

Ritual for a Group

Below is a model for holding a non-denominational ritual after the death of a loved one. Some find it useful to hold with a close circle of family or friends, even months after someone has died.

To prepare, set up chairs in a circle with a votive light on each seat. If there's one prayer you wish everyone to read, then place this on the chair as well. On a table in the center of the circle, put a tray with a large candle in the middle, and then you can decorate the tray with flowers or leaves – leaving space for the votive candles to eventually be placed there. Have a few people ready with lighters.

Welcome everyone, and explain what we are going to do:

Establish our intention for this ritual.

Light a candle that we dedicate with the deepest wish in our heart for our loved one who is gone.

Place the candles onto the tray. And, if you like you can say out loud what your deepest wish is for the person who's died.

Then, we'll sit silently for a minute or two.

We'll listen to a guided practice of Essential Phowa, a special meditation that gives spiritual support and healing for those who have died.

We'll conclude by reading a poem or quote, or listen to a piece of music, and then dedicate.

Establishing our intention and offering lights

Let's begin by establishing a compassionate intention for today. Bring to mind the deceased person, with a sincere wish that this might be of great benefit for them, releasing any suffering from their life or death, and bringing them the blessings of profound happiness and peace.

Stewards can start lighting a few candles

As we light our candle, we dedicate it for our loved one who has died, with a deep wish in our heart for their highest good.

Once all the candles are lit: Now, you can come - one by one - and put your candle on the tray, while saying out loud what your wish is, if you like.

For a larger group, stewards can bring the tray or trays to those seated: We will silently put our candle onto the tray, while mentally dedicating for our loved one.

Now, we'll sit in silence for a minute or two.

If anyone wants to speak from the heart, this would be the time to invite them.

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Essential Phowa, introduction

Every spiritual tradition in the world has special prayers or meditations that bring spiritual support or healing for those who have died. We're going to do one of these beautiful meditations now, which is called *Essential Phowa*.

In the meditation, you'll be invited to invoke a presence who is the embodiment of truth, above the person for whom you are practicing. If you know there's a spiritual presence your loved one relates to, then think of this presence. If not, then simply invoke a presence who is the embodiment of wisdom and loving compassion, in the form of radiant light.

Start by settling yourself, remaining open - and at ease. *(Pause)*

You can arouse a compassionate intention for this meditation, with a wish that it might transform the suffering of your loved one who's died, and establish him or her in a state of profound happiness and peace. *(Pause)*

Imagine now that your loved one is in front of you. *(Pause)*

With all your heart, invoke in the space above him or her a presence who is the embodiment of wisdom and pure love, in the form of radiant, golden-white light. *(Pause)* Consider this presence is actually here—alive, breathing, and gazing towards the person with kindness, and love. *(Longer pause)*

On behalf of your loved one, ask the presence to dispel any of their suffering, regrets, or burdens, or any anguish they may have experienced while dying. *(Pause)*

The compassionate heart of this radiant presence immediately responds, shining out tremendous light rays onto the person, which completely dispel all of his or her suffering. *(Longer pause)*

And these powerful light rays of compassion fill the person's heart with forgiveness, and peace; warming their entire being with genuine compassion and love. *(Longer pause)*

Consider now that this transformation is completely effected, so that the person is entirely healed, and filled with ease and happiness and well-being. Even on the cellular level, the person's body is being purified and transformed into light. *(Longer pause)*

Now the person's body and mind – in the form of light – rises up, and dissolves into the heart of the loving presence – completely mixing, like light mixing with light. *(Longer pause)*

Remain in this profound openness and peace, as long as you can. *(Longer pause)*

If you don't read the dedication at the end of this document, then you can read this at the end of the Essential Phowa:

Dedicate the blessings and goodness of this meditation for your loved one, and for all who have died, including your ancestors, with the wish they might be free of suffering, and realize the unchanging happiness and peace of their true nature. *(Longer pause)*

Now, if your eyes were closed, please open them and come back.

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Sharing a poem or quote or piece of music of your choice.

As we conclude with a dedication, let's bring to mind our loved one who's died, and any others we would like to include. *(Pause)*

Dedication

May the power of the goodness we've created today, together with all the merit ever created by all beings - including every single act of kindness - may this become part of a vast shimmering ocean of blessings.

We share this with our loved one who's died, and our friends, and family, and all our ancestors;

We offer this to all who are suffering from hatred, or shame, or fear or ill-will;

To those who in our blindness we have harmed, and those who harmed us;

We offer to all those who are struggling right now in our community and throughout the world, including the animals and insects;

To those who are living and those who have died. *(Pause)*

With all our heart, we offer this ocean of blessings to them:

May it dispel their suffering and the causes of their suffering;

May it bring good circumstances – safety, love, and healing – and whatever they need;

And may this merit re-connect them with the profound peace and unchanging happiness of their true nature, that is free of suffering. *(Pause)*

During the silence now, let your heart and mind expand to become vast and all-embracing, so you're sharing this blessing with every single being throughout the whole universe. *(Longer pause)*

Consider that all those we have brought to mind actually receive the blessings and merit we've dedicated, and are transformed by this. *(Longer pause)*