

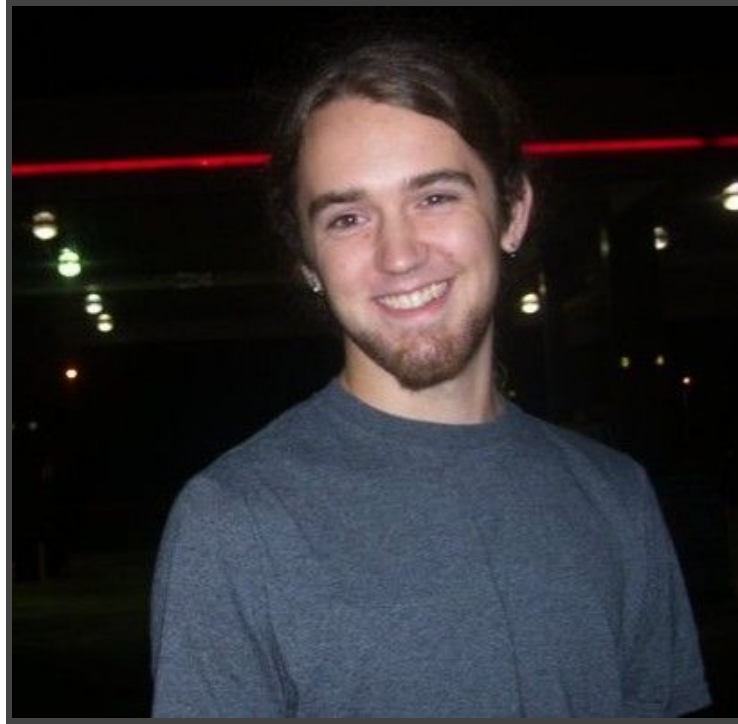
Using Grief on the Path



Buddhist Practices Following the Loss of a Loved One

Dedication

I dedicate this booklet to my son, Stephen Wayne Pomper Fry, whose kindness and example inspired me and many others.



I dedicate any merit generated from this booklet to my kind teachers - may their every aspiration be fulfilled.

“For those who know how to use it, sadness is a fertile ground from which all kinds of beneficial thoughts can spring with very little effort. Jigme Lingpa described sadness as one of the most invaluable kinds of noble wealth, and in the sutras Buddha hailed sadness as the trailblazer for all subsequent good qualities.”

Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse - *Not for Happiness - A Guide to the So-Called Preliminary Practises* - Shambhala Publications

Om Mani Padme Hum



Introduction

The intention of this booklet is to support people who are grieving. I have been learning how to navigate the sometimes overwhelming emotions that accompany loss of a loved one and exploring how to use this experience on the Buddhist path. Searching for the “middle way” between on one hand fusion with grief and on the other spiritual bypassing, characterizes this exploration. Although I had experienced loss of loved ones before, when my 25 year old son Stephen died suddenly on April 5, 2016, I entered a different level of grief, but also found an increased commitment to my Buddhist practice. At times like this “the rubber meets the road” in terms of faith and practice. As I found great comfort and support in my Buddhist faith and path, my appreciation and devotion increased. I share my experience here in dedication to Stephen and with the intention to help relieve suffering. The purpose of Buddhist practice is to realize enlightenment for the benefit of all beings, not to better manage samsara. However, we can use everything on the path and I hope this summary of practices will help you to use grief on your path.

Let me be clear. It hurts. Grief is painful and overwhelming at times. My body convulses with grief and multiple emotions arise including guilt, sadness, shame and anger. I cry from a deep pit of sadness. For me, being able to titrate these emotions so that I am not completely fused with the grief and lost, yet still able to let myself feel, has emerged as the middle way path. My Buddhist practices are resources that help me to make meaning of this experience and to find a middle way.

This is not an instructional booklet on how to practice. Please work with your teacher and/or consult the resources at the end of this book for support in your Buddhist practice. I mention practices that helped me, but this is not an extensive list or necessarily the right list for you. There are many good resources available that cover supporting those who are dying such as *How to Enjoy Death* by Lama Zopa (see the Resource list at the end of this booklet). This booklet is about working with your grief after someone has died.

To those who are grieving...

Everyone grieves differently so I do not presume that my experience is anything like yours. I felt compelled to make use of my experience by sharing how my Buddhist path has supported me through my grief and with the hope that this summary may help you. I have written in the first person about my experience with each practice so as not to assume your experience is the same as mine, but I do hope that some will find enough resonance with these reflections that they are useful in helping you navigate this difficult and fertile time.

To those who are not yet grieving...

Clearly each of us will experience the loss of a loved one at some point in our lives. You will be able to call on the practices you do now in times of loss. Perhaps this thought will help you to focus on your practice not just to be prepared for your own death, but also for the death of others.

Supporting Your Loved One in Transition

Focus on supporting your dear one in transition.

By focusing on my son's transition, I felt a deep connection to him as he moved into the next phase of his journey. The teacher I called the day I found my son's body, directed me to focus on the future and support my son in the bardo where he had the opportunity to become a Buddha. I was in shock so having something concrete to focus on was very helpful for me. I immediately began a series of prayers that my local Buddhist center uses in pujas. I have decided to do these the rest of my life and dedicate to my son. I found that I truly believe in the continuity of consciousness and felt that his consciousness would be influenced by my prayers. The prayers that I now do daily and dedicate to my son include:

- Taking Refuge and Generating Bodhicitta; The Four Immeasurables
- The King of Prayers: The Extraordinary Aspiration of the Practice of Samantabhadra
- Supplication for Liberation During the Treacherous Path of the Bardo: The Heroic Liberator from Fears
- Requesting Prayer to Avalokiteshvara and mantra Om Mani Padme Hum
- Dedication Prayers, Long Life Prayer for His Holiness Dali Lama

(Check out the Resources section at the end of this booklet for ways to access prayers and the Appendix for the *The King of Prayers*.)

Thankfully, Buddhism offers many ways you can support your loved one in transition. I requested prayers and pujas and it touched my heart to have others participate and dedicate practice to my son. Dear friends who share their house for meditation kept his photo and a candle on the altar and as we meditated I felt he was touched by lots of good practice energy.

With my son's photo and ashes on my altar, I dedicated my practices to him. I gave him all my virtue and merit and took on his suffering. I visualized him being supported in the bardo as he became a Buddha or found his way to a pure land. After a time, I was able to include other beings in my dedication, but not at first when I was completely focused on helping him. I knew this was a clinging to "me and mine", but I worked with it as best I could with kindness for myself. Eventually I was able, at times, to feel the difference between attachment and love. I am still learning to loosen my attachment and let go with love.

One friend included some money in a card and asked that I use it to buy something to treasure my memory of Stephen. I spoke with a local teacher about which deity statue would be most helpful for my son, and added a beautiful Tara next to his photo on my altar. I visualized Tara helping him and both of them hearing Tara's mantra. Lighting candles and lights helped me to visualize my son in light as I kept telling him to look for the clear light.

Summary of prayers and practices for Supporting Your Loved One in Transition:

- Bardo prayers

- Pujas
- Tong-len with your loved one (Giving love, virtue and merit to your loved one, and taking on their suffering)
- Dedicating practice and virtue to your loved one
- Love v.s. Attachment; Letting go with love
- Lighting candles



Connect with Yourself and Others with Compassion

Generate compassion for self and other beings who are suffering.

The first time I felt deep grief after my brother died in 1985, I could not believe that there were people walking around who had gone through such intense pain. When I called my teacher from the airport, where I was about to get on a plane with my brother's body, and asked him how to deal with the pain. my teacher recommended that I think of others and their pain. After my brother's death, I took my teacher's advice and went to stay with and support my mother and father who were the people hurting as much if not more than me. I had an experience of compassion that was unknown to me until then.

My son's death felt different as I believed no one could know how this hurt. No one had a son like mine so no one had experienced such a devastating loss. My son was a physical part of me and my husband, and my body ached for him. To turn towards others' pain was difficult.

My ability to feel compassion began with myself and my husband. Although I knew that impermanence and death are expected and the time of death unexpected, my grief and pain required my self compassion, the desire that I be free from suffering and its causes. My husband was suffering which I understood deeply and wished he could be free of suffering and its causes. I approached myself and my husband with tenderness, holding this time for us as sacred as well as painful. I visualized Avalokiteshvara and the light of compassion healing and freeing us.

I noticed there was a place where self compassion could topple into victimhood. Self compassion led me to self care; allowing myself to sleep as I wanted, to not answer the phone, to eat comfort food, or to numb out with a television program from time to time. Victimhood led to a spiraling pit of despair. Compassion practices helped me to discern the difference.

Using the Four Immeasurables, I began to visualize first me and my family, then different groups who I wished to be happy, free of suffering, and living in bliss and equanimity. I visualized all the grieving parents in the local hospital and then in hospitals around the world, and went on to

include those losing their children in war and violence. I thought how some had lost their very young children. I set my aspiration, generating bodhicitta for all those in the bardo, for those who were dying, for those who were being born. Before long, I was including all age groups of the living and included animals, beginning with those about to be slaughtered, then all the insects and on from there. I walked in the woods attuning to the life around me and visualized my son, an avid hiker, sending and receiving loving kindness with all of life. Saying refuge prayers and generating bodhicitta while holding others in mind helped me to broaden my perspective and generate compassion in a deep, foundational way. I felt the compassion for others originating in the same place as I felt the sadness of grief in my body, but my feeling and vision expanded outward, loosened and opened.

One of the prayers I do daily is the King of Prayers and I began to feel relief from phrases such as “on every atom are Buddhas numberless as atoms surrounded by bodhisattvas”, and “I will lead all beings to the bliss of awakening and be of worldly benefit to them as well”. This prayer has become so deeply meaningful to me as it gives me hope and encourages me to see the world in a new way, a way filled with Buddhas who are there for us all. It opened my mind and allowed me to feel confident that there are many more layers of reality than those I currently perceive.

The bodhicitta aspiration to become enlightened for the benefit of other beings springs from the reality that we are not alone. One of my teachers had suggested tong-len with my son, and eventually I found it helpful to do with others. When I felt grief, I took on the grief of specific groups and of the world as smoke and energy. I found if I got caught up in thinking in detail about all the grief and pain in the world, I could fall into the bottomless grief pit. Taking away suffering of others, then letting it go into the ground allowed me to use my suffering to help others, and realize that I am interconnected and not alone. Sending them love and compassion to relieve their suffering provided a means of heartfelt connection.

As I generated bodhicitta each day, I began to review the Six Perfections as a blueprint for what I could do, even in my compromised, grieving state. Acting in ways that are compassionate and turning to Buddhist advice on conduct such as the Six Perfections gave me concrete direction and helped to ground me in day-to-day life.

A keen awareness of cause and effect can motivate conduct that will lead to positive outcomes. I began to more vehemently recall and hold the Six Perfections as a guide to conduct as I was motivated to try to live a more meaningful and compassionate life. By recalling my son's example, I dedicated these efforts to him. From a young age, Stephen would save insects by taking them outside, showed kindness to animals and treated others with respect, especially those who are often forgotten such as homeless people.

One of my teachers recommended lighting “butter lamps”, candles or little lights, and sending and dedicating the Compassion mantra, Om Mani Padme. At the same time as reciting the mantra, I visualize a 1000 petaled lotus at my heart with the mantra on the center petals. As I

continue the mantra, the lotus petals send light out to the lotuses in the hearts of other beings, including my son. The 1000-petaled lotus in every being's heart opens and sends light and love out to other beings. This goes on until all is filled with light and love. My teacher suggested doing these for at least a year. I find the "Mani mantras" and the lotus of light that touches the lotus in every being's heart a way to open my heart and connect with other beings, transforming grief into love.

Summary of prayers and practices to Connect with Yourself and Others with Compassion:

- King of Prayers
- Four Immeasurables
- Tong-len with all sentient beings (Giving love, virtue and merit to other beings, and taking on their suffering)
- Six Perfections
- Lighting and dedicating butter lamps or candles
- Mantra of Compassion, *Om Mani Padme Hum*, and visualization of 1000-petaled lotus

Practice Example

Guided Meditation: Tonglen: Awakening the Heart of Compassion by Tara Brach

Sit in a way that allows you to be relaxed and alert. Let go of any habitual tension and allow your body and mind to settle. The traditional practice of tonglen begins by taking a moment to sense the stillness or openness that is already here. This is considered a flash of remembrance, a reconnecting with our awakened heart and mind.

Now bring your attention to the natural rhythm and quality of your breath. As the breath flows in, allow your cells to receive this life energy. With each in-breath, open with total receptivity, like a balloon gently expanding with air. Be aware of the experience of no resistance, of allowing yourself to be touched by the sensations of the breath. With the out-breath, notice the sensations of letting go and releasing into the space that surrounds you. Imagine your total body and consciousness flowing outward with the breath and mingling with the vastness of space. Breathe out into relaxation, ease, and spaciousness. Continue meditating on the essence of receiving, being touched with the in-breath, and letting go into openness with the out-breath.

Now invite into your awareness someone you know personally who is suffering, someone you want to help. Imagine yourself in this person's circumstances, experiencing this person's fear or hurt or loss. What is it like to look at the world through these eyes? Live inside this particular body? Feel with this heart? What is the most vulnerable, painful part of this person's experience? What does he or she most need? Now breathing in, invite all this pain into your heart, allowing yourself to feel it fully. Inhale, taking the pain into yourself, so that the other person will have relief. And as you breathe out, respond to his or her needs by sending out relaxation, space, love, or whatever will bring ease and happiness.

Sometimes as you inhale, you will meet your own resistance to pain. If this happens, shift the focus and breathe for yourself and countless others just like you who are feeling this same stuckness, anger, revulsion, or fear. Then as you breathe out, offer whatever helps you and others like you find space and relief. As your resistance softens, return to breathing for the person you intend to help. As you inhale and let the person's pain touch you, feel how he or she is held in your heart. And as you exhale, send whatever prayer or expression of care feels most sincere or most needed.

Now, enlarge the taking in and sending out to include all those who are in the same situation, experiencing the same suffering. If the person you want to help is grieving a loss, breathe in and out for all those who are experiencing the pain of loss. If this person feels like a failure, breathe in and out for all who feel like failures. Sense, as you breathe in, the unconditional willingness, tenderness, and receptivity of your heart; and as you breathe out, the vastness of loving awareness that is here, holding this world.

Continue breathing, opening to the universal experience of this suffering and letting go into spaciousness with prayer. As your heart opens to the enormity of suffering, you become that openness. As you offer your tenderness, your awareness becomes suffused with compassion.

Brach, Tara. *True Refuge: Finding Peace and Freedom in Your Own Awakened Heart* (pp. 220-222). Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.



Develop Your Motivation to Practice

Use your sadness to motivate practice with renunciation, humility and love.

The four preliminary contemplations (precious human life, death and impermanence, shortcomings of samsara, and karma - cause and effect) motivate the aspiration for enlightenment to relieve suffering and liberate all beings, and to practice diligently with the gift of this human life. Grief can offer us the gift of deepening these foundational practices.

The preciousness and vulnerability of human life are vividly front and center when we lose someone close to us. Death and impermanence were “in my face” and I wanted to turn away, but could not. I found there is no better time to face the truth of the suffering of change, death and impermanence. My own suffering left no doubt about the shortcomings of clinging to samsara, and highlighted the relief that there is a path to the cessation of suffering. Considering cause and effect, I came to believe that there would be a continuation of my connection to my son. This motivated in me a desire to be able to recognize this connection in future incarnations. I began to wonder what connections I had in the past with all of those beings I meet daily and this became a way to view each with the love I feel for my son and a way to expand that love. Perhaps the deer I saw in the woods today was a family member in a former life.

Looking back, I could see some of the chain of cause and effect that led to my son’s death. I have found that guilt and shame accompany grief for me. Even when my brother was killed by lightning, I had some feelings of guilt based on thinking that I could have prevented his death if I had been with him or invited him to do what I was doing. Compassion for yourself, forgiving yourself, and asking for forgiveness may be necessary parts of your process. Purifying practices

such as the Seven-limb prayer or Vajrasattva practice can help. These practices helped me to look forward and set intention for the future and also to look at what was good in the conduct of myself and others so that I could rejoice. I recognize that guilt and shame are expressions of the grasping onto a solid self, and these purifying practices can help to loosen some of that self grasping.

Considering cause and effect, from a Buddhist perspective, looking forward rather than to the past is most important as we don't really know all of the causes that led to the current situation unless we are omniscient. I felt a great desire to be omniscient for the benefit of all beings, and believe it is possible (although it is way down the path for me). I used this to motivate my next baby step on the path and my commitment to practice.

Without faith in a path, facing death and impermanence would be devastating. The teachings, support of others and the guidance of our teachers are indispensable when we are deep in suffering and unsure as to what to do. I ran to my refuge in Guru, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. I appreciated deeply how important the path is to me so that my refuge prayers reflected a deeper level of meaning and commitment.

Summary of practices to Develop Your Motivation to Practice:

- The Four Thoughts that turn the mind
- Purifying practices such as Seven-Limb Prayer or Vajrasattva
- Refuge
- Guru Yoga



Tap into the Experience of Emptiness

Use an understanding of emptiness to loosen the grip of grief.

Emptiness is the middle way, not nihilistic and not grasping to anything as inherently existent, that loosens the ignorance that underlies our suffering. Receiving teachings on emptiness and reading about it can help one to understand this fundamental concept of Mahayana Buddhism. Meditation is required for our understanding of emptiness to lead to experience and realization. Meditations on emptiness require contemplating how we exist as well as how others and phenomena exist. Each level of understanding, experience and realization can be helpful in giving us a larger perspective in which to hold ourselves and other, our thoughts and emotions, and begin to develop the wisdom of emptiness. Ongoing attention and practice is required to really loosen our attachment and clinging to our mistaken views of reality which are at the root of our suffering. Whatever insight you have as you study and meditate can help you to find peace.

How my delusions about reality are at the root of my suffering became very clear to me when I would grasp onto thoughts about myself, my son and life as permanent and unchanging. Yes, I wanted to freeze time and have him be alive forever. This is a statement born from delusion.

That can sound harsh, but in fact, leads to what is needed to get to the cause of suffering and be free of suffering.

Dependent origination, the way in which everything exists dependently rather than independently, encourages us to see how our view of ourselves, others and phenomena as separate and independent is mistaken. When we delve into dependent origination we come to understand that our lives and the lives of our loved ones came about due to a whole series of causes and conditions, and that this is a very dynamic situation. Contemplating interdependence helps us to develop a broader perspective on who we are and how we lack independent, inherent existence. We can also see how that is the case for our loved one who has transitioned into the next phase.

I found contemplations on how everything and everyone is interdependent offered me a broader perspective and a sense of peace. Clinging to the mistaken view of being an independent, separate being leads to suffering. When I thought of how my son and I and others were all connected and how we have impact on each other moment to moment, I could sense a larger unfolding and continuity. I can only imagine how a complete realization of emptiness would cut through suffering. Having some glimpses of the cause of suffering and some relief helps to increase my motivation to practice.

Summary of practices Tap into the Experience of Emptiness:

- Study and contemplate the middle way of emptiness (all being empty of inherent existence)
- Recognize your delusions about how you and others exist
- Consider how ignorance, clinging to the mistaken view of reality, creates suffering
- Learn and delve into meditations on dependent origination and emptiness



Find Peace with Shamatha

Use Shamatha meditation, settling the body, speech and mind, to let go and give yourself a break.

Finding a way to relax and focus the body, speech and mind into their uncluttered, natural state can provide a break from the intense emotion and confusion that you may be experiencing. Letting go of the tortuous thoughts and emotions that come up rather than following them and clinging to them can give you a break. Attachment to the past can be released just by coming into the present and mindfully paying attention to your breath and/or sensations in the body.

Shamatha meditation can be really helpful to calm you down, give you relief, even find some peace and happiness or sense of joy. Of course, if you use meditation just to escape,

sometimes called “spiritual bypassing”, this will not be helpful in the long run. But using it to help you navigate through a very difficult time is a gift to yourself and others.

If you have not developed a Shamatha practice of relaxing the body and focusing on the breath or another object, it may be difficult to do so now, but do not get discouraged and give it time to develop. I find that lying comfortably on the floor or bed in a supine position as recommended by one of my teachers is especially helpful. There are many guided meditations and you may try different ones until you find one that works for you. See the resource list at the end of this booklet for websites, podcasts and apps with guided meditations.

I found that giving myself some time to settle my body, speech and mind, especially before some of the other practices discussed here, allowed me to drop into a place where I could more attentively complete other practices. Also, I found it helped to use Shamatha by settling the body and focusing on the breath before going to bed for better sleep. Tuning into the sensations in the body allowed me to let go of thoughts since body sensations are non-conceptual. In the morning when my mind began to race, or my body felt like there was an empty hole in my gut, focusing on the breath and relaxing my body, letting thoughts and emotions come and go helped me to begin the day with a little more peace and openness.

There is a practice called “Shamatha without a Sign” which I find particularly helpful in cultivating a sense of spaciousness and sometimes even bliss. That I could feel this in the middle of grief was amazing to me. For most, this “awareness of awareness” practice is not a beginning practice, but each individual is different in the practices that are most viable. I was grateful that I had learned and practiced this approach to Shamatha so that I was familiar with it and able to use it to continue to deepen my practice.

Summary of practices to Find Peace with Shamatha:

- Settle the body and deeply relax
- Tune in to the sensations of the body
- Use the breath to settle the speech and mind
- Notice thoughts, images and emotions and let them come and go
- Become aware of awareness and rest there

Practice Example

Settling Body, Speech and Mind in the Natural State - Meditation by B. Alan Wallace

Let your awareness descend into the body, right down to the ground. Attend to those sensations of firmness and solidity where your body is in contact with your chair, cushion and floor and rest your awareness in a witnessing mode, the quiet attentiveness, the closest approximation to bare attention.

Attend quietly, not conceptually to the sensations of the earth element, sensations of firmness and solidity, your body in contact with the earth.

Let your awareness rise up and fill the whole space of your body, right up to the top of the head, like a frequency filling a room. Let your awareness fill the space of the body, taking note of the sensations arising on the interior and from the interior as well as on the surface.

There is no need to visualize the body or think about it. Simply be aware of the sensations arising in this tactile field.

As you are mindfully aware of the sensations arising throughout this field, you may note areas that feel tense, tight, contracted. Gently focus your attention upon this area as you breathe in, and as you breathe out, surrendering your muscles to gravity. As you breathe out you may feel your shoulders drop, the muscles around the base of the neck soften and loosen up.

Bring awareness to the face and soften, loosen the muscles around the mouth, the lips, the jaws, the temples.

Bring awareness to the forehead, let it feel opened, spacious, relaxed, let it be opened between the eyebrow, soften all the muscles around the eyes and finally soften the eyes themselves. Soften your whole face and feel relaxed, soften and loosen.

In this way settle your body in a posture of ease and comfort and insofar you do it and feel relaxed and comfortable you should find it easy to let your body remain still with no unnecessary movements, just the movement of the breath.

If you are in a supine position then your body should be fully relaxed, let still, psychologically you can adopt a stance, an attitude, a posture of vigilance. This is a formal meditation posture to use only for practicing. And if you are sitting upright, let your spine be straight, slightly lift your chest so you are sitting with very much attention, keep your abdomen muscles lucid and relaxed so as you breathe in, the sensations of the breathe go right down to the belly that is expanding when you inhale and falling back as you exhale.

In this way settle your body in its natural state imbued with the qualities of relaxation, stillness and vigilance.

Settling your speech in its natural state is quite straightforward, not difficult, it simply means to rest silently, in effortless silence, the silence of a guitar with the streams cut. But together with settling the speech in its natural state, you settle the respiration in its natural rhythm, this is crucially important. In short this involves breathing effortless without forcefully drawing the air in as you inhale or forcefully expelling it as you exhale. Allow the breath to flow in and out effortless without constraint. The key is the out breathe, with every out breath relax more and more deeply in the body, releasing most of the tension, tightness, stress, with every out breath simply release the breath without holding it back or forcefully expelling it.

And with every out breath simply release any thoughts, memories and images that may come to mind as if the out breath is gently gust of breeze loading away easily. With every out breath as if with a sigh of relief, just let go of any thought that may come to mind and return your awareness to a non-conceptual flow of mindfulness.

The key to the out breath is at the very end of the out breath. Each time be mindfully as you approach the end of the exhalation. See if you do release fully without expelling the breath. Simply do not hold any back, release it fully, release, release until the next breath flows in, effortless like a wave washing upon the shore, just let it flow in, and whether the breath is short or long, deep or shallow, whether the cycle of respiration is rhythmic or not-rhythmic, let your body breathe without intervention, without regulation, without control.

Allow your body to reestablish in its own equilibrium, its own balance, energetically by way of the breath.

And in this way settle your respiration in its natural rhythm which is bound to shift, to change as your body is sorted itself out and find its own equilibrium.

And finally settle your mind at ease by releasing all concerns, all hopes and fears about the future and the past.

For the brief duration of this session settle it all aside, let your mind be careful and free, untroubled by what is going by and by what is yet to come.

And in this way allow your awareness to come to rest in stillness, hovering motionless in the present moment.

Awareness is by nature luminous, it is clear, it is bright, so let the natural luminosity of your own awareness illuminate the field of the body and attending especially to those sensations associated with the in and out breath.

Relax deeply with every out breath.

Settle your mind in its natural state, imbued with the qualities of relaxation, stillness and clarity.

And in this phase of mindfulness of breathing, the challenge is to balance an ever deeper sense of relaxation, of lucidness, of ease, without losing the degree of clarity with which we began the session.

B. Alan Wallace. From transcript of *Fall 2012 Shamatha and the Four Applications of Mindfulness*, 25 Aug 2012 – 17 Oct 2012, Thanyapura Mind Centre, Phuket, Thailand.

<http://media.sbinstitute.com/courses/fall2012/01-settling-body-speech-and-mind-in-its-natural-state/#transcript>



Awareness and the Nature of Mind

Allow expanded awareness and looking at the nature of mind to loosen grasping and reification.

I began practicing Shamatha, Vipassana and the Dzogchen view before my son died. I found these practices very helpful to continue as I was more motivated than ever to progress on the path. One of the practices I found helpful was to expand and steady my awareness so that it felt I was holding all in a larger perspective. This stepping back and holding thoughts, images and emotions in a larger awareness without clinging can be done in short spurts throughout the day, or as a meditation practice.

I noticed how that when I “lost my mind” and started clinging to thoughts or images, especially those about my son and how much I missed him, or started a “poor me” dialogue with myself, that this cognitive fusion created suffering. The relationship between thoughts, images and emotions became very clear to me. At times, I let emotions well up in my body, letting them run their course and release or dissipate without grasping. I think it is important that I don’t push emotion down once it has arisen, but also recognized how inner dialogue can lead to more intensely painful emotion. However, I found that if I made a prisoner of my grief and guilt and did not let them see the light of day, they were expressed in nightmares. Working with my body to let the emotion come up, but keeping a larger awareness has been useful.

I found contemplating the nature of my mind led to a broader view of reality. By looking into where mental events come from and go to, it led to a loosening of the grip of my painful thoughts. I also contemplated the illusory nature of appearances. I explored what it was like to stop reifying myself (and my grief), others (including my son), and objects (such as those on my altar).

If you have not done these types of practices previous to finding yourself in the grip of grief, you may need to be kind with yourself as you may experience confusion or frustration at first. Learning from a qualified teacher is the best step you can take for yourself. We are blessed to have access to wonderful teachers who can guide you onto this path if you feel drawn to it. Do your due diligence and follow your heart to find the right teacher for you.

Summary of practices to increase your Awareness and Explore the Nature of Mind:

- Step back and hold thoughts, images and emotions in a larger awareness without clinging
- Notice how when you “lose your mind” and cling to thoughts, images and emotions, this
- cognitive fusion creates suffering
- Notice the relationship between thoughts, images and emotions
- Work with the body to allow emotion and let them release or dissipate without grasping
- Investigate the nature of your mind; contemplate where mental events come from and where mental events go to
- Recognize and contemplate the illusory nature of appearances
- Loosen your reifying of self, others, objects



Closing

Please utilize all that is available to you to assist you and your loved ones as you grieve. The time period and intensity of grief will be different for different individuals and change over time. Do what works for you. I found some therapy sessions helpful. Others I know have been helped by grief groups. I hope that your commitment to the Dharma and practice will be supported and support you as you use grief on the path.



Inspiration

A favorite poem of mine can be found in Sharon Salzberg's book *The Force of Kindness* (see Resources) and I share it here.

Kindness

By Naomi Shihab Nye

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.
Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

From *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems*. Naomi Shihab Nye, 1995.

Resources

This is a short list of resources that I found helpful as support for my practice along with the support and advice of my teachers. This list is by no means exhaustive.

Books

A Buddhist Grief Observed. Guy Newland; Wisdom Publications, 2016.

Advice from a Spiritual Friend. Geshe Rabten and Geshe Dhargey translated by Brian Beresford; Wisdom Publications, 1996.

Buddhism with an Attitude. B. Alan Wallace; Snow Lion Publications, 2001.

Dudjom Lingpa's Visions of the Great Perfection. B. Alan Wallace; Wisdom Publications, 2015. (Volume 1: Heart of the Great Perfection; Volume 2: Buddhahood Without Meditation; Volume 3: The Vajra Essence)

Genuine Happiness: Meditation as the Path to Fulfillment. B. Alan Wallace; John Wiley and Sons, 2005.

How to Enjoy Death: Preparing to Meet Life's Final Challenge without Fear. Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche; Wisdom Publications, 2016.

How to Practice: The Way to a Meaningful Life. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Jeffrey Hopkins; Simon and Schuster, 2002.

Meditation, Transformation, and Dream Yoga. Gyatrul Rinpoche, B. Alan Wallace; Snow Lion Publications, 2002. (Includes *Transforming Adversity and Felicity into the Spiritual Path.*)

Minding Closely: The Four Applications of Mindfulness. B. Alan Wallace; Snow Lion, 2011.

Naked Awareness: Practical Instructions on the Union of Mahamudra and Dzogchen. Gyatrul Rinpoche and B. Alan Wallace; Snow Lion Publications, 2000.

Not for Happiness: A Guide to the So-called Preliminary Practices. Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse; Shambala Publications, 2012.

Reducing Suffering through the Study and Practice of Buddhist Psychology. Geshe Ngawang Phende; Phende LLC, 2014.

Samatha Meditation: Tibetan Buddhist Teachings on Cultivating Meditative Quiescence. B. Alan Wallace and Gen Lamrimpa; Snow Lion Publications, 1992.

Start Where You Are; A Guide to Compassionate Living. Pema Chodron; Shambala Publications, 1994.

The Force of Kindness: Change Your Life with Love and Compassion. Sharon Salzberg; Sounds True, 2005. (Includes CD with Guided Loving Kindness meditations.)

The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying. Sogyal Rinpoche; Harper Collins, 1992.

Touching Enlightenment: Finding Realization in the Body. Reginald Ray; Sounds True, 2008.

True Refuge: Finding Peace and Freedom in Your Own Awakened Heart. Tara Brach; Random House Publishing Group, 2013.

Audio/Video: Guided Meditations and Teachings

Again, this is a small sampling of resources. It is a blessing to have access to teachings and meditations over the Internet. There are days when I was home and feeling sad and unmotivated when I found it especially useful and inspiring to listen to teachings or use a guided meditation just when I needed it.

Bodhicitta Sangha videos with Khenpo Sherab Sangpo

<https://www.bodhicittasangha.org/>

<https://www.youtube.com/user/KhenpoSherabSangpo/videos?>

Dharma Ocean podcasts with Reggie Ray

<https://www.dharmaocean.org/meditation/podcasts/>

Drepung Loesling Monastery - Atlanta - Livestream (and recordings)

<http://www.drepung.org/>

<https://livestream.com/accounts/7116288>

Santa Barbara Institute podcasts with B. Alan Wallace

<http://www.sbinstitute.com/phuketpodcasts>

Santa Barbara Institute DVD: *Transforming Adversity and Felicity into the Spiritual Path*

<http://www.sbinstitute.com/node/313>

Taking Grief onto the Path - with Lama Tsultrim Allione of Tara Mandala (Audio MP3 Download)

<http://dakinibookstore.mybigcommerce.com/taking-grief-onto-the-path-with-lama-tsultrim-allione-audio-mp3-download/>

Note that the **Insight Timer App** can be downloaded to your phone for access to hundreds of guided meditations. I have not used it but have many friends who have found it helpful.

Prayers

The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) provides many prayers for free download including the *King of Prayers* and the *Long-life Prayer for His Holiness the Dali Lama* as well as Refuge and Bodhicitta prayers..

<http://fpmt.org/education/teachings/texts/prayers-practices/>

Venerable Thubten Chodron, Abbess of [Sravasti Abbey](#) has a version of *The King Of Prayers* that I use. Other prayers and recordings of teachings are available on her site.

<http://thubtenchodron.org/2011/06/extraordinary-aspiration/>

If you would like a copy of the *Puja for Those We Have Lost: King of Prayers and Bardo Soldeb Prayers (2014)*, you may try contacting Drepung Loesling Monastery in Atlanta.

<http://drepung.org/Contact.cfm>



Contact Information

For Additional copies of this booklet or for questions/feedback please contact:

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APPENDIX

The King of Prayers

The Extraordinary Aspiration of the Practice of Samantabhadra

I bow down to the youthful Arya Manjushri.

You lions among humans,
Gone to freedom in the present, past and future
In the worlds of ten directions,
To all of you, with body, speech and sincere mind I bow down.

With the energy of aspiration for the bodhisattva way,
With a sense of deep respect,
And with as many bodies as atoms of the world,
To all you Buddhas visualized as real, I bow down.

On every atom are Buddhas numberless as atoms,
Each amidst a host of bodhisattvas,
And I am confident the sphere of all phenomena
Is entirely filled with Buddhas in this way.

With infinite oceans of praise for you,
And oceans of sound from the aspects of my voice,
I sing the breathtaking excellence of Buddhas,
And celebrate all of you Gone to Bliss.

Beautiful flowers and regal garlands,
Sweet music, scented oils and parasols,
Sparkling lights and sublime incense,
I offer to you Victorious Ones.

Fine dress and fragrant perfumes,
Sandalwood powder heaped high as Mount Meru,
All wondrous offerings in spectacular array,
I offer to you Victorious Ones.

With transcendent offerings peerless and vast,
With profound admiration for all the Buddhas,
With strength of conviction in the bodhisattva way,
I offer and bow down to all Victorious Ones.

Every harmful action I have done
With my body, speech and mind
Overwhelmed by attachment, anger and confusion,
All these I openly lay bare before you.

I lift up my heart and rejoice in all positive potential
Of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas in ten directions,
Of solitary realizers, hearers still training and those beyond,
And of all ordinary beings.

You who are the bright lights of worlds in ten directions,
Who have attained a Buddha's omniscience through the stages of awakening,
All you who are my guides,
Please turn the supreme wheel of Dharma.

With palms together I earnestly request:
You who may actualize parinirvana,
Please stay with us for eons numberless as atoms of the world,
For the happiness and well-being of all wanderers in samsara.

Whatever slight positive potential I may have created,
By paying homage, offering, and acknowledging my faults,
Rejoicing, and requesting that the Buddhas stay and teach,
I now dedicate all this for full awakening.

May you Buddhas now living in the worlds of ten directions,
And all you gone to freedom in the past, accept my offerings.
May those not yet arisen quickly perfect their minds,
Awakening as fully enlightened ones.

May all worlds in ten directions,
Be entirely pure and vast.
May they be filled with bodhisattvas
Surrounding Buddhas gathered beneath a bodhi tree.

May as many beings as exist in ten directions
Be always well and happy.
May all samsaric beings live in accord with the Dharma,
And may their every Dharma wish be fulfilled.

Remembering my past lives in all varieties of existence,
May I practice the bodhisattva way,
And thus, in each cycle of death, migration and birth,

May I always abandon the householder's life.

Then, following in the footsteps of all the Buddhas,
And perfecting the practice of a bodhisattva,
May I always act without error or compromise,
With ethical discipline faultless and pure.

May I teach the Dharma in the language of gods,
In every language of spirits and nagas,
Of humans and of demons,
And in the voice of every form of being.

May I be gentle-minded, cultivating the six paramitas,
And never forget bodhicitta.
May I completely cleanse without omission
Every negativity and all that obscures this awakening mind.

May I traverse all my lives in the world,
Free of karma, afflictions and interfering forces,
Just as the lotus blossom is undisturbed by the water's wave,
Just as the sun and moon move unhindered through the sky.

May I ease the suffering in the lower realms
And in the many directions and dimensions of the universe.
May I guide all wanderers in samsara to the pure bliss of awakening
And be of worldly benefit to them as well.

May I practice constantly for eons to come,
Perfecting the activities of awakening,
Acting in harmony with the various dispositions of beings,
Showing the ways of a bodhisattva.

May I always have the friendship
Of those whose path is like mine,
And with body, words and also mind,
May we practice together the same aspirations and activities.

May I always meet a spiritual mentor
And never displease that excellent friend,
Who deeply wishes to help me
And expertly teaches the bodhisattva way.

May I always directly see the Buddhas,

Masters encircled by bodhisattvas,
And without pause or discouragement for eons to come,
May I make extensive offerings to them.

May I hold within me the Buddha's genuine Dharma,
Illuminate everywhere the teachings that awaken,
Embody the realizations of a bodhisattva,
And practice ardently in all future eons.

While circling through all states of existence,
May I become an endless treasure of good qualities—
Skillful means, wisdom, samadhi and liberating stabilizations—
Gathering limitless pristine wisdom and positive potential.

On one atom I shall see
Buddha fields numberless as atoms,
Inconceivable Buddhas among bodhisattvas in every field,
Practicing the activities of awakening.

Perceiving this in all directions,
I dive into an ocean of Buddha fields,
Each an ocean of three times Buddhas in the space of a wisp of hair.
So I, too, will practice for an ocean of eons.

Thus I am continually immersed in the speech of the Buddhas,
Expression that reveals an ocean of qualities in one word,
The completely pure eloquence of all the Buddhas,
Communication suited to the varied tendencies of beings.

With strength of understanding I plunge
Into the infinite enlightened speech of the Dharma
Of all Buddhas in three times gone to freedom,
Who continually turn the wheel of Dharma methods.

I shall experience in one moment
Such vast activity of all future eons,
And I will enter into all eons of the three times,
In but a fraction of a second.

In one instant I shall see all those awakened beings,
Past, present and future lions among humans,
And with the power of the illusion-like stabilization
I will constantly engage in their inconceivable activity.

I shall manifest upon one single atom
The array of pure lands present, past and future.
Likewise, I shall enter the array of pure Buddha fields
In every direction without exception.

I shall enter the very presence of all my guides,
Those lights of this world who are yet to appear,
Those sequentially turning the wheels of complete awakening,
Those who reveal nirvana – final, perfect peace.

May I achieve the power of swift, magical emanation,
The power to lead to the great vehicle through every approach,
The power of always beneficial activity,
The power of love pervading all realms,

The power of all surpassing positive potential,
The power of supreme knowledge unobstructed by discrimination,
And through the powers of wisdom, skillful means and samadhi,
May I achieve the perfect power of awakening.

Purifying the power of all contaminated actions,
Crushing the power of disturbing emotions at their root,
Defusing the power of interfering forces,
I shall perfect the power of the bodhisattva practice.

May I purify an ocean of worlds,
May I free an ocean of beings,
May I clearly see an ocean of Dharma,
May I realize an ocean of pristine wisdom.

May I purify an ocean of activities,
May I fulfill an ocean of aspirations,
May I make offerings to an ocean of Buddhas,
May I practice without discouragement for an ocean of eons.

To awaken fully through this bodhisattva way,
I shall fulfill without exception
All the diverse aspirations of the awakening practice
Of all Buddhas gone to freedom in the three times everywhere.

In order to practice exactly as the wise one
Called Samantabhadra, 'All Embracing Good',

The elder brother of the sons and daughters of the Buddhas,
I completely dedicate all this goodness.

Likewise may I dedicate
Just as the skillful Samantabhadra,
With pure body, speech and mind,
Pure actions and pure Buddha fields.

I shall give rise to the aspirations of Manjushri
For this bodhisattva practice of all embracing good,
To perfect these practices
Without discouragement or pause in all future eons.

May my pure activities be endless,
My good qualities boundless,
And through abiding in immeasurable activity,
May I actualize infinite emanations.

Limitless is the end of space,
Likewise, limitless are living beings,
Thus, limitless are karma and afflictions.
May my aspiration's reach be limitless as well.

One may offer to the Buddhas
All wealth and adornments of infinite worlds in ten directions,
And one may offer during eons numberless as atoms of the world
Even the greatest happiness of gods and humans;

But whoever hears this extraordinary aspiration,
And longing for highest awakening
Gives rise to faith just once,
Creates far more precious positive potential.

Those who make this heartfelt aspiration for the bodhisattva way
Will be free of all lower rebirths,
Free of harmful companions,
And will quickly see Amitabha, Infinite Light.

And even in this very human life,
They will be nourished by happiness and have all conducive circumstances.
Without waiting long,
They will become like Samantabhadra himself.

Those who give voice to this extraordinary aspiration
Will quickly and completely purify
The five boundless harmful actions
Created under the power of ignorance.

Blessed with supreme knowledge,
Excellent body, family, attributes, and appearance,
They will be invincible to vast interfering forces and misleading teachers,
And all the three worlds will make offerings.

Going quickly to the noble bodhi tree,
And sitting there to benefit sentient beings,
Subduing all interfering forces,
They will fully awaken and turn the great wheel of Dharma

Have no doubt that complete awakening
Is the fully ripened result—comprehended only by a Buddha—
Of holding in mind by teaching, reading or reciting
This aspiration of the bodhisattva practice.

In order to train just like
The hero Manjushri who knows reality as it is
And just like Samantabhadra as well,
I completely dedicate all this goodness, just as they did.

With that dedication which is praised as greatest
By all the Buddhas gone to freedom in the three times,
I, too, dedicate all my roots of goodness
For the attainments of the bodhisattva practice.

When the moment of my death arrives,
By eliminating all obscurations
And directly perceiving Amitabha,
May I go immediately to Sukhavati, Pure Land of Great Joy.

Having gone to Sukhavati,
May I actualize the meaning of these aspirations,
Fulfilling them all without exception,
For the benefit of beings for as long as this world endures.

Born from an extremely beautiful, superlative lotus
In this joyful land, the Buddha's magnificent mandala,
May I receive a prediction of my awakening

Directly from the Buddha Amitabha.

Having received a prediction there,
May I create vast benefit
For beings throughout the ten directions,
With a billion emanations by the power of wisdom.

Through even the small virtue I have accumulated
By offering this prayer of the bodhisattva practice,
May all the positive aspirations of beings
Be fulfilled in an instant.

Through creating limitless positive potential
By dedicating this prayer of Samantabhadra's deeds,
May all beings drowning in this torrent of suffering,
Enter the presence of Amitabha.

Through this king of aspirations, which is the greatest of the sublime,
Helping infinite wanderers in samsara,
Through the accomplishment of this scripture dazzling with Samantabhadra's practice,
May suffering realms be utterly emptied of all beings.

Translated by Jesse Fenton, 2002, Seattle, Washington, by request of her teacher Venerable Thubten Chodron.

Please see <http://thubtenchodron.org/2011/06/extraordinary-aspiration/>