

The Tibetan Book of the Dead – Bardo Thodol

Is there a greater gift of charity you can give than helping a person to die well.

Bardo – The intermediate or between state.

Thodol – Liberation through understanding.

Liberation through understanding - of/in - the between state.

Written in the 8th C by the legendary Padmasambhava, buried, hidden, until rediscovered by Karma Lingpa in the 12th C and used continuously since that time. The Book we study is only 3 of the some 42 books in the complete cycle of writings.



The pace of our lives is so hectic that the last thing that we have time to think about is death. We smother our secret fears of impermanence by surrounding ourselves with more and more goods, more and more things, more and more comforts, only to find ourselves their slaves. All our time and energy is exhausted simply maintaining them. Our only aim in life soon becomes to keep everything as safe and secure as possible. When changes do happen we find the quickest remedy [. . .] so our lives drift on unless a serious illness or disaster shakes us out of our stupor. [*T.B.L.D.trans Evans-Wentz p18.*]

'The Tibetan Book of the Dead,' is a guide for the dead and dying. The first part, called Chikhai Bardo, describes the moment of death and the clear light.

The second part, Chonyid Bardo, deals with the states which supervene immediately after death.

The third part, Sidpa Bardo, concerns the onset of the birth instinct and of prenatal events.

The *Bardo Thödol* began by being a 'closed' book, and so it has remained, no matter what kind of commentaries may be written upon it. For it is a book that will only open itself to spiritual understanding, and this is a capacity which no man is born with, but which he can only acquire through special training and special experience. It is good that such to all intents and purposes 'useless' books exist. They are meant for those 'queer folk' who no longer set much store by the uses, aims, and meaning of present-day 'civilisation'

Carl Jung (Intro to Evans Wentz Tibetan Book of the Dead .post 1954)

0 nobly-born, when thy body and mind were separating, thou must have experienced a glimpse Of the Pure Truth, subtle, sparkling, bright dazzling, glorious, and radiantly awesome, in appearance like a mirage moving across a landscape in spring-time in one continuous stream of vibrations.

Be not daunted thereby, nor terrified, nor awed. That is the radiance of thine own true nature. Recognize Reality in the Bardo state, wherein all things are like the void and cloudless sky, and the naked, spotless intellect is like unto a transparent vacuum without circumference or centre. At this moment, know thou thyself-, and abide in that state. (*Tibetan Book of the Dead 1927, Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup ed W.Y. Evans-Wentz pp. 91*)

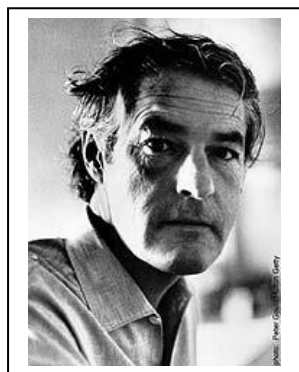
Eugene Halliday recommended Tim Leary's version as it strongly endorses the daily experience of Ego disturbance, trauma and loss through attack, loss or shock – or as the title states drug stimulation.

¹His description of the Second Bardo is very lucid;

'The underlying problem of the Second Bardo is that any and every shape - human, divine, diabolical, heroic, evil, animal, thing - which the human brain conjures up or the past life recalls, can present itself to consciousness: shapes and forms and sounds whirling by endlessly.

You are standing on the threshold of recognizing the truth: there is no reality behind any of the phenomena of the ego-loss state, save the illusions stored up in your own mind either as accretions from game (Sangsaric²) experience or as gifts from organic physical nature and its billion-year old past history. Recognition of this truth gives liberation.

There is, of course, no way of classifying the infinite permutations and combinations of visionary elements. The cortex contains file-cards for billions of images from the history of the person, of the race, and of living forms. Any of these, at the rate of a hundred million per second (according to neuro-physiologists), can flood into awareness. Bobbing around in this brilliant, symphonic sea of imagery is the remnant of the conceptual mind.



One cannot predict what visions will occur, nor their sequence. One can only urge the participants to shut the mouth, breathe through the nose, and turn off the fidgety, rationalizing mind. But only the experienced person of mystical bent can do this (and thus remain in serene enlightenment). The unprepared person will be confused or, worse, panicky: the intellectual struggle to control the ocean.

If read literally, The Tibetan Book of the Dead would have you expect the "Master of All Visible Shapes" (or his opposite, the fondness for stupidity) on the first day; the "Immovable Deity of Happiness" and his consort, attendants and opposite on the second, etc. The manual should, of course, not be used rigidly, exoterically, but should be taken in its esoteric³, allegorical form.

Read from this perspective, we see that the lamas have listed or named a thousand images which can boil up in the ever-changing jeweled mosaic of the retina (that multi-layered swamp of billions of rods and cones, infiltrated, like a Persian rug or a Mayan carving, with countless multi-colored capillaries). By preparatory reading of the manual and by its repetition during the experience, the novice is led via suggestion to recognize this fantastic retinal kaleidoscope.

The aim of this manual is to make available the general outline of the Tibetan Book and to translate it into psychedelic English. For this reason we shall not present the detailed sequence of lamaist hallucinations but, rather, list some apparitions commonly reported by Westerners '

¹ *The Psychedelic Experience: A manual based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* By Timothy Leary, Ph.D., Ralph Metzner, Ph.D., & Richard Alpert, Ph.D can be read freely online at Erowid Online Books.

² Saṃsāra is a Buddhist term that literally means "circle" or "wheel" and is commonly translated as "conditioned existence", "cyclic existence". Within Buddhism, samsara is defined as the continual repetitive cycle of birth and death that arises from ordinary beings' grasping and fixating on a self and experiences, referring to the process of one rebirth after another within the six realms of existence, where each realm can be understood as physical realm or a psychological state characterized by a particular type of suffering.

³ The term derives from the Greek ἐσωτερικός (*esôterikos*), a compound of ἔσω (*esô*): "within", thus "pertaining to the more inward", mystic. Its antonym is "exoteric". Plato, in his dialogue *Alcibiades* (circa 390 BC), uses the expression *ta esô* meaning "the inner things", and in his dialogue *Theaetetus* (circa 360 BC) he uses *ta exô* meaning "the outside things". Aristotle applied this distinction to his own writings.

The term *esoteric* first appeared in English in the 1701 *History of Philosophy* by Thomas Stanley, in his description of the mystery-school of Pythagoras; the Pythagoreans were divided into "exoteric" (under training), and "esoteric" (admitted into the "inner" circle).