

***Tonglen*: My Personal Application**

The following passage gives an overview of the practice of *tonglen*.

In brief, the practice of *tonglen* consists of opening out to your own suffering so that you experience it fully just as it is, and then breathe it in with the natural rhythm of the in-breath. As you do this, you imagine that the suffering of all other beings is being breathed in with it. This takes courage. The wish to do it springs from love and compassion (even if you do not feel particularly loving and compassionate). Suddenly, as the in-breath fades and gives way to the out-breath, you switch to breathing out all that is good and conducive to happiness, so that it fills your being and flows out to all beings like the light and warmth of the sun. (Hookham, Lama Shenpen. *There's More to Dying than Death*. Windhorse Publications Ltd. Kindle Edition.)

As I pondered the practice of *tonglen*, I compiled the following three reflections to help me in my own practice of *tonglen*. They are one person's attempt at applying the *tonglen* practice and not intended to be of a direct instructional nature/tone for everyone. Nevertheless, perhaps my reflections will be of help to others too.

Reflection #1: Use and/or adapt the following statements as a basis for your *tonglen* practice:

Hatred > Loving-Kindness

- May I breathe in any *ill will, anger, or aversion*; and as I breathe out, let **love** and **compassion** flow out from me to all beings.
- May I breathe in any *hurt, resentment, or grudge*; and as I breathe out, let **patience** and **forgiveness** flow out from me to all beings.

Greed > Generosity

- May I breathe in any *greed, miserliness, or selfishness*; and as I breathe out, let **sharing** and **generosity** flow out from me to all beings.
- May I breathe in any *stinginess, hoarding, or tight-fistedness*; and as I breathe out, let **big-heartedness** and **open-handedness** flow out from me to all beings.

Ignorance > Wisdom

- May I breathe in any *darkness, delusion, or misperception*; and as I breathe out, let **wisdom** and **light** flow out from me to all beings.

- May I breathe in any *confusion, uncertainty, or perplexity*; and as I breathe out, let **discernment** and **discrimination** flow out from me to all beings.

Attachment > Equanimity

- May I breathe in any *attachment, neediness, or lust*; and as I breathe out, let **composure** and **gratitude** flow out from me to all beings.
- May I breathe in any obsessive *clinging, passion, or desire*; and as I breathe out, let **contentment** and **equipoise** flow out from me to all beings.

Jealousy > Rejoicing

- May I breathe in any *envy, begrudging, or jealousy*; and as I breathe out, let **happiness** and **rejoicing** in others' good fortune flow out from me to all beings.
- May I breathe in any *covetousness, resenting, or hankering after*; and as I breathe out, let **joy** and **delighting** in others' success flow out from me to all beings.

Pride > Humility

- May I breathe in any *pride, arrogance, or superiority*; and as I breathe out, let **humility** and **selflessness** flow out from me to all beings.
- May I breathe in any *egotism, self-importance, or haughtiness*; and as I breathe out, let **unpretentiousness** and **modesty** flow out from me to all beings.

Reflection #2: Adapt, in a way that speaks to your heart, the following statements which relate to the six disturbing emotions, for your own *tonglen* practice:

- Where there is hatred, let me sow love and compassion.
- Where there is greed, let me sow generosity.
- Where there is ignorance, let me sow wisdom.
- Where there is desire, let me sow equanimity.
- Where there is jealousy, let me sow rejoicing.
- Where there is arrogance, let me sow humility.

Source: Kauai Dharma Center (<http://www.kauaidharma.org/>)
Lama Tashi Dundrup (Resident Lama and Center Director)

Reflection #3: Build a *tonglen* practice based on the following words from St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226). I once asked a senior student (mentor) in one of Pema Chödrön's online classes if these words from St. Francis of Assisi could be adapted for *tonglen* practice. He readily affirmed that they could be. (Pema Chödrön has taught extensively on *tonglen*.)

- Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
- Where there is injury, pardon;
- Where there is doubt, faith;
- Where there is despair, hope;
- Where there is darkness, light;
- And where there is sadness, joy.

In closing, *tonglen* is further described in the source quoted at the beginning:

Many details can be added, such as visualizing the negativity as black, foul, and disgusting, and the good as white, bright, and liquid. The practice can be performed focusing on the specific sufferings and pleasures of individuals in specific situations, or it can be more generalized.

The practice can have all sorts of helpful effects, including undercutting our doubts, fears, and tendency to self-concern and self-pity. As we catch ourselves getting lost in some kind of pathetic storyline, we simply use it as a trigger to breathe in that suffering along with that of everyone else who suffers likewise. There is something tremendously big-hearted and accommodating about practising *tonglen*. Nothing is too much to be breathed in. It cuts through any tendency to feel overwhelmed or to want to run and hide, ignore, or turn away. At the time of death this is very important, as you need to be able to open right into the situation, however bad it gets. *Tonglen* is an excellent practice for doing that. (Hookham, Lama Shenpen. *There's More to Dying than Death*. Windhorse Publications Ltd. Kindle Edition.)

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Caption for Seascape Photo:

As I stood and paused on the walking trail, with the seascape panorama stretching before my eyes, the practice of *tonglen* came naturally from the depths of my heart – as I reflected with the in-breath on the three kinds of suffering in this cycle of existence that continually torments beings (blatant suffering, suffering of change, and the all-pervasive suffering of conditioning). [Also, suffering is so evident whenever we see the daily news or read our newspapers and magazines.]

With the out-breath, lines from the following words came to mind . . .

*May all beings have happiness,
and the causes of happiness.
May all beings be free from suffering,
and the causes of suffering.
May all beings dwell in bliss,
free from all suffering.
May all beings dwell in equanimity,
free from attachment and
free from aversion.*