

SENDING AND RECEIVING

In addition to gaining an intellectual understanding of bodhicitta from the teachings, it is important to have a practical experience of the practice of bodhicitta. To that end, there is a meditation practice called sending and receiving (*tong len* in Tibetan) that can help you develop the enlightened attitude.

When you do this short meditation, first sit in the meditation posture, relaxing your body and sitting rather comfortably. Then breathe normally, following the natural course of your breath. Imagine that with the exhalation of your breath, whatever merit you have accumulated from beginningless time, are accumulating now, and will accumulate in all future time, radiates toward all sentient beings. Just as when the sun shines, the rays of light radiate toward all places, so with your exhalation, these positive qualities radiate, bringing happiness, well-being, comfort, health, and longevity to all beings without discrimination.

Then when you inhale, imagine you are inhaling all the suffering, confusion, sickness, turmoil, and conflict of sentient beings. All the suffering and turmoil of sentient beings merges with you, and this uproots the suffering and confusion of the sentient beings. Because of the strength of bodhicitta—the power of your sincere attitude of wanting to benefit beings—as soon as the suffering merges with you, it dissolves into nothing and disappears. It is just as if you had collected some dust together into a little pile and a strong wind blew it away. Inhaling and exhaling in this way, meditate for a short time.

After you have meditated in this way for a short while, let go of the mental focus and let your mind rest in a state of awareness. Attempt to have the sense that there are no sentient beings to meditate on, there is no person meditating, and there is no act of meditation taking place. Try to transcend these three, which are relative, and give birth to something ultimate, something effortless and spontaneous like the arising and disappearing of clouds in the sky. Just remain in a state of clar-

ity. There is no act, no thought of doing something outside or inside, no you doing something. Just cut off all that and remain in a state of awareness.

In order to give birth to bodhicitta, we must accumulate merit or positive qualities on the relative level and also on the absolute level, the level of wisdom. The desire to benefit beings accumulates merit on the relative or physical level, since we think of doing this in a substantial or physical way. We imagine all sentient beings everywhere. We generate love toward all the beings and think of helping them in this way; we generate compassion toward all the beings, and think of taking away their suffering and confusion. The inner aspect of the accumulation of merit comes through developing wisdom, which transcends any fixed, substantial focal point. Wisdom is understanding that, in ultimate reality, the practice transcends any idea of other beings on whom we need to focus, the self as the one who is focusing, and the very act of focusing.

It is possible to transcend these, because in ultimate reality the true nature of beings is not suffering; it is not the upheaval of neurotic emotions. Certain causes have evolved in such a way that beings now experience suffering and confusion. They experience a feeling of solidity and, therefore, a feeling of insecurity that this solid entity might be jeopardized. All of this takes place, but in reality it is like the appearance of clouds or rainbows. Clouds and rainbows appear in the sky but they are not part of the sky. They appear suddenly and disappear suddenly, from various causes. In our situation also, suffering and confusion are not innate qualities; they are not something substantial with us. When we understand that, we transcend the act of focusing, someone to focus on, and someone who is focusing. We just maintain a state of clarity, meditating in a state of awareness and spaciousness. This is a very, very important aspect of the practice.

There are different names for these two practices—the practice of focusing on an object and the non-focusing practice of awareness. They are called relative and absolute bodhicitta, method and wisdom, or merit and wisdom. Whatever name