



# Sleeping Yoga Instruction

His Holiness the Sakya Trichen



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# Acknowledgement

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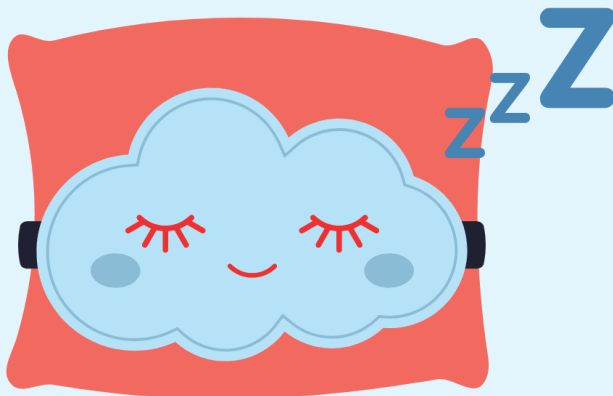
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By the merit of this work, may His Holiness the Sakya Trichen enjoy perfect health and a very long life, and continue to turn the wheel of Dharma.

The teachings of Buddhism state that the end of birth is death, an inevitable occurrence with uncertainty lying in when it will happen. Since death is unavoidable, facing and preparing for it not only helps us overcome fear but also transforms death into a favorable condition for liberation and even perfect buddhahood. This is why sleeping yoga is important.

What is sleeping yoga? How can it dispel the fear of death? How should one practice it, and is this practice connected to the path of liberation and enlightenment?

His Holiness provides clear and direct instructions in this teaching. Through careful reading, repeated contemplation, and putting it into practice, one can gain profound insights into living the practice. With such understanding, we can navigate various circumstances in life, including the fear and uncertainties associated with birth, death, and the intermediate state (bardo), accomplishing both temporary and ultimate goals.





Buddha Amitābha

# Sleeping Yoga Instruction

**T**here are several different kinds of *phowa*, or methods for directing one's consciousness at the time when it leaves the body. This sleeping yoga instruction is a *phowa* called Amitābha's sleeping yoga, and its purpose is to direct the consciousness to Amitābha's buddhafiield or pure realm at the time of dying.

The great Lord Buddha has said that all compounded things are impermanent. Of course, our lives, too, are impermanent. Everything is changing, and the bodies we possess now that seem substantial are in fact essenceless. The teaching on the four endings tells us that:

*The end of gathering is separation,*

*the end of accumulation is exhaustion,*

*the end of height is to fall, and*

*the end of birth is death.*



*The end of gathering is separation.* We have all come from different places, and we are gathered now together in the same place. However, when the causes and conditions for the gathering have ended, everyone will separate and go to their respective destinations. In the end, no one in this gathering will remain.

*The end of accumulation is exhaustion.* No matter how much wealth is acquired or possessions accumulated, eventually it will all be exhausted.

*The end of height is to fall down.* No matter how exalted we are in our social position or status, and no matter how powerful we become, eventually we will fall down.

*The end of birth is death.* Anyone who is born in the world will die. There has never been a single person who was born who did not die or will not die when the time comes. When we die, all of our possessions and all of our relatives and friends will be left behind. We will even leave behind our precious bodies that have been with us right from the day when we were conceived in our mothers' wombs. We have taken great care of our bodies, making sure they do not feel too cold or too hot, too weak, or too hungry or thirsty. But in the end, we will have to leave our precious bodies behind, despite all the effort and care with which we protected them.

When we die, nothing but our consciousness will remain. It happens like a strand of hair pulled from a slab of butter. The consciousness will then have to go to some unknown destination, alone, without any help or companionship. Some people think that when our physical bodies are disposed of, one way or another, our minds will just disappear, too. The powerful consciousness, however, which is invisible and indescribable cannot simply disappear. It necessarily continues, and we will have no certainty where we are heading or into what lower realms we might be falling. We cannot guarantee our destination. We lack the freedom to do this. Wherever the winds of karma or our defilements blow, there we are always forced to go.

The moment of dying is an especially critical time. It is like the moment a car is about to fall off a cliff. Turning the wheel of the car in the opposite direction in that precise moment can prevent the crash. In the same way, in the critical time of dying, the ability to change course will keep one from falling into the lower realms, and the consciousness can be directed to a buddhafiield. This is the special practice that will be discussed here.

This phowa is not an exclusively Vajrayāna practice. It is a joint practice between the Sūtrayana and Vajrayāna. In fact, it

is based primarily on Sūtrayāna, in that its main source is the Samantabhadra *Ārya-bhadracaryā* prayer, which was coupled with pith instructions by great Indian masters. These teachings were transmitted to the great lamas Sakya Paṇḍita and his nephew the Drogön Chögyal Phagpa.

Through this practice, one can truly direct one's consciousness to the buddhafiield. To perform it, however, one needs to receive the transmission from a guru. The teaching has four parts: preparation, main part, conclusion, and the benefits of the practice.

### *I. Preparation*

We cannot know the negative deeds that we have committed that will cause us to fall into lower realms at the time of death, realms where there is unimaginable suffering. Even in the higher realms, where it appears that there is a mixture of happiness and suffering, there is no real happiness, either. The things that we ordinarily consider to be happiness and joy are, in reality, another form of suffering.

Realizing this, we should not wish to remain in saṃsāra in any of the six realms. We should genuinely wish to go to a

buddhafield at the time of death instead. Although there are many buddhafields, there is only one where it is possible for ordinary persons to be born. This is the buddhafield of Buddha Amitābha. By making special aspirations and prayers to Buddha Amitābha, even ordinary persons with their obscurations and defilements can be born into this buddhafield, as long as they have strong faith and pray to be born there.

This faith has three aspects: clear faith, desiring faith, and believing faith:

- When you hear about and contemplate the good qualities of the buddhafield Sukhāvati, the buddhafield of Amitābha, and the qualities of Buddha Amitābha himself, you are greatly impressed, so much that all confusion and doubt is cleared away, and you experience a sense of great relief. This is clear faith.
- When you see the great qualities of the Buddha and wish to obtain such qualities yourself in order to benefit sentient beings—this is desiring faith.
- When you become convinced of these great qualities through careful analysis which produces conviction that they are the genuine truth and not just true because someone told you so—this is called believing faith.

### *Shrine Setup*

If possible, acquire a large thangka of Sukhāvati. If this is not possible, situate nicely a picture or an image of Buddha Amitābha facing east. The Buddha Amitābha realm is in the west, and this is why the image should be placed facing east.

Next, whatever offerings you can acquire, such as flowers, incense, water, food, and so on, should be arranged in front of the image.

### *Preparatory Steps*

This yoga is a sleeping phowa, meaning it is practiced right before falling asleep. There are several preparatory steps. The first preparation, as for all practices, is to switch from the wrong path to the right path—in other words, to take refuge. This is a necessary step. If you want to go to an unknown destination, the first thing you need is a guide who can show you the correct path. In this context, the destination is liberation and enlightenment. By taking refuge in the Buddha, you are taking him as your guide on the path to liberation and enlightenment. Of course, you must travel the path by yourself, but with the Buddha as guide.

The second object of refuge is the Dharma. To practice the Dharma is to travel the path. Really, our main savior is the Dharma because it is only through practicing Dharma that we enter upon and traverse the path that leads to the destination of liberation and enlightenment. Therefore, we take refuge in the Dharma as the path.

Because the journey is long and difficult, it will be a great help if we have companions who are traveling to the same destination so that they can accompany us on our journey. This is why we take refuge in the Saṅgha who are our companions on the path.

By taking refuge in the Triple Gem—the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha—we will be properly set on the right path. The text that we are referring to gives a long version of refuge. To simplify the process, we will use a shorter version of the refuge prayer. The short version combines refuge with the creation of bodhicitta, or the enlightenment mind, which is the wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

The second preparatory step, which diverts us from the lower path to the higher path, is generating bodhicitta. When we possess genuine bodhicitta, or the enlightenment mind, every deed that we perform, every practice we do—every activity—

is totally devoted to the benefit of all sentient beings. The enlightenment thought is the thought or motivation to attain full enlightenment for this purpose, or to benefit every sentient being. To accomplish this goal, we resolve to practice this meditation of Buddha Amitābha.

The verse of four lines that combines refuge and enlightenment thought was written by the great Indian master Atiśa:

༄༅།སངས་རྒྱལ་ཚེས་དང་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་མཚོག་རྣམས་ལ།

Sangye Cho-dang Tsho-kyi Cho-nam la

བྱང་རྒྱལ་བར་དུ་བདག་ནི་སྐྱབས་སུ་མཚེ།

Jangchub Bardu Dagni Kyab-su chi

བདག་གིས་སྐྱེན་སོགས་བགྲིས་པའི་བསོད་ནམས་ཀྱིས།

Dag-gyi Jin-sog gyi-pai So-nam kyi

འགོ་ལ་ཕན་ཕྱིར་སངས་རྒྱལ་འགྲུབ་པར་ཤོག།

Dro-la Phen-chir Sangye Drub-par shok

*To the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha,  
I seek refuge until enlightenment is reached.  
By the merit of generosity and so forth,  
May I attain the state of buddhahood,  
for the benefit of all sentient beings.*

You should recite this prayer three times with a genuine wish to go for refuge and create the enlightenment mind.

The next step is to think that this place where you are at now is no longer an ordinary place; it is Sukhāvati, the perfect buddhafiield of Amitābha. You are in the middle of a large green field with sparkling streams. Birds are singing on trees whose leaves and flowers are made of precious gems. You are cooled by a gentle breeze. Visualize that you are in the form of a deity. This can be any deity, but in this case, Avalokiteśvara is an appropriate choice because Buddha Amitābha is the guru or the owner of the race of Avalokiteśvara. So then, visualize yourself in the full form of Avalokiteśvara, either with four arms, one thousand arms, or another form. The four-armed Avalokiteśvara is the simplest form. Whichever the case, you should visualize Avalokiteśvara as clearly as possible.



In front of you is a jeweled throne. Upon it, there is a pink-petaled lotus, and upon this is a moon disc. On the moon disc, there is Buddha Amitābha in human form, red in color, with one face and two hands, seated in the meditation posture and holding a begging bowl filled with nectar. Buddha Amitābha can be visualized in two forms. The first is in renounced form, with a shaved head, lacking any ornaments, and wearing a three-piece robe, the form that we would normally see. The other form is called saṃbhogakāya. This is red in color, with one face and two hands, with long hair and wearing ornaments such as a crown, earrings, a necklace, and so on.

Whichever form you visualize, Buddha Amitābha is adorned with the thirty-two signs<sup>[1]</sup> and eighty qualities<sup>[2]</sup>. You should visualize this very clearly, yet keep in mind that the body is not solid like our bodies made of flesh. The body of the Buddha Amitābha is made of light. Although the shape and colors appear vividly, they are devoid of self-nature, just like a rainbow, the reflection of the moon in water, or a reflection in a mirror. Normally, when we speak of appearance or what is visible, we mean something that exists in the way that we ordinarily conceive of existing things. Here, however, ordinary appearance and emptiness do not contradict each other. The appearance is empty because the form is not a solid body, yet it

is also very clearly visible. This shows the non-contradiction or nonduality of appearance and emptiness.

Next, in order to accumulate merit and to purify our negative deeds, we perform the seven-fold prayer together with the visualization. This seven-fold prayer is not the version that is usually recited in a wang, or a major empowerment. This version is based on *Samantabhadra's Aspiration to Good Actions—the King of Aspiration Prayers* (Sanskrit: *Ārya-bhadracaryā-praṇidhāna-rāja*).

### *Seven-fold Prayer*

The first element of the seven-fold prayer is making prostrations. Even performing a single prostration to a buddha with the right mind can accumulate an enormous amount of merit. After all, everything is mind. If we can visualize that our single body is multiplied into millions and all of them are performing millions of prostrations, then the merit is multiplied. We can then visualize that our body, multiplied this way into millions performing millions and millions of prostrations, is prostrating not just to one buddha but to all the buddhas of the past, present, and future in every direction. When we perform even one prostration with a strong

visualization like this, we can accumulate an enormous amount of merit.

There are three types of prostrations: physical, verbal, and mental. Verbal prostration refers to the recitation describing the great qualities of the buddhas while chanting very sweet melodies. Mental prostration means to imagine each atom is filled with as many buddhas as there are atoms in the universe. Such a visualization might sound extraordinary but it is easily performed—after all, everything is the mind. In this way, we should visualize that the whole universe is filled with buddhas.

The second element of the seven-fold prayer is making offerings of two kinds: ordinary offerings and matchless offerings. Ordinary offerings are offerings that are physically arranged such as flowers, incense, scented water, food, music, incense, and so on as well as other offerings that are mentally created. Matchless offerings are offerings made by the noble ones, the great bodhisattvas. We should visualize all these and offer them to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Confession is the third element of the prayer. From beginningless time until now, due to our defilements, we have performed negative deeds, or negative karma, through body, speech, and mind. With a feeling of genuine regret, we should confess to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The fourth element is rejoicing. We should rejoice in all the activities of the buddhas, bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, and pratyekabuddhas, as well as the beneficial activities of ordinary beings. This includes yourself. Whatever virtuous deeds have been performed by anyone, whether big or small, we rejoice in them fully. This means to support everyone's virtuous actions without competitiveness or jealous thoughts.

The fifth element is requesting all the buddhas to turn the wheel of Dharma. Buddhas do not turn the wheel of Dharma unless they see that we are worthy of receiving the precious teachings. After attaining enlightenment under the bodhi tree, Lord Buddha Śākyamuni did not teach right away. He thought, "I have found the nectar, but I will not teach it to anyone because there is no one who is able to comprehend its profound meaning." He only began to teach when Lord Brahma offered him a golden wheel with a thousand spokes requesting the Buddha to turn the wheel of Dharma. For the sake of all sentient beings who are in saṃsāra experiencing great suffering, we also request all the buddhas to turn the wheel of Dharma.

The sixth element is requesting all the buddhas not to enter into nirvāṇa. The buddhas and all those who have reached beyond the worldly level are completely free from birth,

death, old age, sickness, and so forth. It is for the eyes of ordinary beings that buddhas show that they enter into mahāparinirvāṇa. For the sake of all sentient beings, we request all the buddhas not to enter into mahāparinirvāṇa but to remain for as many eons as there are atoms.

By performing the first six elements of the seven-fold prayer, we can accumulate tremendous merit. While it is still fresh and unaffected by our negative actions, we should dedicate this merit to the attainment of buddhahood for all sentient beings. Once merit is dedicated, it can never be affected by whatever might destroy it. In fact, it will continue to multiply, as we have assigned a specific purpose to it. This act of dedication is the seventh element of the prayer.

With the visualization already described, you should recite the seven-fold prayer.

## *II. Main Part*

For the main part of the practice, first we request Buddha Amitābha to purify all of our obscurations and nonvirtuous deeds so that we will be born in Sukhāvati and receive there a prophecy that we will attain enlightenment.

As was requested, the practice that I am teaching here includes breathing practice, not just recitation. Imagine that when you exhale, your mind in the form of white light passes from your heart out through your right nostril. Then it enters into the left nostril of Amitābha and descends to his heart. Imagine that your mind is thus merged with the mind of Buddha Amitābha. The body of Buddha Amitābha is made of light, like a rainbow. The shape and colors are very clearly visible, yet it is empty. There are no organs inside the body—sort of like a balloon. At the place of the heart there is a seed syllable HRĪḤ ( ह्रीं ) upon a moon disc. Your mind in the form of the white light is absorbed into this. Thus, your mind and the primordial wisdom of Buddha Amitābha are completely merged together, like water mixed with water.

Then, when you inhale, imagine that white light issues from the seed syllable at Buddha Amitābha's heart. Just like light coming from light, it emerges from his right nostril and enters your left nostril and is absorbed into your heart. Your mind and the primordial wisdom of the Buddha Amitābha are once again merged together.

As you exhale and inhale, visualize the two lights going out and coming in, cycling this way like the turning of a fire

band. You do not need to count. This is how you perform the visualization.

### *III. Conclusion*

Now we are approaching the end of the session. Visualize Buddha Amitābha in front of you, surrounded by buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the lineage gurus. The buddhas and bodhisattvas are absorbed into the lineage gurus, and the lineage gurus are absorbed into Buddha Amitābha. As you inhale, Buddha Amitābha dissolves into light and is absorbed into you. In this way, the buddhas, your guru, and your mind are completely merged together. Then, you should visualize yourself in the form of Buddha Amitābha and recite this mantra as many times as you can.

*[OṂ AMITĀBHA HRĪḤ SVĀHA]*

After this, you should recite the full *Samantabhadra's Aspiration to Good Actions—the King of Aspiration Prayers*.

Then, Buddha Amitābha returns to the buddhfield. At your forehead, throat, and heart there appear the three syllables

*OM*, *ĀḤ*, and *HŪM* as a protection. With the mind unscattered and with a strong intention to be born in Sukhāvati, you should sleep on your right side with your head pointing to the west, where Sukhāvati is located.

At this time, offer the seven-fold prayer again with the strong conviction that your negative deeds are purified. You should give up attachment to your body, wealth, relatives, friends, and so on. None of these will remain forever. One day we will have to leave this world, and whether we are prepared or not, we will have to leave everything behind. You should also form a strong aspiration to be born in Sukhāvati and have no fear of saṃsāra or the lower realms. During the day, whatever you do and wherever you go, you should think that you are in Sukhāvati and never separated from Buddha Amitābha.

*[His Holiness recites prayer.]*

#### *IV. Benefits of This Practice*

Through performing this practice, you will not meet any major sicknesses, obstacles, or the influence of evil forces in this life. You will also have a long life, and at the time of death, thanks to the blessings of Amitābha, you will not encounter any severe suffering or fear in the bardo state.



Just like snakes change their skins, we change our bodies. At this time, your consciousness will take a miraculous birth in the lotus of Sukhāvati. There, you will be able to see Buddha Amitābha in person and receive teachings from him directly. Once you are born in Sukhāvati, you will never fall into the lower realms.

There are innumerable good qualities that you will enjoy in the buddhafiield. These are found in the authentic sūtras that record the words of the Buddha, so you can be assured that you will not fail to obtain them.

## Notes:

[1] The thirty-two signs, or major marks, are auspicious physical marks on the bodies of all buddhas. They are: well-placed feet; marks under the soles of thousand-spoked wheels; heels long and deep; fingers long; hands and feet are soft and tender; hands and feet are webbed; ankles are high; calves are like an antelope's; can rub both his knees with his hands when standing; what is covered by a cloth is unsheathed; golden in color; fine skin to which dust and dirt do not adhere; body hairs arise singly; the hair bristles, his bristling hair is black, the color of collyrium, turning in curls, turning to the right; the limbs are straight like brahmā's; there are seven prominent marks; the torso is like a lion's; between the shoulders it is firm; the body is well-proportioned like a banyan tree, the extent of the arm span equals the extent of the body; the upper back is even all round; the taste buds are supremely sensitive; the jaw is like a lion's; there are forty teeth; the teeth are even; the teeth are without gaps; the teeth are very white; the tongue is very large; the voice is like brahmā's or like the sound of the cuckoo; the eyes are very dark; the eyelashes are like a cow's; the tuft of hair between the eyebrows on his forehead is very white like cotton; there is a protuberance on the head. As described in *Dvātimśa Mahāpuriṣalakkhaṇāni* from *Brahmāyusuttaṃ*.

[2] The eighty qualities, or minor marks are physical attributes possessed by buddhas. They are: copper-colored nails; moderately shiny nails; raised nails; found fingers; broad fingers; tapered fingers; veins do not protrude; veins are free of knots; ankles do not protrude; uneven feet; walks with a lion's gait; walks with an elephant's gait; walks with the gait of a goose; walks with a bull's gait; his gait tends to the right; his gait is elegant; his gait is steady; well-covered body; his body looks as if it were polished; well-proportioned body; clean and pure body; smooth body; perfect body; his sex organs are fully-developed; his physical bearing is excellent and dignified; his steps are even; perfect eyes; youthful; his body is not sunken; broad body; his body is not loose; well-proportioned limbs; clear and

unblurred vision; round belly; perfectly moderate belly; not long belly; his belly does not bulge; deep navel; his navel winds to the right; he is perfectly handsome; his habits are clean; his body is free of moles and discoloration; his hands are as soft as cotton wool; the lines of his palms are clear; the lines of his palms are deep; the lines of his palms are long; his face is not overlong; his lips are red like copper; his tongue is pliant; his tongue is thin; his tongue is red; his voice is like thunder; his voice is sweet and gentle; his teeth are round; his teeth are sharp; his teeth are white; his teeth are even; his teeth are tapered; his nose is prominent; his nose is clean; his eyes are clear and wide; his eyelashes are thick; the black and white parts of his eyes are well-defined and are like lotus petals; long eyebrows; smooth eyebrows; soft eyebrows; evenly haired eyebrows; long and extended hands; equal size ears; his ear sense power is perfect; his forehead is well-formed and well-defined; broad forehead; very large head; his hair is as black as a bumblebee; thick hair; soft hair; untangled hair; unruly hair; fragrant hair; his hands and feet are marked with auspicious emblems such as the glorious endless knot and svastika. *Tibetan-English Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology*, Tsepa Rigdzin, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. This is based on the *Great Volume of Precise Understanding–Mahavyutpatti*–drawn up by Tibetan translators in the ninth century at the instigation of the Tibetan dharma-king Tri Ralpachen.





■ His Holiness the Sakya Trichen is revered as the forty-first throne holder of the Sakya lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Born in Tibet in 1945, His Holiness is from the noble Khön family, whose predecessors date to the early days of Tibetan history and established the Sakya order in the eleventh century. In his youth, His Holiness received intensive training in Buddhist philosophy, meditation, and ritual from eminent masters and scholars.

Widely regarded as an emanation of Mañjuśrī, His Holiness is the spiritual guide to many in the next generation of Buddhist teachers and practitioners, and has bestowed Sakya's core teaching cycle known as the Lamdre (the Path with the Result) in both eastern and western countries. His Holiness manifests profound wisdom and compassion, tirelessly working to establish monasteries, nunneries, and educational institutions and to impart the Buddha's teachings to countless students around the world.



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