

## EXAMPLE OF A LETTER OF INSTRUCTION

TO MY MUCH LOVED family and friends, instructions for the time of my death.

First of all, I want you to know how deeply I care for you. Our connection in this lifetime, especially our moments of affection and happiness, represent my great good fortune. The process of dying brings home powerfully the realization that, as surely as we have come together, we must separate and the time in between is all too brief. Of course I feel sorrow, but I also feel a sweet and intense appreciation of what we have shared.

As death approaches, however, any ordinary attachment I have for you will not help, since I am powerless to turn back from this journey. And your attachment to me, though very natural, will not be useful because it may distract me and turn my attention to where I cannot really return - back to circumstances of my life with you - and hinder me in the tricky transition of death. What I need from you now is calmness, release, and the recognition that however my death appears outwardly, inwardly it is a profound spiritual opportunity. Your prayers, arising from your own depths of love and compassion, will certainly support me in my efforts to use this opportunity well.

You know that my spiritual training in recent years has been in Buddhism. The lineage masters of this tradition have left clear descriptions of what occurs at death and what meditational skills are needed to negotiate death's transition. I have asked some Buddhist practitioners to be present at my death and assist me in the practice. They will help me sit up, if possible, and they will do practice with me. They may also tap the top of my head, since the purpose is to direct the consciousness out of the crown of the head toward a destination of spiritual rebirth. This does not involve any flamboyant ritual, and it does not take more than an hour or so.

Hospitals are usually very willing to create space and time for this meditation, especially if you discuss it with the staff ahead of time.

What follows is a checklist of instructions. I hope that they are clear, because I may not be able to clarify them when I am closer to death, but you may ask any of my lamas or dharma friends on the list below if you have questions.

1. Please notify my lama and dharma friends in time for them to be present before I die. Of course, it may be hard to tell when the actual moment of death will occur; if it somehow happens that they can't arrive in time, don't worry. The blessings of my spiritual training will support my passing.,

2. Please do not touch my body, particularly my hands or feet, as death approaches because your loving contact may draw my attention downward when my whole focus should be at the crown of my head.

3. If no other spiritual practitioner is present when I die, tap my skull in the center about eight finger widths back from my original hairline. This could be of immense benefit in channeling the exit of my consciousness.

4. It is best if my body is not handled much before the practice is finished. Certain signs occur when transference is successful, which other practitioners will recognize. When the practice has been successful, it doesn't matter at all what happens to my corpse. I would prefer it to be cremated as inexpensively as possible and the ashes used in the making of tza-tsas, small sacred images stamped out of clay. A lama can instruct you. If tza-tsas prove to difficult to make, just have my dharma friends scatter the ashes and offer prayers. They are on, y ashes, the merest residue of my life. am an organ donor, and hopefully my consciousness will be transferred before anyone comes to harvest my organs. If not, don't worry; my lama assures me that the mere offering of organs supersedes the disturbance to the body and my consciousness will be direct to a high state of rebirth on the basis of that merit.

6. There is a slight possibility that transference won't be achieved, my organs won't be harvested, and my consciousness will remain lodged in my body for up to four days and three nights. This will cause difficulties for you, because my body should definitely not be buried or cremated until the consciousness has exited' a lama can check to see if it has done so. I don't want to burden you with my dead body (forgive me if many humorous possibilities spring to mind), but I want you to at least know about not destroying it prematurely. If you can't find a place to let it rest, then call the lamas and my dharma friends and urge them to practice. Performing our practice successfully from a distance requires a very great meditator, so it would be best if they did the practice next to my body.

7. Please make offerings to the lamas who perform prayers and ceremonies after my death. I have designated a certain amount of money in my will for this purpose. I know I have not been the most virtuous person in this lifetime, and unless this practice is successful and I take rebirth in a state beyond suffering and can purify my misdeed there, I may be confronted after death with the full weight of my negative actions of body, speech, and mind. This will definitely cause me suffering. You can alleviate this

by asking my dharma friends to arrange for prayers to be said and for ceremonies to be conducted. Particularly, I want to sponsor a practitioner to recite the Akshobhya mantra and to create an image of the Buddha. My lamas will suggest other ceremonies. A list of lamas and dharma friends appears below.

Thank you for all that you have done and will do. I know that it requires a certain tolerance to honor my spiritual belief system when it is different from your own, but I can hope that your respect for my requests will become a source of positive energy that will ease your mind at the time of your own death. According to the teachings I have received, if all goes well, after death I will find liberation from selfish concerns in the realms beyond death and will attain vastly enhanced abilities to benefit you and all beings. This is what I most wish. May it come about just so!