

Lama Kathy Wesley

*Buddhism's Alchemy of Emotion*

Week Three: "Tonglen: Sending and Receiving"

January 21, 2019

Hello, I'm Kathy Wesley, and this is the next installment in the series *Buddhism's Alchemy of Emotion*. In our previous installments we talked about how our habitual patterns can cause us a lot of problems and how the way we feel and respond to emotion can actually make our problems worse. We also talked about how the Buddhist practice of quiet sitting meditation or shamatha or shanay can help us to calm the flow of reaction. And by learning the gentle technique of noticing our breathing and then noticing when our attention has wandered from the breath into the past or into the future, and using the technique of gently touching-letting go of the thoughts and returning our attention to the breath for a fresh start. Using that technique is a way to learn how to be less reactive with the things that arise in our mind. In the second installment, we talked about the continuum of emotion; how emotions start as little thoughts but through the experience of habitual tendencies blossom into experiences of negativity and sadness and suffering.

Now we need to find a way to train our minds to react differently when we experience our emotions. Rather than running away to one of the two extremes of emotion, either the extreme of blind expression of emotion or the experience of blind suppression of emotion. These two extremes cause us to not deal with the emotions that we feel. What we need is a technique that can actually work with the emotion on the spot in the moment. And that is why we're going to be talking about the practice of lojong or mind training today. Lojong or mind training has a very long history. It comes from the teachings of the Buddha in the Sutras which were then formulated by teachers over the ages into specific practices. Those of you who are familiar with Shantideva's book *The Way of the Bodhisattva* know that in his text, Shantideva says, "If you want to gain freedom from suffering you will learn how to exchange yourself for others. It's a sacred mystery." Well, the practice of lojong or mind training, allows us to train in love and compassion and how to experience an exchange between ourselves and others. We'll get a little bit more into that technique in just a moment. But I wanted to let you know where this particular teaching that I'm sharing today comes from. From the 12th century in Tibet there was a teacher named Chekawa Yeshe Dorje. He had read a wonderful poem written by Langri Tangpa called "The Eight Stanzas Of Transformation," in which he talked about giving all victory to others and accepting defeat for oneself. He was intrigued by this idea and went and found one of the

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students of Langri Tangpa and received a transmission from him of the poem. He then practiced it very diligently for years. And when he himself found within himself the power of love and compassion, he was able to transform his mind and have love and compassion for himself and all.

It was from this that he wrote 59 mind training aphorisms that became known as "The Seven-Point Mind Training." You can read all about "The Seven-Point Mind Training" online or in a commentary that was written on it in the 19th century by Jamgön Kongtrül the Great, a wonderful Tibetan master. The book is translated into English as *The Great Path of Awakening*. But today, what we're going to talk about is just one of the practices from that book. "The Seven-Point Mind Training," these 59 mind training sayings have a complete path you can actually attain Buddhahood just from doing this practice, at least that's what my teacher Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche told me when he gave me permission to teach it. The practice has a preliminary, a main practice, and then a whole section of aphorisms about how to make corrections in your practice and how to expand your practice. But today, we're going to talk mainly about the main practice of "The Seven-Point Mind Training," the main practice of lojong which is called *tonglen* or sending and receiving.

The practice of tonglen is a practice of changing one's inner attitude. Do you remember from the first installment, we talked about the Buddha's four noble truths; suffering is part of life, it has a cause which is clinging and fixation and that in order to go beyond clinging and fixation we have to learn how to let go and the path is all about that. Well, of all of the things we cling to, according to the teachings of the Buddha, the thing we cling to the most is our sense of self; me or I. You could say it is the biggest obstacle to our attainment of happiness. When we cling to ourselves over others, we think my way or the highway and we begin to judge people and put them in categories as to whether they're friends or enemies. And all of this categorization might make us feel safer in our life but really what it does is it helps us to feel isolated in our life. Yes, we have lots of people that we love, but sometimes our love is a little bit more transactional than it is genuine. We might actually love people only as much as they help us. But when they stop helping us we put them on the other side of the fence of our love and compassion.

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So we have to train our mind to be loving and compassionate. I know that sounds strange; doesn't love and compassion come naturally to us? It does, but mainly for those people who we consider to be "our people." We have a whole group of people on the other side of that fence. It could be people that we disagree with personally. It could be people we disagree with politically. But these are people who we don't love. And not only do we not love them we may dislike them. And not only do we dislike them, we might even *hate* them. And what's really interesting is if you look inside the feelings within us when we feel dislike, when we feel hatred, when we feel anger that doesn't feel good to us. It actually causes us suffering. In a way it's like my friends in the 12-Step Recovery tradition say, "Nursing a resentment is like drinking something poisonous and expecting the other person to get sick." In the practice of tonglen, we walk all of that backward instead of saying, "All of those people out there are either friends or enemies," we look inside ourselves and say, "How would it be to be like that other person?" The other person who comes at us in anger, we think how would it be to feel like they feel and so forth and so on.

So the practice of tonglen that I'm going to share with you today is taken from my teacher Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, who is a teacher of the Karma Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. It is explained in his book *Dharma Paths* which you can get from a publisher or from a bookstore. In this book, he explains a very simple method for doing tonglen that is accessible to anyone. You don't have to be Buddhist to practice tonglen. And the methodology is very similar to what we've learned already. If you remember from the first installment, we talked about quiet sitting meditation and being aware of your breath, coming in and going out. In tonglen you put an attitude on the breath as it goes out and you put an attitude on the breath as it comes in. And in order to train ourselves in the opposite of self-clinging, what we do is with the out breath we think may all beings be happy because normally we would be saying may I be happy. So in this exercise of tonglen, we sit on our meditation seat and on the out breath we make the aspiration "May all beings be happy." And as we breathe in, we can also put an attitude on that and say, "May all beings be free of suffering." Out breath, "May all beings be happy." In breath, "May all beings be free of suffering."

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And if we think about this, what this is doing is it's training our attitude to be the opposite of what it normally is, which is "May I have happiness and may others have suffering." So what we're doing is in effect what one great Buddhist teacher described as, "reversing ego's logic." Ego's logic is "All good for me, all bad for others." So if we sit on our meditation seat and train diligently in the opposite, we should have a beneficial effect from that. So once again, we can sit in meditation and with the out breath we can think "may all beings be happy", that's training the mind in love. And when we breathe in and remove the suffering from others, we can think "may all beings be free of suffering." Now, you can do this either with words or with a feeling. For example, if when you breathe out you think "may all beings be happy", you can think instead of words. You can think "may all beings have my happiness." And as you breathe in, instead of thinking "may all beings be free of suffering," you might think "may I remove the suffering from all beings." This is using your imagination. Your imagination will help to change your attitude if you can train it in this way.

In Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche's book, he says that when you breathe out and give happiness to others you imagine that they experience it. And as you breathe in and remove the suffering from others, you think that it enters into you and it meets your compassionate motivation and it dissolves into nothing and disappears. And then on the next out breath, you're giving happiness to others and on your in breath you're removing suffering from others. This gradually changes our viewpoint, we're not only thinking of ourselves now. We're imagining that we are like the enlightened beings, the buddhas, and the bodhisattvas. We're imagining that we're just like them. We're imagining that we have universal love and compassion. It's only in our imagination because we're still just us but what we can do with this practice is train gradually; out breath giving happiness, in breath removing suffering and seeing it dissolve into nothing and disappear.

And in the next installment, we're going to talk about how we can take this attitude of tonglen into our everyday life and work with the emotions we experience on the spot. Because how would it be if we could actually key into this habit of wishing for the benefit of others when we feel a negative mental affliction? So we'll be talking about that in the next installment. So between now and when you see the next installment try the practice of tonglen and see what your

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feeling is. Imagine that in front of you were all the beings of the world including the ones you like and including the ones you don't like. And imagine as you breathe out you give them happiness and as you breathe in you remove their suffering, it enters you, it dissolves into nothing and it disappears. And just by doing that simple practice for maybe two minutes, it doesn't have to be a long time, just a couple of minutes. By doing the practice for that short period of time you will have trained your mind for that long, to be unselfish for that long to be without clinging and fixation.

Thank you very much for listening today, and I will see you next time.