

Compassion and Tonglen Meditation, How to Meditate, Ven. Sangye Khadro

Sit comfortably with your back straight, and relax your body. Relax your mind by staying in the present, letting go of thoughts of the past, the future, other places, people, and so forth. Paying attention to the breath for several minutes will help your mind to settle in the here and now...

Motivation

When your mind is more calm, generate a positive, altruistic motivation for doing the meditation. You can think, for example, “I am going to do this meditation in order to increase my positive feelings -- compassion, love, and wanting to help others -- so that my life and all the things I do will be only beneficial and never harmful to others.”

Spend some time contemplating the following points to prepare your mind for the tonglen meditation:

All beings want to be happy. They have basic needs- for food, shelter, being comfortable, feeling safe and loved- and they have things they wish for- friends, possessions, a satisfying job, etc... All beings also wish to be free of every kind of pain and problem...

Go into your heart, and get in touch with these basic feelings that we share with everyone else. Recognize that everything you do in your life is motivated by the wish to be happy and to avoid problems. The same is true for all other beings...

And don't feel that there is anything *wrong* with feeling this way- we all *deserve* to be happy and free from pain...

Then ask yourself: "If we were all the same in wanting to be peaceful, happy, and satisfied, and to not experience any unhappiness, pain, or problem, then is it right for me to care only for *my* happiness and *my* problems?"... And check: what is the result of such a self-centered attitude? Does it bring you the happiness you want, and prevent you from experiencing the problems you don't want?

Try to recognize that self-centeredness is counterproductive, and feel the wish to become less focused on yourself, and more loving and caring toward others. It *is* possible to transform your mind in this way, and one method that can help you to do this is the practice of tonglen...

Tonglen using one's own problem

Begin the tonglen practice by bringing to mind a problem that is currently troubling you. If you are not so familiar with this practice, it might be best to start with a small or medium-sized problem rather than your biggest one. It could be a physical problem- a painful or uncomfortable feeling, or an illness- or it could be something emotional, such as sadness, hurt, or loneliness. Allow the problem to arise in your mind, and feel how painful it is, how your mind wants to push it away...

Then think: “I am not the only person in the world experiencing a problem like this. There are many others...” Think of other people who may be experiencing the same or a similar problem, some to an even greater degree than yourself. (For example, if you have lost a loved one, think of people who have lost many loved ones, in a war or natural disaster.) Generate compassion for them, thinking, and really *feeling*: “How wonderful it would be if all those people could be free from their suffering.”

Then decide that you will accept or take on your own experience of this problem with the compassionate wish that by doing so, all those other people will be free from their suffering. Let go of your resistance, fear, and aversion toward your problem, and allow your mind to rest in a gentle, peaceful acceptance of it...

When you are more familiar and comfortable with this practice, you can use it to take on bigger problems you have at present, and also the problems you will probably experience in the future.

Tonglen for another person's problem

Imagine in front of you someone you know and love who is suffering. Put yourself in their situation, and try to really feel the suffering they are experiencing and how they wish to be free of it... Feel how wonderful it would be if they *could* be free from all their suffering and problems. Then generate the courage to take their suffering upon yourself.

Visualize that your delusions such as self-centeredness, anger, attachment, and jealousy are in the form of a solid, dark rock in your heart. Then visualize your loved one's suffering in the form of thick, dark smoke floating out of their body. As you inhale, imagine taking this dark smoke of suffering into yourself. It comes to your heart, absorbs into the rock of self-centeredness and delusions, and destroys it. Both the rock and the suffering, your own and that of the other person, become utterly non-existent. Feel a sense of joy that this person is now free from his or her suffering and problems...

When you exhale, breathe out your happiness, positive qualities, and merit in the form of bright light. Imagine that it transforms into whatever will bring joy and peace of mind to this person: material things, love and friendship, inner qualities such as love, compassion, courage, and equanimity. Imagine that their needs and wishes are fulfilled, their mind is filled with peace, happiness, and all the knowledge and qualities of the spiritual path. Let your mind rest for some time in a feeling of joyfulness that you have been able to help your loved one in this way.

As you become more familiar with this meditation, you can practice it gradually with more of your friends and relatives, then strangers, and eventually even with those you dislike.

Dedication

When you wish to conclude the meditation, remember the motivation you started with, and dedicate the positive energy of doing the meditation to the happiness and enlightenment of all beings.