

# Jamgon Kongtrul's Method for Practicing Tong-Len

*(Excerpted from "The Great Path of Awakening," by Jamgon Kongtrul. Additional instructions from Lama Kathy Wesley. Last revised 10.8.14)*

## Introduction

*(By Lama Kathy Wesley)*

In his book "Great Path of Awakening," Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye gives a method of practicing "exchanging oneself for others" to train the mind in love and compassion.

He asks students to begin by performing a short guru yoga, followed by a contemplation on love and compassion.

After contemplating love and compassion "until the feeling ... becomes intolerably intense," students are asked to perform a meditation using their imagination. They are asked to imagine sending love to all beings on their outbreath (while engendering a simultaneous feeling of joy and seeing that happiness received by others) and to imagine removing suffering from all beings on their inbreath (while simultaneously engendering a feeling of joy and seeing that suffering dissolve into themselves and disappear). The session of "sending and receiving" (called "Tong-Len" in Tibetan) involves all beings as the object of one's love and compassion, and ends with a releasing of the visualization and a recitation of the Seven-Branch Prayer as a dedication.

Jamgon Kongtrul also describes a "Post-Meditation" practice of using mindfulness to "catch" our everyday experience of anger, attachment, bewilderment and other mental afflictions and transform them into an aspiration for enlightenment.

Here, directly excerpted from Jamgon Kongtrul's text and annotated with numbers and subheads, is his explanation of how to approach the practice of Tong-Len.

## Jamgon Kongtrul's Instructions

*(Excerpted from "The Great Path of Awakening;" words in brackets from Lama Kathy.)*

### Relative Bodhicitta

Meditation on relative bodhicitta is explained in three parts: teachings on the preparation, on the actual practice, and on postmeditation practice.

### PREPARATION [I.E. CONTEMPLATION]

**First** do the preliminary practice of guru yoga as it was described above. Then you should meditate [i.e. contemplate] on love and compassion. They form the basis for taking and sending. Start by imagining that your own mother is present in front of you. Think about her carefully with such reflections on compassion as these:

“This person, my mother, has looked after me with great effort right from the moment I was conceived in her womb. Because she endured all the hardships of illness, cold, hunger, and others, because she gave me food and clothing and wiped away my filth, and because she taught me what is good and steered me away from evil, I met the teachings of Buddha and am now practicing the dharma. What tremendous kindness! Not only in this life, but in an infinite series of lives she has done exactly the same thing. While she has worked for my welfare, she herself wanders in samsara and experiences many different forms of suffering.”

Then, when some real compassion, not just lip service, has been developed and instilled, learn to extend it step by step:

[Think:] “From time without beginning, each sentient being has been a mother to me in just the same way as my present mother. Each and every one has helped me.”

With this sort of reflection, first [contemplate] objects for which it is easy to generate compassion: friends, spouse, relatives, and assistants, those in the lower realms where suffering is intense, the poor and destitute, and those who, though happy in this life, are so evil that they will experience the hell realms as soon as they die.

When compassion in these areas has been instilled, [contemplate] more difficult objects: enemies, people who hurt you demons, and others.

“All these, my parents, not only experience many different kinds of suffering and frustration without intending to, but are also full of potent seeds for future suffering. How pitiable! What's to be done? To return their kindness, the least I can do is to help them by clearing away what hurts them and by making them comfortable and happy.”

Train in this way until the feeling of compassion is intolerably intense.

## **MEDITATION**

### **Second,**

*<<Train in taking and sending alternately. Put them on the breath.>>*

As you think:

“All these parents of mine, who are the focus of compassion, are hurt directly by suffering and indirectly by the source of suffering, so I shall take on myself all the different kinds of suffering in my mothers' course of experience and the source of suffering, all disturbing emotions and actions,”

meditate that all of this negativity comes to you and foster a strong feeling of joy at the same time.

As you think:

“Without regret, I send all my virtuous activity and happiness in the past, present, and future, my wealth, and my body to all sentient beings, my parents,”

meditate that each individual receives all this happiness and cultivate a strong feeling of joy in each one's receiving it.

[If you wish to use a visualization:]

In order to make this imagined exchange clearer, as you breathe in, imagine that black tar collecting all the suffering, obscurations, and evil of all sentient beings enters your own nostrils and is absorbed into your heart. Think that all sentient beings are forever free of misery and evil. As you breathe out, imagine that all your happiness and virtue pour out in the form of rays of moonlight from your nostrils and are absorbed by every sentient being. With great joy, think that all of them immediately attain buddhahood.

To train the mind, use this practice of taking and sending with the breath as the actual practice for the period of meditation. Subsequently, always maintain the practice through mindfulness and continue to work with it. Shantideva, who has described this practice extensively, says:

"If I don't completely exchange my happiness for others' sorrow, Buddhahood will not be realized. There is no happiness in samsara."

## **POSTMEDITATION**

**Third**, to apply this in postmeditation practice:

*<<Three objects, three poisons, three seeds of virtue.>>*

The three poisons continually arise in connection with three objects. Compulsive attachment arises for objects that are pleasant or useful; aversion arises for objects that are unpleasant or harmful; and stupidity or indifference for other objects. Recognize these poisons as soon as they arise. Then, for example, when attachment arises, think:

"May every bit of every sentient beings' attachment be contained in this attachment of mine. May all sentient beings have the seed of virtue of being free of attachment. May this attachment of mine contain all their disturbing emotions and, until they attain buddhahood, may they be free of such disturbing emotions."

Aversion and other emotions are used in practice by working with them the same way. Thus, the three poisons become three limitless seeds of virtue.

*<<Use sayings to train in all forms of activity.>>*

All the time, repeat these or other suitable sayings and cultivate these attitudes vigorously.

From Shantideva:

While their evil ripens in me, May all my virtue ripen in them.

From the oral advice of the Kadampa tradition:

“I offer all gain and victory to the lords, all sentient beings; I take all loss and defeat for myself.”

From Gyal-se Tokme's teachings:

“While all the suffering and evil of all sentient beings ripens in me, May all my happiness and virtue ripen in them.”

<<*Begin the sequence of exchange with yourself.*>>

In order to be able to take on the sufferings of others, begin the sequence of exchange with yourself. Right now, take on mentally all the suffering that will ripen for you in the future. When that has been cleared away, take up all the sufferings of others.