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TONGLEN – 'Sending and Taking'

BY

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TongLen is a meditation done in conjunction with one's breathing, and in relation to one's parents, friends and enemies, to all beings gathered around oneself. As one breathes out, imagine that with the exhalation out goes all one's happiness and all the causes of happiness, all the good karma that one has, in the form of white light rays. These light rays go out to all beings to touch them, so that they obtain present temporary happiness and the cause for the ultimate happiness of buddhahood.

With inhalation one imagines that all the suffering, the causes of suffering and the bad karma that beings have are drawn into oneself with the incoming breath, in the form of black light rays. These black rays enter and merge into oneself, so one thinks that one has taken on the suffering of all other beings. Thus this Sending & Taking meditation involves giving away happiness and taking on suffering, in combination with one's breathing.

What does this meditation accomplish? Generally, happiness & suffering occur as a result of karma, one's good or bad actions. If someone has done a good action, then naturally from that there will come a result of happiness. That person will receive the result of happiness that cannot be denied him or her. Likewise, suffering occurs as the result of bad actions. If someone has done a bad action then the only result that can be obtained from that is suffering, which cannot be avoided.

In doing this meditation one changes the attitude of seeing oneself as more important than other beings; one will come to consider others as more important than oneself. The normal attitude that people have is to think that it does not matter if other beings are not happy, it does not matter if others are suffering, but it is important that oneself is happy & free from suffering. One normally considers oneself, takes care of oneself first, regarding oneself as more important than others. Through doing this sending & taking practice it is possible to change one's attitude so that it does not matter if oneself is unhappy or suffering, but it does matter that others are happy & free from suffering. Thus one develops the attitude that one is able to take on the suffering of other beings.

Some people new to this practice get worried because they think that by doing the practice they will have to lose happiness and experience suffering, which makes them fearful. However, there is no need for this anxiety because whatever happens to oneself is solely a result of one's karma. Doing this practice does not bring suffering.

Other people do the practice with great expectation, with great hope. They think of a friend who is ill, unhappy or otherwise suffering and they visualise this friend during the meditation in the hope that they will remove the suffering. When they find it does not work they lose hope and become disillusioned. This also is not what the practice is about. The point is to cherish other beings as important, rather than regarding oneself as important. So there is no need to have worry, fear or expectation.

However, it is not true to say there is no result from the practice. In the immediate present one is not able to bring happiness or remove suffering, but by doing this practice one will gradually cease to cherish oneself over others. Instead, one will develop the wish to practise in order to benefit other beings, eventually leading to the ability to help beings, teach and train them in the Dharma, and so forth. Consequently, one will be able to give them happiness and relieve them of suffering, and offer them whatever qualities and abilities that one has. This is the relative bodhicitta.

The ultimate bodhicitta is approached by pacifying concepts and dualism: all one's thoughts are calmed; one's clinging to dualism assuaged; one just rests in the state of peace, of meditation. One dissolves into emptiness and just rests in the true nature of the mind. This is the ultimate bodhicitta.

Taken from the Oral Instructions on the Karma Pakshi Practice given by Thrangu Rinpoche, to the retreatants of Samye-Ling, December 1993.

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