

Weekly Meditation, February 10, 2010

By Rev. Teri Lubbers

Sending and Receiving

The practice of tonglen – sending and receiving – is designed to awaken bodhichitta, to put us in touch with genuine noble heart. It is a practice of taking in pain and sending out pleasure and therefore completely turns around our well-established habit of doing just the opposite. Tonglen is a practice of creating space, ventilating the atmosphere of our lives so that people can breathe freely and relax. Whenever we encounter suffering in any form, the tonglen instruction is to breathe it in with the wish that everyone could be free of pain. Whenever we encounter happiness in any form, the instruction is to breathe it out, send it out, with the wish that everyone could feel joy. It's a practice that allows people to feel less burdened and less cramped, a practice that shows us how to love without conditions. ~ Pema Chodron, "When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times"

I was reminded of this practice last night as I watched CNN's ongoing coverage of Haiti. I first learned about Tonglen meditation when Darfur, Sudan was all over the media. At that time I found myself obsessing and feeling helpless and guilty about the suffering of the women in the refugee camps, who were trying to provide for their children, trying to stay safe, trying to make a life. How could I enjoy my life when so many were suffering?

My spiritual director suggested that Tonglen practice might be a way to engage suffering in a transformative way. Instead of armoring ourselves against pain or powerlessness, suffering or sadness, Tonglen teaches us to sit with it, and with each in-breath, to breathe in the murkiness and darkness, the helplessness and hopelessness, while holding the desire and intention that everyone be free from suffering. And then with each out-breath we breathe out a sense of cool fresh air, a sense of open space, a sense of light and wholeness, peace and happiness, holding the intention that all might know joy.

Maybe it sounds corny or silly or foolish. How can this possibly make a difference? How can the simple act of breathing and meditating make a difference? Because we are all intimately interconnected in this field of love and energy we live in. Every thought makes a ripple. Every breath and prayer affects the whole. When we allow ourselves to be vulnerable and not so armored, some place deep within us opens up and we become conduits of God's love and power; we become the change we desire in the world.

Prayer: Beloved Creator, you call me to be a place of transformation, a point of contact between your Spirit and the world of form in which I live. Lead me today so that my thoughts, words and actions might reflect your love and being. Let your peace begin with me. Amen.