

train ourselves in breathing them in and dropping the story line. At the same time, we extend our thoughts and concern to other people who feel the same discomfort, and we breathe in with the wish that all of us could be free of this particular brand of confusion. Then, as we breathe out, we send ourselves and others whatever kind of relief we think would help. We also practice like this when we encounter animals and people who are in pain. We can try to do this whenever difficult situations and feelings arise, and over time it will become more automatic.

It is also helpful to notice anything in our daily life that brings us happiness. As soon as we become aware of it, we can think of sharing it with others, further cultivating the tonglen attitude.

As warrior-bodhisattvas, the more we train in cultivating this attitude, the more we uncover our capacity for joy and equanimity. Because of our bravery and willingness to work with the practice, we are more able to experience the basic goodness of ourselves and others. We're more able to appreciate the potential of all kinds of people: those we find pleasant, those we find unpleasant, and those we don't even know. Thus tonglen begins to ventilate our prejudices and introduce us to a more tender and open-minded world.

Trungpa Rinpoche used to say, however, that there are no guarantees when we practice tonglen. We have to answer our own questions. Does it really alleviate suffering? Aside from helping us, does it also benefit others? If someone on the other side of the earth is hurting, will it help her that somebody cares? Tonglen is not all that metaphysical. It's simple and very human. We can do it and discover for ourselves what happens.

## *Finding the Ability to Rejoice*

Let the flower of compassion blossom in the rich soil of maitri, and water it with the good water of equanimity in the cool, refreshing shade of joy.

— LONGCHENPA

As we train in the bodhichitta practices, we gradually feel more joy, the joy that comes from a growing appreciation of our basic goodness. We still experience strong conflicting emotions, we still experience the illusion of separateness, but there's a fundamental openness that we begin to trust. This trust in our fresh, unbiased nature brings us unlimited joy—a happiness that's completely devoid of clinging and craving. This is the joy of happiness without a hangover.

How do we cultivate the conditions for joy to expand? We train in staying present. In sitting meditation, we train in mindfulness and maitri: in being steadfast with our bodies, our emotions, our thoughts. We stay with our own little plot of earth and trust that it can be cultivated, that cultivation will bring it to its full potential. Even though it's full of rocks and the soil is dry, we begin to plow this plot with patience. We let the process evolve naturally.

At the beginning joy is just a feeling that our own situation is workable. We stop looking for a more suitable place to be. We've discovered that the continual search for something better does not work out. This doesn't mean that there are suddenly flowers growing where before there were only rocks. It means we have confidence that something will grow here.

As we cultivate our garden, the conditions become more conducive to the growth of bodhichitta. The joy comes from not giving up on ourselves, from mindfully sticking with ourselves and beginning to experience our great warrior spirit. We also provide the conditions for joy to expand by training in the practices of the heart, and in particular by training in rejoicing and appreciation. As with the other limitless qualities, we can do this as a seven-stage aspiration practice.

A traditional aspiration for awakening appreciation and joy is "May I and others never be separated from the great happiness that is devoid of suffering." This refers to always abiding in the wide-open, unbiased nature of our minds—to connecting with the inner strength of basic goodness. To do this, however, we start with conditioned examples of good fortune such as health, basic intelligence, a supportive environment—the fortunate conditions that constitute a precious human birth. For the awakening warrior, the greatest advantage is to find ourselves in a time when it is possible to hear and practice the bodhichitta teachings. We are doubly blessed if we have a spiritual friend—a more accomplished warrior—to guide us.

We can practice the first step of the aspiration by learning to rejoice in our own good fortune. We can train in rejoicing in even the smallest blessings our life holds. It is easy to miss our own good fortune; often happiness comes in ways we don't even notice. It's like a cartoon I saw of an astonished-looking man saying, "What was that?" The caption below read, "Bob experiences a moment of well-being." The ordinariness of our good fortune can make it hard to catch.

The key is to be here, fully connected with the moment, paying attention to the details of ordinary life. By taking care of ordinary things—our pots and pans, our clothing, our teeth—we rejoice in

them. When we scrub a vegetable or brush our hair, we are expressing appreciation: friendship toward ourselves and toward the living quality that is found in everything. This combination of mindfulness and appreciation connects us fully with reality and brings us joy. When we extend attention and appreciation toward our environment and other people, our experience of joy gets even bigger.

In the Zen tradition, students are taught to bow to other people as well as ordinary objects as a way of expressing their respect. They are taught to take equal care of brooms and toilets and plants in order to show their gratitude to these things. Watching Trungpa Rinpoche set the table for breakfast one morning was like watching someone arrange flowers or create a stage set. He took such care and delight in placing every detail—the place mats and napkins; the forks, knives, and spoons; the plates and the coffee cups. It took him several hours to complete the task! Since then, even though I usually have only a few minutes, I appreciate the ritual of setting the table as an opportunity to be present and rejoice.

Rejoicing in ordinary things is not sentimental or trite. It actually takes guts. Each time we drop our complaints and allow everyday good fortune to inspire us, we enter the warrior's world. We can do this even at the most difficult moments. Everything we see, hear, taste, and smell has the power to strengthen and uplift us. As Longchenpa says, the quality of joy is like finding cool, refreshing shade.

The second stage in learning to rejoice is to think of a loved one and to appreciate his or her good fortune. We start with a person we feel good about. We can imagine the loved one's face or say the person's name if it makes the practice more real. Then in our own words, we rejoice—that a person who was ill is now feeling healthy and cheerful, that a child who was lonely has found a friend. We are encouraged to try to keep it simple. The point is to find our spontaneous and natural capacity to be glad for another being, whether it feels unshakable or fleeting.

In the next three stages of the practice, as we practice with people less dear to us, our ability to appreciate and rejoice in their good fortune is frequently blocked by envy or other emotions. This is an important point for the bodhisattva in training. Our practice

is to become aware of our kind heart and nurture it. But it is also to get a close look at the roots of suffering—to see the way we close our hearts with emotions such as jealousy. I find the rejoicing practice an especially powerful tool for doing this.

What happens when we make the gesture to rejoice for the good fortune of our neighbor? We might say the words “I rejoice that Henry won the lottery,” but what is happening in our hearts and minds? When we say, “I rejoice that Tania has a boyfriend,” how do we really feel? The aspiration to rejoice can feel feeble compared with our resentment or envy or self-pity. We know how easy it is to let emotions hook us in and shut us down. We’d be wise to question why we hold a grudge as if it were going to make us happy and ease our pain. It’s rather like eating rat poison and thinking the rat will die. Our desire for relief and the methods we use to achieve it are definitely not in sync.

Whenever we get caught, it’s helpful to remember the teachings—to recall that suffering is the result of an aggressive mind. Even slight irritation causes us pain when we indulge in it. This is the time to ask, “Why am I doing this to myself again?” Contemplating the causes of suffering right on the spot empowers us. We begin to recognize that we have what it takes to cut through our habit of eating poison. Even if it takes the rest of our lives, nevertheless, we can do it.

When we work with neutral people, what happens to our hearts? We say the words in our practice or out on the street, “I rejoice for that man sitting comfortably in the sun.” “I am glad for the dog that was adopted at the pound.” We say the words and what happens? When we regard others with appreciation, do the barriers go up or do they come down?

Difficult people are, as usual, the greatest teachers. Aspiring to rejoice in their good fortune is a good opportunity to investigate our reactions and our strategies. How do we react to their good luck, good health, good news? With envy? With anger? With fear? What is our strategy for moving away from what we feel? Revenge, self-denigration? What stories do we tell ourselves? (“She’s a

snob.” “I’m a failure.”) These reactions, strategies, and story lines are what cocoons and prison walls are made of.

Then, right on the spot, we can go beneath the words to the nonverbal experience of the emotion. What’s happening in our hearts, our shoulders, our gut? Abiding with the physical sensation is radically different from sticking to the story line. It requires appreciation for this very moment. It is a way of relaxing, a way to train in softening rather than hardening. It allows the ground of limitless joy—basic goodness—to shine through.

Can we now rejoice for ourselves, our loved one, friend, the neutral, the difficult one, all together? Can we rejoice for all beings throughout time and space?

“Always maintain only a joyful mind” is one of the mind-training slogans. This might sound like an impossible aspiration. As one man said to me, “Always is a very long time.” Yet as we train in unblocking our basic goodness, we’ll find that every moment contains the free-flowing openness and warmth that characterize unlimited joy.

This is the path we take in cultivating joy: learning not to armor our basic goodness, learning to appreciate what we have. Most of the time we don’t do this. Rather than appreciate where we are, we continually struggle and nurture our dissatisfaction. It’s like trying to get the flowers to grow by pouring cement on the garden.

But as we use the bodhichitta practices to train, we may come to the point where we see the magic of the present moment; we may gradually wake up to the truth that we have always been warriors living in a sacred world. This is the ongoing experience of limitless joy. We won’t always experience this, it’s true. But year by year it becomes more and more accessible.

Once a cook at Gampo Abbey was feeling very unhappy. Like most of us, she kept feeding the gloom with her actions and her thoughts; hour by hour her mood was getting darker. She decided to try to ventilate her escalating emotions by baking chocolate chip cookies. Her plan backfired, however—she burned them all to a crisp. At that point, rather than dump the burned cookies in the garbage, she stuffed them into her pockets and backpack and went

out for a walk. She trudged along the dirt road, her head hanging down and her mind burning with resentment. She was saying to herself, "So where's all the beauty and magic I keep hearing about?"

At that moment she looked up. There walking toward her was a little fox. Her mind stopped and she held her breath and watched. The fox sat down right in front of her, gazing up expectantly. She reached into her pockets and pulled out some cookies. The fox ate them and slowly trotted away. She told this story to all of us at the abbey, saying: "I learned today that life is very precious. Even when we're determined to block the magic, it will get through and wake us up. That little fox taught me that no matter how shut down we get, we can always look outside our cocoon and connect with joy."

## *Enhancing the Training in Joy*

To make things as easy as possible, we can summarize the four lines of the single phrase "a kind heart" to have a kind heart always.

**H**ow do we make the most of our overscheduled lives, how do we find clarity and compassion? How do we develop and maitri are available even in the most frustrating? We feel left out, inadequate, or lonely, can we have perspective and contact bodhichitta?

Sharing the heart is a simple practice that can be done at any time and in every situation. It enlarges our hearts and helps us remember our interconnection. A version of this practice is also a method for enhancing our ability to connect with others.

The essence of this practice is that when we breathe life we breathe into our heart with the recognition of this. It's a way of acknowledging when we are in need of training to open up. When we encounter any situation in our life, we cherish that and rejoice. Then