

Class 9: Compassion Meditation

I. Introducing compassion meditation

- A. We first train in shamata
 - 1. Shamata helps us to perceive things more accurately and deal with situations more effectively.
 - 2. Shamata does not permanently uproot negative thoughts and emotions, because we are still preoccupied with self-clinging.
- B. We continue our training with loving-kindness and compassion practices
 - 1. Loving-kindness: the wish for others to be happy
 - 2. Compassion: the wish for others not to suffer
 - 3. These qualities counter self-clinging
- C. Today we will discuss tong-len (sending and receiving) meditation.
 - 1. The Buddha said self-clinging is the root of our confusion and suffering.
 - 2. Tong-len practice eliminates self-clinging by reversing the normal logic of ego.

II. Instructions on the formal practice of tong-len

(Based on Tong-len Instruction by Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche in Dharma Paths)

- A. Note: Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche recommends this practice be done for a shorter period of time. This could be two-to-three minutes; up to to 5 minutes. Can use a timer or prayer beads to count in-and-out breath cycles.
- B. First, practice some shamata to settle the mind.
- C. Then, to begin a cycle of tong-len, we imagine in front of us someone dear to us, the thought of whom causes love and compassion to arise naturally. C. Then, begin taking and sending by following the breath.
 - 1. Exhale
 - a) As we exhale, we imagine sending our own happiness, well-being, and good karma to this person.
 - b) We imagine they receive happiness and the causes of future happiness.
 - c) This is training the mind in loving-kindness.
 - 2. Inhale
 - a) As we inhale, we imagine taking on their suffering and bad karma in the form of thick, heavy, dark smoke.

- b) We imagine they are relieved of all suffering and causes of future suffering.
- c) This is training the mind in compassion.
- D. We expand until we've included all sentient beings.
- E. We complete the cycle by resting the mind briefly.

III. Tong-len variations

- A. Beginning the practice with ourselves
- B. Beginning with those with whom we have difficulty or even malice.

IV. Tong-len in daily life

- A. Tong-len can be practiced anytime, anywhere.
- B. We can use the "Three Seeds of Virtue" aspiration whenever we experience difficult emotions:
 - 1. "May my [difficult emotion] contain the [difficult emotion] of all beings. By my working through this moment of [difficult emotion], may I and all beings be free of it, and may we attain enlightenment, the complete freedom from [difficult emotion]."

V. Notes on Compassion Meditation

- A. Each cycle of tong-len should be somewhat brief (~5 minutes).
- B. A common misperception is that the practice of mentally taking on others' suffering could be a cause of our own suffering.
 - 1. The Buddha said attachment, particularly self-clinging, is the cause of suffering.
 - 2. Tong-len is an antidote to self-clinging and, therefore, an antidote to suffering.
- C. Tong-len is an exercise in developing our loving-kindness and compassion. It's important we do not develop an expectation that we can literally heal the beings we visualize.

VI. Results of Compassion Meditation

- A. Initially, this practice can feel unnatural, but as we practice with sincerity, our aspiration to benefit others will gradually become more genuine.
- B. Over time, we will manifest the positive qualities that are part of our enlightened nature.
- C. We'll be more open, friendly, and responsible in the world, and our ability to handle painful situations and help others in appropriate ways will increase.