

Overview of the Death and Rebirth Process (lightly edited transcript)
by Ven. Thubten Chodron© at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle. 27 Jan 93

Death

When we are alive, we have the six consciousnesses – the five sense consciousnesses and the mental consciousness, which is thinking. These are the gross consciousnesses. As we're dying and our body is losing the ability to support the mind, these gross consciousnesses absorb into the subtle consciousness. A person stops being able to see, hear and relate to their external world. Even after the breath stops, the dissolution process goes on until you get to the extremely subtle consciousness. This is the clear light of death. This is the most subtle state of mind, the purest state of mind untainted by ignorance. It has the impression of ignorance on top of it, but it itself is untainted and pure. This extremely subtle state of mind is what enables us to become a Buddha, leaving the gross body at death.

Bardo and Rebirth

As soon as the extremely subtle mind leaves the gross body, it becomes slightly more gross. In other words, it becomes subtle instead of extremely subtle, and that's the bardo being, the intermediate stage being.

And then let's say, for example, the person is going to be reborn as a human being. The bardo body and mind are subtle, but they're not extremely subtle. Again, they first dissolve into the extremely subtle mind and the extremely subtle wind (or energy), and this subtlest mind and energy then join with the sperm and egg. Once they join with the sperm and egg, which is the moment of conception, they become subtle again. As the fetus develops in the womb and the baby becomes able to contact different sense objects, the gross consciousnesses develop.

[In response to audience:] The extremely subtle mind is not manifest the whole time, although it's there all the time. Like right now, our extremely subtle mind is here, but it's not manifest. It's not functioning because the gross levels of mind are overwhelming it and we're so distracted, running around to all the other objects.

This teaching is based on the *Lamrim* or *The Gradual Path to Enlightenment*. Please refer to the following web-page for its outline and other transcripts or to listen to the audio recording of these talks: <http://www.thubtenchodron.org/GradualPathToEnlightenment/outline.html>