

Handout for Class 8 A Method for Practicing Tong Len

By Lama Kathy Wesley, based on Jamgon Kongtrul the Great's treatise, The Great Path of Awakening and modified under the guidance of Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche. Last Revised 6.7.00.

This method of practicing Tong Len, the Tibetan Buddhist meditation called "Sending and Taking" or "Sending and Receiving" in English, was prepared at the request of students who wanted an outline they could use while learning this meditation. May all beings benefit!

First, find a comfortable place to meditate. Place your body in the posture of meditation, and, if you have time, begin your session of practice by reflecting on "The Four Thoughts that Turn the Mind Toward Dharma" (the preciousness of our human birth, impermanence, karma and the unsatisfactoriness of samsaric existence). It's always good to begin practice by reviewing the reasons why we are sitting on the cushion in the first place: beings everywhere are suffering, and we must do our best to benefit them by seeking enlightenment (spiritual awakening) for their sake.

Next, do at least a short period of *Shinay* (Tranquility) meditation. This calms the mind and prepares us for doing Tong Len.

After doing *Shinay*, continue the session with a short contemplation on the limitless nature of mind. Consider that mind in itself has no color, no shape and no location, and spend a little time examining your mind for signs of limiting characteristics. When you find none, then recognize that the mind indeed is limitless, and as such has a limitless ability to accept, and a limitless ability to give.

Then, you may close your eyes and visualize a loved one sitting before you. Think of the loved one's qualities, and for a moment, rest in your feelings of love for them.

Next, think of the ways in which your loved one suffers: illnesses, or troubles, or difficulties in body or mind. Think how much you would like to relieve that suffering, and resolve within yourself to do so.

After this feeling becomes strong within you, then visualize that, as you breathe in, you breathe in the suffering of your loved one, in the form of dark-colored smoke. It leaves the loved one and enters into your nostrils and goes down into your heart, where it dissolves and disappears. Think that as the visualized smoke leaves the loved one, they are relieved of suffering, like a burden has been lifted from their shoulders.

Then, as you breathe out, think that you are breathing out your happiness, good karma, etc. in the form of cool, white moonlight. Think that as this light touches the loved one, they are instantly filled with happiness.

Continue meditating in this way for some time, taking in your loved one's suffering with the in-breath, and giving out your merit and happiness with the out-breath.

After a time, reflect in this way: "From time without beginning, all sentient beings have suffered, just as my loved one suffers. Truly, my loved one is exactly like all sentient beings, and they are exactly like her (or him). I wish to free all sentient beings without exception from their suffering."

Then, you begin broadening the group for whom you are doing Tong Len. If you have time, you may slowly broaden the group; if you are short on time, you also may shorten this process of broadening the group for whom you are meditating.

To do this slowly, you first think of the small group of your immediate family and friends. Considering their suffering, you breathe in their suffering the form of dark smoke and breathe out your happiness to them in the form of white light, as before.

Then broaden the group again to include all the people who live in your town, whether you know them or not. Again, consider their suffering, breathe it in and breathe out happiness to them as before.

Then, think of the people who live in your state; then, all the people who live in your country. Then, the world. Then, think of all the beings in the universe — all six realms of existence. Breathe in their suffering and breathe out happiness to them.

After you have done this for a while, drop the visualizations and, for a short time, relax the mind and let it rest in its natural state, without thinking of anything in particular.

If you wish to continue practicing, you may begin this practice again with a different loved one, following the progression of visualization and meditation described above. Always proceed in the same way, starting with one person and then moving outward to include all sentient beings in your practice of love and compassion.

At the close of your session, you should dedicate the merit of your session of meditation to the benefit of all sentient beings.

As you get accustomed to the practice, you may wish to start with people you are not on such good terms with — people who have hurt you or have caused you trouble or difficulty, or people who you are afraid of, or people you just don't like. The rest of the practice is the same: first, you develop a feeling about who the person is and what suffering they must be going through. Then you develop the wish to remove their suffering, and continue with the rest of the meditation as outlined above. This may be more difficult, so proceed slowly. Eventually, you may feel strong enough to meditate upon your worst enemy and use her or him as an object for your development of loving-kindness and compassion.

If, at the beginning, it is too difficult to think of others — even people you love — as objects for compassion, you may visualize yourself as the being who is suffering, and, through the meditation, accept and take on your own suffering and offer yourself happiness and goodness. Then, over time, you may become strong enough through this practice of Tong Len for yourself to begin to do Tong Len for others.