists. That is when someone can use death to gain spiritual realization.

Death occurs without a break in consciousness. When about to expire, the adept enters an ecstatic meditation for 3 to 7 days or longer.



Tibetan letter "A",
the symbol of body of light



Immersed in meditation, fully conscious, he discards the body. Consciousness leaves and the body collapses like a marionette without a support. The body does not decay until long after clinical death. It has been transformed by being saturated and under the impact of great spiritual forces.

These forces retard natural decay. Rainbows may surround the adept at death and his body emits a pleasant odor.

Rainbow Body and Masters of Consciousness

Masters of the science of death leave no corpse behind. They transmute the physical body into a pure body, known as the rainbow body, or body of light. They dissolve the body back into the light essence of the elements that created it. The physical body dissolves into light and disappears, the highest body attainable within cyclic existence. In the rainbow body the master is free to exist for aeons, possessed with ability of appearing and disappearing throughout the Universe. All of these signs signify the status of a great saint.

When the enlightened master dies, the doors of birth into the six realms are closed unless he decides to be born again for the benefit of others.



Milarepa (1052-1135)

Milarepa, Tibet's greatest yogi, spent nine years in solitary meditation and transcended ego attachments. The "cotton-clad Yogi" became fully enlightened in one lifetime.

At death, Milarepa dissolved the five gross elements of his body back into their essences, five-colored light. Milarepa's material body dissolved into

light and disappeared completely. Hair and nails were the only remains. He acquired a rainbow body. Just as the space within and without mingle when a vase breaks, so his body and mind dissolved into the emptiness of dharmakaya.

The Hidden Yogi

S. Namgyal was a stone carver of mantras and sacred texts in eastern Tibet. He was a “hidden yogi” because few people realized he had been practicing a teaching from a great master since youth. Near the end of life, he went into the mountains and chanted songs he had composed.



In 1952 at seventy-nine, the hidden yogi became ill. Surprisingly, he became increasingly happy. His family called in doctors as conditions worsened. His son advised him to recall spiritual teachings. But he smiled and replied, “I’ve forgotten them all and anyway, there’s nothing to remember. Everything is illusion, but I am confident that all is well.”

Before he died, the hidden yogi had requested family to refrain from moving his body for seven days. Accordingly, following death, they wrapped the corpse and left it undisturbed in a small room in the home. Tibetan Buddhists typically refrain from disturbing a corpse for at least three days, a delicate period for self-liberation. Consciousness is still in the body. Violent handling of the body may disturb the departure of consciousness.

Following his departure from the body, lamas and monks visited to do spiritual practices for him. Everyone noticed the yogi’s body was becoming smaller day-by- day. At the same time, a rainbow colored light surrounded the home. Finally on the eighth day after his death, the undertakers arrived to collect his body for the funeral. When they undid its coverings, nothing remained but his nails and hair.



Karma Gyurmed (1794-1851) - Sixth Throne Holder of Palyul monastery

Eastern Tibet is home of the Palyul monastery which has hosted thousands of beings who achieved the rainbow body and other profound accomplishments. Many accounts exist of these yogis flying through space to propagate and receive dharma teachings.

Much of Karma's life was spent in solitary meditation retreats. Visions of an assembly of seventy-five high beings frequently appeared. At other times, Padma Sambhava appeared with instructions for performing sacred ceremonies.

When Karma was 58, enlightened beings manifested in every direction of space. The next day he instructed disciples to arrange offerings for his passing. He dissolved his mind into the great sphere of truth. His body shrank to 18 inches long, while his complexion remained fresh and life-like. Unusual cloud formations and rainbows appeared in abundance.

Prior to departing, Karma left a letter predicting his rebirth, "My incarnation will be born in Khyi-teng."



Dharma Sun of Sutra and Tantra (1854-1906)

Three years later, Karma was reborn as Dharma Sun of Sutra and Tantra. Rainbows announced his rebirth. Magnificent sounds reverberated in every direction. Spiritual beings appeared to a high lama at moment of his birth. Celestial beings arranged clouds

of offerings and declared the incarnation of Doctrine Upholder had been reborn. They prophesied he would benefit the doctrine of three Inner Yogas.

Dharma Sun took charge of Palyul monastery, presided over ceremonies and bestowed transmissions. He tried to conceal his good qualities, while emphasizing the qualities of others. He arose by three in the morning to recite his daily prayers. He performed at least 100 prostrations and circumambulations daily. He never cut his daily practice short for any reason.

On one occasion, Dharma Sun performed a ceremony involving construction of a mandala. Dharma Sun held a vajra to his heart, wrapped with a cord connected to the mandala's central vase. Apparently the connecting cord symbolized radiation of light and consciousness from the universal center to the individual. During this ceremony, nectar in the skullcups overflowed. Dharma medicine pills inside the mandala increased. The blessed pills rolled down the cord to the vajra at Dharma Sun's heart.

Dharma Sun dissolved into the exhaustless sphere of clear light at 53. During cremation, clouds in the shape of pitched tents appeared in the clear sky, releasing gentle showers of rain.



[Mahasiddha Karma Chagmed Rinpoche \(1613-1678\)](#)

During pregnancy, a divine being came to his mother in a dream. The great Protector cleared all obstacles and blessed her. On another occasion, his pregnant mother dreamed she was flying up a valley on a white horse carrying a butter lamp.

Young Mahasiddha demonstrated supernatural

abilities. He beheld visions of divinities. While at play, the child performed religious practices and created Buddhist ritualistic materials.

As early as 6 years, Mahasiddha read ancient Tibetan texts such as *Milarepa's One Hundred Thousand Songs*. On one occasion, while singing verses, he sat in full lotus posture and entered into a long meditation.

At 19, Mahasiddha renounced family life to practice dharma without distractions. He entered a monastery. One or two months every year, he devoted to solitary retreat from age 11 until 37. Auspicious visions, dreams and signs of accomplishment were everyday experiences.

At 37, he began a strict 13-year retreat. He occasionally gave empowerments and commentaries to persistent disciples through a hole in the wall of the retreat house. The retreat bore spiritual blessings. From that time, whenever he performed ceremonies, the deity of Boundless Compassion appeared. Lamas present also witnessed rainbow-like pitched tents in the sky. Sweet smells pervaded the monastery.

By 66, Mahasiddha perfected all stages of Buddhist spiritual practice. Prior to his transition, he had a pure vision of Buddha Amitabha. He was displeased that Mahasiddha had not come. Mahasiddha understood it was time to go to Dewachen (Pure Realm of Great Bliss).



Mahasiddha suddenly became severely ill. He continued to teach disciples even with physical discomfort. He condensed his mind into the heart of Buddha Amitabha. Over 150 monks performed after-death ceremonies. They constructed Mandalas

during his cremation. Everyone witnessed white clouds in

the shape of eight auspicious symbols. Rainbows, like pitched tents, mingled with clouds and filled the sky.

Numerous relics were recovered following cremation. His brain, heart, and tongue remained untouched by fire. They had sacred markings embossed upon them. Syllable AH along with clear images of Buddhist deities. Chemchog (Heruka), Gurdrag (Wrathful Guru), Drolod (Extremely Wrathful Guru) Eight auspicious symbols with images of the Deity of Boundless Compassion were embossed on his bones.

Being born in the Land of Bliss is not the same as reaching Buddhahood, total awakening. It is a liberation from samsaric worlds in which we no longer need to be reborn. The Land of Bliss is devoid of conflicting emotions and suffering. One is free of harm and fear of enemies, suffering of illness, and poverty. This is a step on the path, but not the end of the road. We still must continue to purify ourselves and accumulate merit. Buddhahood is like a far away town we would like to visit. The Land of Bliss is like a pleasant stopover on the road where we eat and refresh ourselves before starting out again.

There are many pure lands. One land for each Buddha of the five families:

- 1. Firmly Established Land of Vairocana Buddha**
- 2. Land of Pure Joy of Aksobhya Buddha**
- 3. Land of Glory of Ratnasambhava Buddha**
- 4. Land of Bliss of Amitabha Buddha**
- 5. Land of Accomplished Action of Amoghasiddhi Buddha**



Khenpo A-chos, Gelugpa monk, Kham, Tibet

Khenpo was known for faithfulness to his vows, purity, and cultivating compassion. He could teach the roughest people how to be gentler, more mindful. To be in his presence changed people.

A few days before Khenpo A-chos died in

1998, a rainbow appeared above his hut. After he died, dozens of rainbows appeared in the sky. Khenpo A-chos died lying on his right side. He wasn't sick; nothing appeared to be wrong; he was reciting the mantra OM MANI PADME HUM over and over. After his breath stopped his flesh became pinkish and started to shine. One person said it turned brilliant white.

Khenpo's body was wrapped in a yellow robe. As days passed, people observed, through the robe, that his bones and body were shrinking. They heard beautiful, mysterious music coming from the sky, and smelled perfume.

After seven days, they removed the yellow cloth; no body remained. After his death Khenpo A-chos appeared to many in visions and dreams.



Others who attained the rainbow body

**Shug-gseb rJe-btsun
Cho-nyid bzang-mo
(1852 -1953.)**

**Kenchen Tsewang
Rigdzin disappeared
alive in 1958.**

**Togden Ugyen Tendzin
Ayu Khandro (1953)¹**

**Nima Cultrim Rinpoche
Teacher of Arta Lama**

Shardza Tashi Gyaltzen