



Similar to the dream

Nothing is Born or Perishes

But things that already exist combine and then separate again.

Anaxagora

I have problems with Tonglen. It is more and more difficult to imagine the suffering while doing this practice (by feeling it or by visualizing it) and likewise for the joy which I would suppose to give. Are there any suggestions you can share that will help me?

The key to the practice of Tonglen is in the transmutation, between inhalation and exhalation.

Grasping the substantial reality of the self of phenomena and the self of the individual leads to a reification of the process and thereby prohibits transmutation. The giving and taking remains constrained by the usual dualistic perception.

In the true sense, there is no substance that is taken by a subject, or given to another object.

Neither storage, nor loss

There is no storage of the negative on the in breath, nor a decrease in our wealth on the outbreath.

Confusion arises from a lack of awareness about relative truth and its absolute essence.

With compassion we inspire, in the awareness of absolute Bodhicitta. Suffering is then seen in its illusory nature, and it is this realization that one gives, with love, on the exhalation.

Hope and apprehension arise from grasping the supposed substantial reality of phenomena.

The way of transformation is in the slogans dealing with absolute Bodhicitta

- See all the phenomena as similar to the dream.
- Remain in the fundamental consciousness.
- Let the remedies dissolve once they have fulfilled their function.

On this experiential basis, we can then practice giving and taking in the awareness of the illusory nature of the process. This does not lead us to a negation of the experience we go through, but on the contrary leads to a clear vision of the interaction of the relative and the absolute realities, which neither confirm nor exclude each other.

The very basis of *Tonglen* is the union of conventional and ultimate Bodhicitta.

How to do sending and taking? We connect the *sending and taking* with our breath.

First you breathe in, taking in all the unbearable misery of all living beings everywhere. As you inhale, you take in all the suffering, bad karma that are suffering and the root causes of the misery. You thereby relieve all sentient beings from their suffering and the causes of the suffering. You are not the *star* of the process; you are simply the “*best supporting actor*”. It is not about you and your feelings regarding this practice. Beings are really the main object of your care and attention; the light is on them.

Remember also the view of absolute Bodhicitta: All phenomena are like the dream experience; they have no inherent reality. You are a *trickster*, using the illusion to relieve beings from their illusion of a pain. Breathing is your trick to alleviate the illusory suffering that affects people. Breathing out, you give all the wholesome karma, happiness and good circumstances to every sentient being. Imagine all this good being absorbed by living beings. We visualize the *giving and taking* in harmony with the rhythm of our own breathing, in and out.

During *calm abiding* meditation we simply follow the breath, here we add another element, which is *sending and taking*. It is like a *calm abiding* type of meditation with an extra element: the focus on Bodhicitta.

Once you are in the flow of giving and taking, you do not have to contrive yourself to feel anything special. Simply focus on the altruistic attitude: take all suffering; give all merit, breath gently. Do the *giving and taking* for as long as you can. It is good to do this training in many short intervals. Practice for little while like this, then stop, take a break and relax for a few moments. You are still sitting, but you take a break, stop thinking about sending and taking, then start again. In this way, you can do many short sessions with breaks in between. You can do many five minutes’ cycles with one-minute break within half an hour, or whatever duration you feel comfortable. Do not worry if you find yourself distracted during the actual meditation. Do not worry, means do not scold yourself. The care is gentle. Do not push yourself with a gun in the back. Remain simply aware and patiently bring your focus back on the Bodhicitta attitude, in a very gentle way.

It is important not to think, that there is something physically being exchanged. Remember for that the view of ultimate Bodhicitta. If you don't stop tripping on how real the things, that you take and give are, you keep solidifying it in your mind – that may cause some

trouble – such as anxiety. It is very important to regard everything as a mirage. The essence of this practice is training our Bodhicitta, yet at the same time our rational mind is being trained to focus. It is a twofer. Your mind will be pacified by the calm abiding aspect of this practice and therefore all disturbances will fall away. Simultaneous with the pacification of your mind, Bodhicitta, the altruistic intention, will arise. That is the *tonglen* aspect of this practice, which is the very heart of Shamar Rinpoche's book: *Path Of Awakening*.

Sometimes we may wonder, what about practicing *sending and taking* for ourselves?

There is one slogan in mind training that says: “*Begin by taking care of yourself.*” In order to practice *sending and taking* efficiently, you need some sort of preparation, such as learning to see how everything is like an illusion. This is clarifying your perspective. It is taking care of yourself in a way. Through this awareness you become gentler with yourself, more respectful, less uptight.

You cannot send love when you do not have it in you. We all have a different history; there are some people who have a very difficult background. For them it is difficult to relate to love and generosity, because they never experienced it. As they never received it, they have no idea of what it is. We have to first build up the connection with loving kindness and compassion. Some people have been so badly wounded that they are locked in. They cannot trust and they cannot give love or welcome another person. They have to heal this first. You can use this meditation taking yourself as the object of the compassion. Breathing in, you welcome this person wounded and in pain, which is you. You give a shelter to this person. Breathing out, you give this person confidence, self-esteem, respect, and love so that this person can have an experience of it. Maybe later on, this person will be able to share this, having had this experience.

Thich Nhat Hahn's is also teaching this kind of a meditation:

*When I breathe in, I welcome myself as a five years old,
When I breathe out, I smile to myself as a five years old.*

To put it into simple words: *welcome, thank you*. These are little things, but when you wake up in the morning and the first things you say to yourself, as you breathe in, is – *welcome* - and when you breathe out you say - *thank you* - it is a good way to start a day. If nobody else is here to say this to you at least you will.