



## Tonglen Practice: Taking In and Sending Out

Tonglen practice is a method for connecting with suffering – our own and that which is all around us, everywhere we go. It is a method for overcoming our fear of suffering and for dissolving the tightness of our hearts. Primarily it is a method for awakening the compassion that is inherent in all of us. We begin to feel love for both ourselves and others; we begin to take care of ourselves and others. Tonglen awakens our compassion and introduces us to a far bigger view of reality.

To begin, sit comfortably with your spine straight and your belly soft. Close your eyes, gently relax your body, and rest your awareness lightly on your breath. For a few breaths, rest your mind in a state of openness or stillness.

1. Bring into your awareness someone you care about whom you know to be hurting and wish to help – someone who is in some physical or emotional pain or suffering in their life. Breathe in with the wish to take away all of their pain and suffering and fear. Then as you breathe out, send happiness, joy, or whatever would relieve their suffering. Breathe in others' pain so they can be well and have more space to relax and open. Breathe out, sending them relaxation or whatever you feel would bring them relief and happiness.
2. When your own pain arises – fear, resistance, anger, helplessness, stuckness – change the focus and begin to do tonglen for yourself, for what you are feeling. Breathe in your own pain, with the wish to be relieved of this suffering. And breathe out, send out to your self whatever brings ease, relaxation, openness, compassion, relief from your suffering.
3. And now, make the practice bigger. As you practice tonglen for the person you care about or for your self, breathe in for the millions of other people just like us who at this very moment are feeling exactly the same pain and misery. And breathe out, for all beings what would bring relief to this suffering. We simply contact what we are feeling and breathe in, take it *in*, for all of us – and sent *out* relief to all of us.

Breathe in completely the feeling, letting it touch us, accepting it, with a willingness to feel the suffering of humanity. And breathe out, radiate out compassion, loving kindness, freshness, openness, anything that heals, relaxes, helps you and others to open to and enjoy life. Breathe in through every pore, letting it melt your heart open, and knowing that there is nowhere for it to get stuck inside. And breathe out through every pore, sending out, radiating out your compassion in all directions, into infinity. Breathe in, training in staying with the soft spot of your vulnerability. Breathe out, training in staying with the soft spot of your vulnerability.

Through this practice, you contact the suffering and joy of human experience and how universal this experience is. Rather than do the habitual – whatever is painful we push away; and whatever is pleasurable we hold on to – tonglen reverses that habit. When it is painful, breathe it in, let it touch us, overcoming our fear of pain. When it is delightful, we send it out, share it with others – relaxation, happiness, well being...

Tonglen can be done as a formal meditation practice or an everyday habit, right on the spot breathing in and breathing out, and feeling fully when we see and feel physical and emotional pain, with the wish that all beings be happy and free of suffering.

Adapted from *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times*, by Pema Chödrön.