

The breathing practice of tonglen (giving and taking)

In the beginning we usually choose someone for whom we have a great or profound love as the object of our practice. First, clearly visualise your own mother, or someone you love the most, experiencing suffering right now. She is enduring unbearable sadness or hurt! The more detailed the visualisation, the better it will be. Then imagine that your mother's suffering changes into an accumulation of scorching hot black smoke. When you breathe in visualise all that black smoke entering into your heart, demolishing your self-cherishing and purifying all your negative karma. When you breathe out visualise that you give your mother all your calm, joy, happiness, and wisdom in the form of brilliant light and that this radiance purifies all your mother's negative karma and suffering. Anytime, when we see somebody suffering and if we ourselves are enjoying some kind of happiness, we must seize the opportunity to put this into practice. Through compassion, we take on the responsibility for the physical and mental suffering of all sentient beings. When we breathe in, breathe in all their fear, frustration, setbacks, pain, anger, sadness, and doubts, all their negative emotions. When we breathe out, breathe out all our happiness, calmness, health, our roots of virtue, merit, all our positive qualities, and transfer it to them.