

## **Sending and Taking Should Be Practiced Alternately. These Two Should Ride the Breath**

Sending and taking is a very important practice of the Bodhisattva path. It is called tonglen in Tibetan: 'tong' means 'sending out' or 'letting go' and 'len' means 'receiving' or 'accepting'. 'Tonglen' is a very important term; you should remember it. It is the main practice in the development of relative Bodhicitta.

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The practice of tonglen is actually quite straightforward ; it is an actual sitting meditation practice. You give away your happiness, your pleasure, anything that feels good. All of that goes out with the outbreath. As you breathe in, you breathe in any resentments and problems, anything that feels bad. The whole point is to remove territoriality altogether.

The practice of tonglen is very simple. We do not first have to sort out our doctrinal definitions of goodness and evil. We simply breathe out any old good and breathe in any old bad. At first we may seem to be relating primarily to our IDEAS of good and bad. But as we go on, it becomes more real.

Sometimes we feel terrible that we are breathing in poison which might kill us and at the same time breathing out whatever little goodness we have. It seems to be completely impractical,. But once we begin to break through, we realize that we have even more goodness and we also have more things to breathe in. So the whole process becomes somewhat balanced...But tonglen should not be used as any kind of antidote. You do not do it and then wait for the effect - you just do it and drop it. It doesn't matter whether it works or not: if it works, you breathe that out; if it does not work, you breathe that in. So you do not possess anything. That is the point.

Usually you would like to hold on to your goodness. you would like to make a fence around yourself and put everything bad outside it: foreigners, your neighbors, or what have you. You don't want them to come in. You don't even want your neighbors to walk their dogs on your property because they might make a mess on your lawn. So in ordinary samsaric life. you don't send and receive at all. You try as much as possible to guard those pleasant little situations you have created for yourself. You try to put them in a vacuum, like fruit in a tin, completely purified and clean. You try to hold on to as much as you can, and anything outside of your territory is regarded as altogether problematic. You don't want to catch the local influenza or the local diarrhea attack that is going around. You are constantly trying to ward off as much as you can.

...The Mahayana path is trying to show us that we don't have to secure ourselves. We can afford to extend out a little bit - quite a bit... if you develop the attitude of being willing to part with your precious things, to give away your precious things to others, that can help begin to create a good reality.

How do we actually practice tonglen? First we think about our parents, or our friends, or anybody who has sacrificed his or her life for our benefit. In many cases, we have never even said thank you to them. It is very important to think about that, not in order to develop guilt but just to realize how mean we have been. We always say "I want", and they did so much for us, without any complaint... If we do not have that, then we are somewhat in trouble, we begin to hate the world - but there is also a measure for that, which is to breathe in our hatred and resentment of the world. If we do not have good parents, a good

mother, or a good person who reflected such a kind attitude toward us to think about, then we can think of ourselves.

Just relate to the technique: the discursiveness of it doesn't matter. when you are out, you are out; when you come in, you are in. When you are hot, you are hot; when you are cool, you are cool... Make it very literal and simple.

*From Training the Mind & Cultivating Loving-Kindness by Chogyam Trungpa*

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So now the technique. Tonglen has four stages. The first stage is flashing openness, or flashing absolute bodhicitta. The slogan "Rest in the nature of ALAYA, the essence" goes along with this flash of openness, which is done very quickly. there is some sort of natural flash of silence and space. It's a very simple thing.

The second stage is working with the texture. You visualize breathing in dark, heavy and hot and breathing out white, light and cool. The idea is that you are always breathing in the same thing: you are essentially breathing in the cause of suffering, the origin of suffering, which is fixation, the tendency to hold on the ego with a vengeance.

You may have noticed, when you become angry of poverty-stricken or jealous, that you experience that fixation as black, hot, solid, and heavy. That is actually the texture of poison, the texture of neurosis and fixation. You may also have noticed times when you are all caught up in yourself, and then some sort of contrast or gap occurs. It's very spacious. That's the experience of mind that is not fixated on phenomena; it's the experience of openness. The texture of that openness is generally experienced as light, white, fresh, clear, and cool.

So in the second stage of tonglen you work with those textures. You breathe in black, heavy, and hot through all the pores of your body, and you radiate out white, light and cool, also through all the pores of your body, 360 degrees. You work with the texture until you feel that it's synchronized: black is coming in and white is going out on the medium of the breath - in and out, in and out.

The third stage is working with a specific heartfelt object of suffering. You breathe in the pain of a specific person or animal that you wish to help. You breathe out to that person spaciousness or kindness or a good meal or a cup of coffee - whatever you feel would lighten their load. You can do this for anyone: the homeless mother that you pass on the street, your suicidal uncle, or yourself and the pain you are feeling at that very moment. The main point is that the suffering should be real, totally untheoretical. It should be heartfelt, tangible, honest, and vivid.

The fourth stage extends this wish to relieve suffering much further. You start with this homeless person and then extend out to all those who are suffering just as she is, or to all those who are suicidal like your uncle or to all those who are feeling the jealousy or addiction or contempt you are feeling. You use specific instances of misery and pain as a stepping stone for understanding the universal suffering of people and animals everywhere. Simultaneously, you send out spaciousness or cheerfulness or a bunch of flowers, whatever

would be healing, to your uncle and all the others. What you feel for one person, you can extend to all people.

You need to work with both the third and fourth stages - with both the immediate suffering of one person and the universal suffering of all. If you were only to extend out to all sentient beings, the practice would be very theoretical. It would never actually touch your heart. On the other hand, if you were to work only with your own or someone else's fixation, it would lack vision. It would be too narrow. Working with both situations together makes the practice real and heartfelt; at the same time, it provides vision and a way for you to work with everyone else in the world.

You can bring all of your unfinished karmic business right into the practice. In fact, you should invite it in. Suppose that you are involved in a horrific relationship: every time you think of a particular person you get furious. That is very useful for tonglen! Or perhaps you feel depressed. It was all you could do to get out of bed today. You're so depressed that you want to stay in bed for the rest of your life: you have considered hiding u

*From Start Where You Are : A Guide to Compassionate Living by Pema Chodron*

## **Train in Taking and Sending Alternately. put Them on the Breath**

First do the preliminary practice of guru YOGA as it was described above. Then you should meditate on love and compassion. They form the basis for taking and sending. start by imagining that your own mother is present in front of you. Think about her carefully with such reflections on compassion as these:

*This person, my mother, has looked after me with great effort right from the moment I was conceived in her womb. Because she endured all the hardships of illness, cold, hunger, and others, because she gave me food and clothing and wiped away my filth, and because she taught me what is good and steered me away from evil, I met the teachings of Buddha and am now practicing the dharma. What tremendous kindness! Not only in this life but in an infinite series of lives she has done exactly the same thing. While she has worked for my welfare, she herself wanders in samsara and experiences many different forms of suffering.*

Then, when some real compassion, not just lip service, has been developed and instilled, learn to extend it step by step:

*From time without beginning, each sentient being has been a mother to me in just the same way as my present mother. Each and every one has helped me.*

With this sort of reflection, first meditate on objects for which it is easy to generate compassion: friends, spouse, relatives, and assistants, those in the lower realms where suffering is intense, the poor and destitute, and those who, though happy in this life, are so evil that they will experience the hell realms as soon as they die. When compassion in these areas has been instilled, meditate on more difficult objects: enemies, people who hurt you, demons, and others. Then meditate on all sentient beings, thinking along these lines:

*All these, my parents, not only experience many different kinds of suffering and frustration without intending to, but are also full of potent seeds for future suffering. How pitiable!*

*What's to be done? To return their kindness, the least I can do is to help them by clearing away what hurts them and by making them comfortable and happy.*

Train in this way until the feeling of compassion is intolerably intense.

Second,

### **Train in taking and sending alternately. Put them on the breath**

As you think:

*All these parents of mine, who are the focus of compassionate hurt directly by suffering and indirectly by the source of suffering, so I shall take on myself all the different kinds of suffering in all my mothers' course of experience and the source of suffering, all disturbing emotions and actions.*

meditate that all of this negativity comes to you and foster a strong feeling of joy at the same time. As you think:

*Without regret, I send all my virtuous activity and happiness in the past, present, and future, my wealth, and my body to all sentient beings, parents*

*meditate that each individual receives all this happiness and cultivate a strong feeling of joy in each one's receiving it.*

In order to make this imagined exchange clearer, as you breathe in, imagine that black tar collecting all the suffering, obscurations, and evil of all sentient beings enters your own nostrils and is absorbed into your heart. Think that all sentient beings are forever free of misery and evil. As you breathe out, imagine that all your happiness and virtue pour out in the form of rays of moonlight from your nostrils and are absorbed by every sentient being. With great joy, think that all of them immediately attain buddhahood. To train the mind, use this practice of taking and sending with the breath as the actual practice for the period of meditation. Subsequently, always maintain the practice through mindfulness and continue to work with it. Shantideva, who<

*From The Great Path of Awakening : An Easily Accessible Introduction for Ordinary People by Jamgon Kongtrul, translated by Ken McLeod.*

## **Alternately Practice Sending and Taking**

To understand what this next verse of the root text means, let's simply follow Sechibuwa's commentary. He suggests that we sit comfortably on a cushion and while clearly visualizing our mother, cultivate loving kindness and compassion for her.

It seems crucial, and profoundly beneficial, that he chooses to begin with our own mother. If we do not have a loving relationship with our own parents, something is going to be awry at the very core of our spiritual practice, creating disharmony throughout our lives. I say this not naively, but knowing that some parents abuse their children sexually, physically, and psychologically. Those of us with ill-feeling towards a mother or father may be tempted to say: "This is hard for me because I had a rotten childhood. I'll skip my parents and begin instead on firmer ground, with a close friend, or my wife or husband."

There is, of course, no law against this. But as long as our feelings remain unresolved towards our own parents, we lack a firm foundation for other relationships. Regardless of how our parents have treated us, it is crucial for a balanced and harmonious life that we come to terms with any resentment we feel, and so bring insight to bear on the relationship that loving kindness and compassion can arise from our heart. By beginning with our mother, we establish a root to let this compassion flow out to our father, to other relatives and friends, to people about whom we feel indifferent, and finally to our enemies.

Sechibuwa encourages us first to reflect that our mother has given us this precious, fully endowed human life, which means, in essence, that we have time for spiritual practice if we do no more than shift our priorities. Regardless of how she might have treated us afterwards, it is because she gave us birth that we have a wonderful potential for spiritual growth in this and future lives.

Think too, says Sechibuwa, that while our mother has cared for us so long in this and previous lifetimes, sometimes even sacrificing her life for her children, she has meanwhile suffered grief, anxiety, fear, and physical pain. Not only because of her children, but throughout the course of her life, she has experienced the suffering of mental afflictions, aging, sickness, and death. As we ponder this, a feeling of compassion for our mother arises without much effort. Compassion, in this case, is simply the wish, "May you be free of suffering."

Take the example of a mother who is a drunkard. We can reflect upon the unhappiness, the lack of satisfaction and meaning in life that gave rise to a habit of drinking and made her dependent on alcohol to get through each day. If a mother is an alcoholic, it naturally follows that sometimes she is not a very conscientious mother; and thirty or forty years later the child may still suffer resentment. But as we feel compassion for her, we can empathize with the sorrow and anxiety that gave rise to the affliction of alcohol dependency. And we can wish from our hearts, sincerely and without hypocrisy, "May you be free both from the dependency, and from the unsatisfied need that gave rise to it. May you be free of the suffering as well as its inner source."

Imagine now the suffering that your own mother experiences. For this potent practice to be done correctly, it must become a very personal meditation on your own mother. Bring to mind the suffering you have seen her experience, physical or mental, related to her internal condition or external circumstances. Go right to the source of the suffering, the basic mental afflictions themselves: attachment, hostility, ignorance. Imagine her own experience of the suffering, particularly if you have a mother who is handicapped by a problem such as drinking.

Practice "taking" this suffering. Imagine taking upon yourself your own mother's suffering together with its sources: all the mental distortions and the instin

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## **Practice a Combination of Both Giving and Taking. Place These Two Astride the Breath.**

The Tibetan term for this technique is *tonglen*: 'giving and taking.' However, during the actual meditation practice, it is said that taking comes first, followed by giving. We must

first accept all the miseries and impurities from sentient beings upon ourselves because only then will they be in a position to enjoy the happiness and merit that we give them as replacement. This is like first cleaning a dirty pot before placing food in it.

Prior to meditating in this way we must do a preliminary contemplation in which we reflect on the fact that during our countless previous lifetimes every sentient being has been a mother to us at least once. By remembering the kindness of pure mother love, we generate the deep heartfelt wish to repay the kindness that they, as our mothers, have shown us.

Then, when practicing giving and taking, we first generate from the depths of our heart the strong desire to accept all the sufferings of sentient beings on ourselves. Out of this motivation we visualize all their miseries in the form of dark fumes, like heavily polluted smoke, coming from every direction, absorbing into us, and striking the self-cherishing attitude at our heart. After this, we generate the wish to replace this suffering with all the happiness and merit that we have. Such a motivation or wish should be united with a prayer toward our refuge objects - the spiritual master, the Three Supreme Jewels, and our own meditational deity (*vidam; ishtadevata*) - for the accomplishment of all these practices. We give away our merit and happiness in the form of visualized radiant light blazing forth from our chest and all parts of our body. These rays illuminate all sentient beings and fulfill their every wish. We should repeat this many times in order to transform our thoughts effectively.

By utilizing inhalation and exhalation, the practice of giving and taking becomes easier. First, we inhale, breathing slowly and calmly, generating the motivation of accepting all the sufferings of others. They come in the form of dark fumes, which enter with the breath and dissolve into ourselves. Then, with the motivation of giving our own happiness and merit to others, we generate in ourselves pure white light, which we visualize as being exhaled through our nostrils. This radiant light spreads in all directions, giving happiness to every sentient being.

Sometimes we may have doubts and wonder what is the use of this practice and what are its results, for even though we visualize in this way, cows remain as cows, insects as insects, our happiness does not go anywhere, and the suffering of sentient beings is not alleviated: this practice does not appear to change anything.

However, the essential point is that giving and taking helps to develop and train our mind, and it is through mental development that we reach enlightenment. Whether such a practice helps directly or has any immediate effect on other beings is not the primary consideration. It is by a gradual process that we develop our mind until it is fully compassionate, powerful, and wise - until it is fully awakened. At that point we shall be able to realize our wish to help less fortunate beings. *Excerpted from Advice from a Spiritual Friend*

## **Train to Give and Take Alternately**

This refers to an extremely important practice. As the great master Shantideva said,  
*Whoever wishes quickly to become  
A refuge for himself and others,  
Should undertake this sacred mystery:  
To take the place of others, giving them his own.*

Enlightenment will be ours when we are able to care for others as much as we now care for ourselves, and ignore ourselves to the same extent that we now ignore others. Even if we

had to remain in samsara, we should be free from sorrow. For as I have said, when the great Bodhisattvas gave away their heads and limbs, they felt no sadness at the loss of them.

For those who can practice generosity like this, there is no suffering at all. Enlightened teachers, Bodhisattvas, come into the world to accomplish the welfare of beings and even when they are ignored by people in the grip of desire, anger and ignorance, who stir up obstacles and difficulties, the thought of giving up never occurs to them and they are totally without anger or resentment.

Now, when training in giving away your happiness to others, it is unwise to try to give to all beings right from the start. For beings are countless and your meditation will not be stable, with the result that you will derive no benefit from the practice. Therefore, visualize in front of you a specific person, someone whom you love - your mother, for example. Reflect that when you were very little, she suffered while she carried you in her womb; she was unable to work or eat comfortably, unable to even stand up or sit down without difficulty. Yet all the time she loved and cared for you. You were not even strong enough to raise your head. Nevertheless your mother took you, this little thing which did not even know her, upon her lap to wash, clean and bring up lovingly. Later she put up with loss and disgrace on account of your misbehavior, her only preoccupation being how to keep you alive...

Thinking in terms not only of this but of countless lives, understanding that all beings have been your mothers and have cared for you just as your present mother has done. When your mother looks at you, she does not frown, but looks at you with loving eyes. Calling you her dear child, she has brought you up, protecting you from heat and cold and all the rest. In every way she has tried to bring about your happiness. Even if she could give you the kingdom of a universal ruler, she would still not be satisfied and would never think that she has given you enough. Your mother, therefore, is someone to whom you should have an endless gratitude. Therefore now, at this very moment, we should make a strong resolution to repay [our parent sentient beings'] kindness and work to dispel their suffering.

We should decide to take upon ourselves the suffering and the causes of suffering of all sentient beings (who have all in previous existences been our mothers), and at the same time to give away to them whatever causes of happiness that we have. And if it happens that, as we meditate upon their sufferings entering our hearts, we begin to suffer ourselves, we should think with joy that this is all for our mother's sake.

If we think continually in this way about our own parents, we will eventually be able to care for them more than for ourselves and likewise with regard to our brothers, sisters, friends and lovers. Then we should enlarge our outlook to include everyone in our city, then in our whole country. When we get used to that, we can try to encompass all beings. If we do this gradually, our attitude will increase in scope, our feelings will grow stable and constant, and our love become ever more intense. Starting thus with our mother and father, we should finally focus on all sentient beings, who for countless lives have cared for us just like our present parents. We should feel a deep gratitude towards them.

The thought of exchanging happiness and suffering will

*From Enlightened Courage, by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche.*