

The Four Immeasurables

Tonglen

Take nine deep relaxation breaths with long exhalations.

For the first three breaths, breathe in and bring the breath to any tension in the body, releasing the tension with the exhalation.

For the second three breaths, inhale into any emotional tension, feel where you hold it in your body and release it with the exhalation.

And, lastly, breathe into any mental tension. Feel where you hold nervousness, worries or mental blockages in your body and release them with the exhalation.

Close your eyes and remember the two-fold egolessness of self and phenomena, and flash on absolute bodhicitta, absolute reality.

Begin with your own mother, seeing her in front of you. Coming to terms with your own mother is important for the development of compassion because if you can't come to terms with your mother, you can't have true compassion for anyone. Even if you have had a good or bad mother, you still begin with your mother.

See her in front of you and remember her compassion. Think first of the gift of the body she gave you. She carried you for nine months which in itself is a sacrifice and not something comfortable. And then she gave birth to you which is also something she had to undergo. Think that she cared for you with self-sacrifice. She cared for your needs and your complaints and your illnesses and your lack of gratitude, your expectations, your greed and need and everything a child naturally has.

She had her own grief, anxiety and pain and yet she did her best. While caring for you, she was also experiencing sickness and aging and the knowledge that she would die. Try to imagine your own mother's suffering. The different kinds of suffering she underwent and perhaps is still undergoing. Imagine this suffering in a personal way. Even if she was handicapped by a problem like alcoholism, think how that made her not take good care. She got caught in that because of her suffering. Really try to feel her in a personal way. Now feel a longing to relieve that suffering. Breathe in as though your nose, your breath, is a vacuum and can pull the suffering. Breathe it in, removing it. As you reach the end of the inhalation, flash on emptiness. Then exhale freedom from suffering, freedom from fear and the clearing of her karma. Breathing in and breathing out in this way, be really willing to take her burden. Flash on emptiness as it comes into you and with the exhalation see it leave as a clear cool breeze that clears her karmic stream. Gradually see her clearing and becoming more peaceful. The exhalation carries a white light that permeates her body and the in-breath keeps pulling out any of her negative karmic patterns, her fear or her pain.

Her suffering is being peeled off of her and dissolving into your luminous empty heart and then from that space you are sending out love and compassion. See her begin to be full of serenity, freedom from fear, freedom from attachment, hatred and aggression.

See that she has all the material things she needs: food, clothing, and helpers. And see her physically change. Her appearance changes as she clears. Imagine her attaining full awakening. See those qualities arise in her and offer her that awakening with the exhalation.

In the second phase, you imagine next to her an easy person, someone whom it is easy to feel love and compassion for: a young child, an old person, or a dear friend. See her or him sitting next to your mother,

facing you. And then imagine yourself relieving their suffering through breathing it in, flashing on emptiness in the luminous heart of bodhicitta and releasing with the exhalation. Breathing in any physical or psychological or spiritual pain that person might have and releasing it with the exhalation and giving back to them the cool breeze of clarity and awakening. See this being change as you do this. See them physically change. Be willing to take their suffering with the in-breath, take it in, dissolve it into emptiness and release the awakened energy of compassion that clears their karmic stream. See them cleared and awakened like a Buddha, see their Buddha nature shining through.

Imagine on the other side of your mother a difficult person, an enemy or someone who wants to cause harm to you. It could be someone you find challenging. See them very clearly. Then breathe in their suffering, recognize it, flash on emptiness and release to them love and compassion. Their suffering and negativity may feel hot and sticky and if you are willing to take it, to pull it off, dissolve it into luminous absolute bodhicitta and release the relative force of love and compassion. Gradually see them transform as the layers of confusion and delusion are removed. See this difficult person emerging as a luminous Buddha being who is on the way to waking up to the absolute truth as all of the obscurations and negativity have been removed.

Allow this practice of tonglen to expand to include all of those in this circle. Feel willingness to take, to remove, and to carry their suffering. But hold that with an understanding of emptiness and then release the cool breeze of compassion.

Gradually expand out to include all the beings on the land, seen and unseen. Your practice is becoming more vast, beginning to be inconceivable. Still this pulling in of the negativity, flashing on emptiness and releasing of compassion that clears and awakens.

Then expand out to the whole surrounding area, all the beings. The inconceivable number of beings that are here just in this corner of the world. Feel your own vastness, your own immeasurability, understanding the absolute reality of doing this practice in the relative world within the framework of the immeasurable nature of mind.

You are offering out to all these beings insight and understanding and awakening to the nature of mind. See them wake up and their karmic obscurations clear.

Gradually expand this receiving and offering to all beings everywhere. Make it truly immeasurable and feel the vastness in which this is taking place. Feel all the inconceivable kinds of confusion, suffering, harm, depression, bewilderment and so on that all the different beings of the whole universe experience because of the split from the ground of being. Pull that off them like a veil being removed and then with the out-breath feel their awakened nature lighting up.

Keeping that experience of the relative compassion and the absolute reality, open your eyes.

And with that presence dedicate the merit.



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