



**Funeral advice for Buddhists**  
**in the Tibetan tradition**  
*as advised by Akong Tulku Rinpoche*  
&  
**‘When I go’**  
*a summary of your wishes*



**Buddhist Funeral Services**  
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## Funeral advice for Buddhists, according to the Tibetan tradition

We hope the enclosed information will be useful to Buddhists and their carers when the time comes for them to die. Buddhists believe that consciousness survives physical death and, following an interval (bardo), rebirth will usually take place. If we are not prepared, death can be a confusing and terrifying experience. With preparation, it can be an opportunity for attaining higher rebirth or even enlightenment, so we offer this information, which includes practical arrangements as well as spiritual care, in the hope that it will help as many people as possible during this special time.

The topics covered include traditional practices performed for the dying person, main points to consider when we're dying or accompanying a Buddhist who's dying, organ donation, practical arrangements to consider and storing cremated remains at Samye Ling.

After reading, a summary of your wishes can then be contained in the enclosed 'When I go' documents and given to those close to you. These also include information to give to nurses and undertakers. It's useful to carry a summary of the information on you, as in the Buddhist 'I.D.' card (see below on page ...), since executors and funeral directives may not be readily available.

## Prayers

When someone dies in Tibet, the tradition is to ask the local Lama to come to the bedside of the deceased and perform prayers 3 times a day until an auspicious date for the sky burial; thereafter the family would sponsor prayers and food at the local monasteries for 49 days, sometimes giving as much as a third of their wealth to ensure the spiritual well-being of their relative.

Here in the west, with differing culture and resources, the following approach is emerging: we ask for prayers from suitably qualified practitioners, where possible at the bedside, alternatively, long-distance. Additionally, prayers from lineage holders are requested, where there's a strong link. These prayer requests are accompanied by a donation plus any expenses. Dharma practice cannot be given a financial value but does create the links between the donor, the prayers and the recipient. The prayers may include Powa, short Bardo prayer, Confession to the 35 Buddhas, Chöd, Amitabha and the long Amitabha puja on the 49<sup>th</sup> day. Those close to the deceased may also want to read daily from the Bardo Thodol.

The 'Simple Practices' document (page 5) is designed to be of use to everyone, whatever their level of experience.

## Main points to consider when a Buddhist dies

Death should ideally take place in a peaceful environment, with loving thoughts for our fellow beings. Of course, this isn't always possible but where there is a choice, it is strongly advised that the bedside be kept quiet and if one's mind can be drug-free, clear and aware, this would be an advantage. However, there should be no sense of failure if this isn't possible.

The person who is dying and those accompanying them, need as much stability of mind as possible. The companions should try not to agitate the dying person, nor disturb them from attending to their death mindfully but to maintain a benevolent and tranquil atmosphere.

Whilst still conscious and able to practice, one should keep one's root guru clearly in mind (the one who has pointed out the nature of mind) or one's teacher to whom one has great devotion. Also to do one's usual, most familiar practice, is beneficial.

As soon as the dying process has begun, a family member or friend who is able to be calm and compassionate, should sit at the bedside and speak gently, along the lines of: "Don't be afraid (*name*), whatever appears, it's only a projection of your mind, like a dream. There's nothing to fear, just relax and when a bright white light appears, go towards it, merge with it".

Even if an experienced practitioner isn't available, the 'Sending & Taking' or Tonglen practice is accessible to anyone who wishes to provide a peaceful presence for the dying person. (See 'Simple practices to help the dying, dead and bereaved' document). It may also be possible to play a recording of Akong Rinpoche reciting prayers at the bedside during the dying process and following death, since hearing is the last sense to go.

If the deceased had a strong connection with a local Buddhist centre or teacher, please inform them of the death as soon as possible and request prayers.

In general, the body should not be moved or touched unless necessary, so ask those who are caring for the dying person, to delay touching or washing the body for 4 hours, if at all possible – give them the document 'When a Buddhist dies' for nurses, in the 'When I go' section.

If a postmortem is required, this should be done at least 3 or 4 days after the person has passed away.

## Organ Donation?

Offering one's body for the benefit of others is the ultimate act of generosity which some Buddhists may wish to arrange. If this is the case, then all advice about non-disturbance of the body must be disregarded.

Akong Rinpoche strongly advises anyone wishing to be an organ donor, to prepare by practicing Chöd, Tonglen and the 7 Points of Mind Training on a regular basis, for which the proper permissions and transmissions should be sought.

For more information about organ donation, please see: <http://www.bts.org.uk>

Look under the 'Clinical' section and then 'Organ donation'

Also: <http://www.organdonation.nhs.uk>

## Which undertaker?

Just when your family feels least able, they are obliged to make many important decisions and choosing an undertaker within a few hours of your death, is one of them. If you can find a sympathetic local firm, it will ease the burden for them and you can make sure that the undertakers understand your wishes by giving them the 'When a Buddhist dies' document for undertakers.

## Where to take the body?

At Samye Ling, bodies are sometimes brought to the Stupa once prayers are done at the bedside and cremation paperwork (where appropriate) completed. When possible, the body rests there until the day of the funeral, with evening prayers held around the coffin.

For Buddhists who live a long way from Samye Ling, trying to maintain compassion and stability around the body wherever it happens to be, is recommended. This will help the deceased to let go and move on. See **'When a Buddhist dies' for undertakers** in the 'When I go' section & **'Simple practices to help the dying'**. There's no legal reason why a body should not be at home (if that's what you want and access isn't a problem) - just ensure that the room is kept cool and well ventilated.

## Suggested reading if you want to know more

**Shenpen Osel:** By Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche. The Clear Light of the Buddha's Teachings which Benefits All Beings

Volume 2, Number 3, December 1998

Down-loadable from [www.shenpen-osel.org](http://www.shenpen-osel.org)

**The Tibetan Book of the Dead:** by Francesca Fremantle, Chogyam Trungpa. In this classic scripture of Tibetan Buddhism, traditionally read aloud to the dying to help them attain liberation, death and rebirth are seen as a process that provides an opportunity to recognize the true nature of mind.

**The Tibetan Book of the Dead:** First Complete Translation by Padmasambhava (Author), Gyurme Dorje (Translator), Graham Coleman (Editor), Thupten Jinpa (Editor)

**Sacred Passage:** by Margaret Coberly Phd, Rn. How to Provide Fearless, Compassionate Care for the Dying

**Transition and Liberation:** by Tenga Rinpoche. Explanations of meditation in the Bardo.

**Bardo - Interval of Possibility:** by Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche. Commentary on Aspiration in the Bardo.

**An Overview of Bardo Teachings:** by Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche. Commentary on the Bardo.

**Advice on Dying and Living a Better Life:** by HH The Dalai Lama

**Death and the Art of Dying:** Bardo Teachings. by Bokar Rinpoche

**Journey of the Mind:** by Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche. Bardo Teachings.

## Simple practices to help the dying, the dead and the bereaved, useful during the dying process and for the 49 days following death

- Akong Rinpoche recommended Chenrezig prayers or just the Mani mantra, which should be done as often as possible during the 49 days after death, especially during the first 3 days.
- “The best prayers are the ones you usually do and at the end, dedicate them to the deceased.” (Ringu Tulku)

### ● ‘Sending and Taking’ (Tonglen meditation) - suitable for Buddhists and non Buddhists alike

Sit comfortably with your spine upright, being aware of your breath as it flows in and out.

Visualise yourself as a sphere of golden light, with the deep inner conviction that this form truly represents your true pure nature of perfect awakesness and universal compassion. The pure bright light of compassion is in your heart.

Focus on the dying / deceased person. Breathe in. As you do so, take in all of his or her suffering, which comes out in the form of a thick, dirty, tar-like liquid which is heavy and almost solid. With every few breaths this liquid enters your ‘heart of wisdom and compassion’ where the pure bright light of compassion burns it up like fuel, creating more compassion and strengthening your awareness of your true nature.

While this is going on, with every few breaths you breathe out all goodness, virtue and happiness from your heart to him or her. The pure qualities take the form of crystal-clear bright light which frees the dying person from suffering and the causes of suffering. So it is a two-way process. You take suffering in the form of the dirty liquid, and exchange this for the pure bright light.

As you continue with the exercise, the dirty liquid becomes gradually thinner and paler as the suffering is slowly removed. Finally, after about half an hour, what you breathe in is the same bright light of purity as that which you breathe out. You do not need to think of this process as happening with every breath; each third or fourth breath is sufficient. Visualise that the dying person’s suffering is relieved and that they have become perfect wisdom and compassion, the same as you.

There is no need to fear that you will become sick or overwhelmed, because you are not your ordinary self when doing this exercise – you are visualising yourself as a light form and thus cannot suffer any harm.

*Taken from Akong Rinpoche’s book ‘Taming the Tiger’*

- *As soon as it is detected that the dying process has begun, a family member or friend might want to sit at the bedside and gently say this or similar to the dying person:*  
“Don’t be afraid, whatever appears, it’s only a projection of your mind, like a dream. There’s nothing to fear, your body can no longer be hurt. Just relax and when a bright white light appears, go towards it, merge with it.”

Because hearing is the last sense to go, it is considered helpful to say this and other prayers aloud (and indeed for the 49 days following death – the intermediate/Bardo state prior to rebirth).

- Set aside a few moments daily to talk to the deceased. They should be reassured that even though they may see frightening things, they should recognise these as being merely projections of their own mind. As they no longer have a body, they can no longer be hurt. Light a candle and send blessings and positive thoughts to them.

- The 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, 35<sup>th</sup>, 42<sup>nd</sup> & 49<sup>th</sup> days following death, are considered to be significant for the deceased and some people choose to light many candles on those days.

- One could also perform virtuous positive acts and dedicate the merit to the deceased: being of service to others; give up alcohol /smoking / meat for a month /year; take one or more of the Five Precepts for a period; do Nyung Nay practice.

## What you may need to think about when planning a funeral:

- Coffin type (veneered, cardboard, bamboo, willow)?  
*Note: Some crematoriums cannot accept cardboard coffins due to the design of the cremator. Also, only the traditional-type veneered coffin has an adequate seal that reduces odour.*
- Cremation or burial? If burial, regular or environmental?
- Dressed in what type of clothes?
- Body to rest at home / Funeral parlour / Buddhist centre / Stupa, prior to funeral?
- Who would you like to carry the coffin?
- Funeral service at home / Buddhist centre / outside in a natural setting / crematorium / cemetery?
- Donations to those doing prayers for you, minister at service etc
- Transport of coffin in hearse / estate car
- Flowers and/or donations to charity?
- Content of service / music
- Candle-lighting?
- Funeral tea / gathering, after service?
- Scattering of ashes / storage of ashes in Stupa / Prayer Wheel Walkway?

## Services available from Samye Ling

**A Buddhist 'ID' card** which you can carry on your person.

This gives basic information and there is space for contact details.

The card is available in Samye Ling Shop for £5.

To arrange **permanent storage of ashes** in the Prayer Wheel Walkway or to arrange storage of ashes within the Stupa please contact [bardo@samyeling.org](mailto:bardo@samyeling.org).

## Order of Service

Immediately prior to the deceased leaving the Stupa on its way to the local crematorium, Samye Ling Sangha recite prayers for the benefit of the deceased. Family and friends are welcome to attend these if wished. In and around the Stupa we can fit up to 40 people (weather dependent).

Many people also choose to light 1,000 lamps in the Butterlamp House at this point.

Finally, there is a committal at the local crematorium. This can be an opportunity for non-Buddhist relatives and friends to remember the deceased, with the options of music and readings that may seem out of place within the Stupa.



## Buddhist Funeral Services at Samye Ling

### Lighting candles in the Butterlamp House

If you would like to arrange the lighting of candles in the Butterlamp House in memory of the deceased, please contact reception by email: [reception@samyeling.org](mailto:reception@samyeling.org)

### Buddhist ID card:

A credit card-sized information on what to do for a Buddhist at the time of death, plus space for emergency contact details is available from Samye Ling Shop

*For more information or general advice on Buddhist funeral procedures, please email [bardo@samyeling.org](mailto:bardo@samyeling.org)*

Kagyü Samye Ling Monastery & Tibetan Centre is part of Rokpa Trust  
which is a registered charity in England and Wales (1059293) and in Scotland (SC038628)

## The Amitabha Shrine & Prayer Wheel Walkway



Dedicated to caring for those who have died

*Kagyü Samye Ling Monastery & Tibetan Centre  
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Email: [bardo@samyeling.org](mailto:bardo@samyeling.org)*

## Information

Death is often described as the most significant event of all for a Buddhist. One question it inevitably arises is, what to do with one's physical remains once the mind has departed. Choje Akong Tulku Rinpoche provided two options for those who wish their cremated ashes to be interred at Samye Ling:

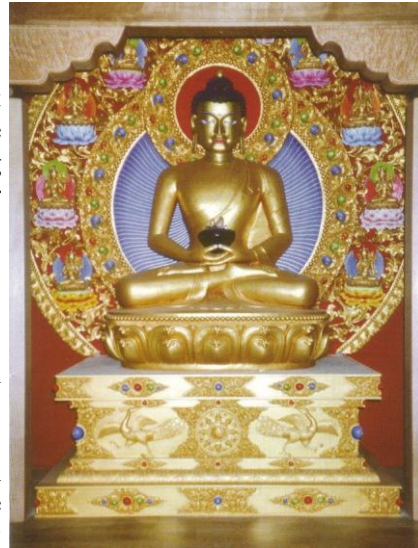
- Inside the Amitabha Shrine within the Victory Stupa
- In the cabinets of the Prayer Wheel Walkway

In Tibet there are various traditional means of generating merit through the generosity of offering one's bodily remains. One of these is to have sacred objects called *tsa-tsa* made from one's cremated ashes. A stupa generally houses numerous *tsa-tsa*, which reinforce the power of the stupa to heal and transform.

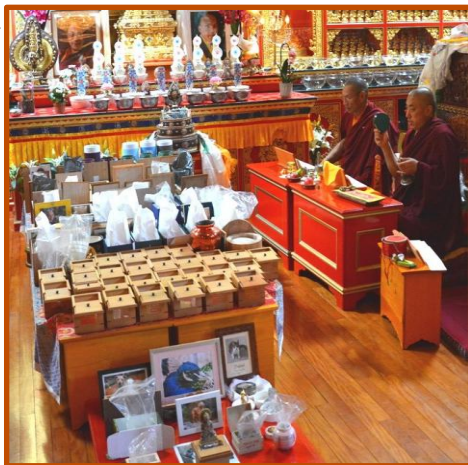
The Victory Stupa at Samye Ling was consecrated in the year 2000, providing the possibility of having a portion of one's ashes interred there, in a *tsa-tsa* within the Amitabha Shrine. Seven years later the Prayer Wheel Walkway was completed. The latter provides a second option, designed for those wishing to have caskets of their ashes kept near the stupa, but in a setting designed to facilitate access for loved ones.

Prior to being placed in the Stupa or Walkway, ashes are purified and blessed by qualified lamas, usually on an annual basis. The prayers are concluded with an installation ceremony, which relatives and friends of the deceased are welcome to attend.

In addition, special prayers for the deceased are recited during Kagyu Monlam prayer gatherings.



*Amitabha Shrine in the Stupa*



*Lamas blessing caskets & tsa-tsa during the 2023 ashes-blessing ceremonies*



*Blessing prayers at the Amitabha Shrine in the Stupa*



*Tsa-tsa and box*



*Prayer Wheel Walkway & cabinets*

As it is the responsibility of the subscriber to ensure procedures are in place to arrange delivery of the ashes, we will provide you with a certificate and confirmation letter to facilitate this.

## Amitabha Shrine

Tsa-tsa are housed in numbered hardwood boxes, with plaques giving details of the deceased. These details are also listed in the remembrance book kept in the stupa.

Many prayers have been offered within the stupa to benefit those who have died, and all those who have time to sit quietly here appreciate the peaceful atmosphere. Relatives and friends are welcome to visit any time, but please call or email in advance to arrange this (see details on 1st page).

Reserving a space here is available for a minimum donation of £500 per person, which includes the tsa-tsa, hardwood box and plaque.

## The Prayer Wheel Walkway

The covered walkway is lined with prayer-wheels which turn continuously, sending out millions of prayers dedicated to compassion and transforming negative emotions. Opposite the prayer wheels are cabinets, which have alcoves for individual caskets, with space for a framed photo. This service has a suggested donation of £250. This is not a fee, so in practice subscribers can offer according to means. Caskets and plaques may be purchased from us, if desired.

There are also some cabinets set aside for animal ashes with shelves for communal storage. There is no suggested donation for keeping your pet's ashes in this special place, but offerings are received with gratitude.

If either of these projects are of interest, please complete and return the enclosed form. Offerings to Samye Ling Stupa & Ashes Project are generally made via a PayPal link, which we will email to you.

# Amitabha Shrine Project

## Details of the person whose ashes will be stored in the Stupa

Name (as you wish it to appear on plaque)

.....

Date of birth.....Date of death (if applicable).....

Since only a small amount of the ashes will be used in the tsa-tsa, please tell us what you would like to do with the surplus ashes:

Please supply your contact details and if the arrangement is for you, please also provide them for the person authorised to deal with your remains:

### Your contact details:

### Additional contact details:

Name.....

Name .....

Address.....

Address .....

.....

.....

Tel .....

Tel .....

Email.....

Email .....

Relationship to Subscriber:.....

I understand the duties and benefits set out in the project information and authorise you to deal with the cremated remains as outlined above.

Signed..... Date.....

# Prayer Wheel Walkway

## Details of the cremated remains to be stored in the Walkway

Name (as you wish it to appear on plaque)

.....

Date of birth.....Date of death (if applicable).....

I will supply the casket and plaque for the ashes  
(no bigger than 11" high x 7¼" wide x 6½" deep)

Or...

Please supply the casket (£40) & plaque (£8)  
for the ashes, as pictured right.

Please delete as appropriate.

How to pay: email [bardo@samyeling.org](mailto:bardo@samyeling.org)  
for the link to a dedicated PayPal page.



Please supply your contact details and if the arrangement is for you, please also provide them for the person authorised to deal with your remains:

### Your contact details:

### Additional contact details

Name.....

Name .....

Address.....

Address .....

.....

.....

Tel .....

Tel .....

Email.....

Email .....

Relationship to Subscriber:.....

I understand the duties and benefits set out in the project information and authorise you to deal with the cremated remains as outlined above.

Signed..... Date.....



**When I go**

***What I would like my family and friends to do when I die***

# How to Use this Document

This information was compiled in conjunction with the 'When a Buddhist Dies' document. Having considered your choices, it's hoped that this will help you to record your wishes clearly and alleviate anxiety for you and those left behind.

Once completed and signed it can be given to next of kin and copies made for friends, executors, hospital staff etc..

Please consider it as a prototype and use whatever parts of it are suitable for your particular needs and circumstances.



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## **To My Family**

In order to spare you unnecessary worry and difficult decisions with regard to arrangements at the time of my death, I have given the matter much thought. I have recorded my preferences here, which are based on my beliefs as a Buddhist in the Tibetan tradition.

The areas highlighted with an asterisk \* indicate aspects that are really important to me and I would ask that you abide by my wishes to the best of your ability. For the rest, they are simply preferences.

You may not agree with some of the decisions I have made, but please know that the prayers and spiritual care during the dying process and immediately following death, are believed to be a supremely important time for Buddhists. These are the choices I have made based on my personal beliefs.

As I go, know that I love and cherish all of you and thank you for being a part of my life even if I never made that clear enough to you.

With love and affection

Signature..... Date .....



## **Before the final days**

Unless I am totally incapacitated, please always ask me first before deciding what is best for me.

Do try to communicate with me however difficult this may be. It is my understanding that even in a coma, awareness and hearing are possible.

If at all possible do not leave me to die alone, let there be a witness to my passing, a loving quiet presence.

Please contact my Buddhist Centre to request prayers.

Please ensure that my body is not touched for 4 hours after I die. If this is impossible, or I have agreed to be an organ donor, (see page 5), please make sure that the crown of my head is touched first.

## Prayer arrangements

When I am dying, or as soon as possible after my death, please contact my Buddhist Centre:

.....

.....

**Please arrange for the following if available (tick where applicable):**

- ☐ Recording of Akong Rinpoche reciting prayers, to be played during my last hours
- ☐ My bedside to be kept as quiet as possible with minimum disturbance.
- ☐ An experienced Buddhist practitioner to say prayers at my death bed (if available).
- ☐ Prayer dedication at my Buddhist centre.
- ☐ Prayers by Lineage Holders.
- ☐ 108 / 1,000 candles lit on day of funeral / every 7th day following my death for 49 days

## Organ donation

- ☐ I do not want to donate my organs
- ☐ I want to donate my organs

*Please note: If organ donation is requested, please ignore all advice about non-disturbance of my body!*

# **Information for nurses caring for a Buddhist in the Tibetan tradition at the end of their life**

*The following is based on the Buddhist belief that consciousness continues after the body dies. The first 3 days following death are considered to be particularly important, whereby the subtle process of the mind disengaging from the body is taking place.*

We would be most grateful if you could bear the following points in mind:

Please contact the patient's Tibetan Buddhist Centre for prayers to be said, if death is known to be close, or as soon as possible after death. The ideal is to have prayers done at the bedside as soon as possible.

Please leave the body undisturbed for 4 hours.

We understand that a doctor has to touch the body to certify death, but request that the nurses delay laying out the body until prayers have been said. Once prayers are said, the body can be laid out and moved. Only the minimum should be done and the crown of the head should be touched first.

If paper mandalas or a blanket have been placed on the body, please replace them in the correct positions.

Buddhists believe that it is possible to help the person who has just died by maintaining a tranquil and compassionate environment around them wherever possible. Friends and family may want to sit by the body to pray, so facilitating this would be very much appreciated.

If a post-mortem is required, please ask for it to be postponed for 3 ½ days.

Where there is no family to organize a funeral, please inform social services that the undertaker should just lift the body into the coffin (assuming that you have washed it already) and that there should be no embalming. Cremation should not take place until 3 ½ days have elapsed.

Thank you

# **Information for Undertakers who are arranging the funeral of a Buddhist in the Tibetan tradition**

*The following is based on the Buddhist belief that consciousness continues after the body dies. The first 3 days following death are considered to be particularly important, whereby the subtle process of the mind disengaging from the body is taking place.*

We would be grateful if you could bear the following points in mind:

Where the body has been washed and dressed by the nurses, please just lift the body into the coffin and avoid unnecessary contact or movement. If the body does need to be washed, please just do the absolute minimum.

If paper prayers or a mandala blanket have been placed on the body, please replace them after putting the deceased in the coffin. There may also be additional pieces to be placed on the coffin.

Please refrigerate the body rather than embalm it.

Because Buddhists would prefer not to be embalmed, requesting the speedy completion of the cremation forms would be very much appreciated.

Buddhists believe that it is possible to help the person who has just died, by trying to maintain a tranquil and compassionate environment around them. Friends and family may want to sit by the body to pray, so facilitating this would be very much appreciated.

Cremation or burial should not take place until 3 ½ days have elapsed.

*Thank you*

## Practical arrangements

☐ I wish to be cremated at.....Crematorium

☐ I wish to be buried, green / regular at.....Cemetery

☐ I have a pre-paid funeral plan with.....

Ref. ....Tel. ....

☐ No pre-paid funeral plan but a preferred funeral director:

.....

.....Tel. ....

☐ Body not to be embalmed

☐ Prior to funeral, body to rest at:.....

My preferred coffin is:.....

My ashes to be scattered.....

My ashes to be interred at.....

# Funeral Service

I would like the funeral service to be held at:.....

.....

Person to officiate if available:.....

To include these prayers.....

.....

.....

Poems / Readings .....

.....

Music .....

☐ Flowers    ☐ Donations to .....

Funeral tea afterwards at .....

## Other useful information

*Where to find my:*

Will.....

Birth certificate .....

Marriage certificate.....

Bank account details.....

Pensions.....

Address book.....

My email address is .....

Password = .....

## Personal details that will be useful when registering my death

Full name .....

Address: .....

.....

Date & place of birth.....

.....

Occupation.....Religion.....

Marital status .....

Spouse's name, d.o.b. & occupation .....

.....

Mother's name inc. maiden name & occupation.....

.....

Father's name & occupation.....

.....

Nat. Insurance no. ....

NHS Doctor & Address .....

Next of kin.....

.....

## Lodgement of the document

I have lodged a copy of this document with:

1. ....

.....

2. ....

.....

3. ....

.....

4. ....

.....

Signature .....

Date .....

## **Acknowledgements**

Deep appreciation to Chuje Akong Tulku Rinpoche  
for all his guidance and inspiration

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