



# **TONGLEN & THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES**



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# Day 1: TONGLEN



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# 01 Why do tonglen and the four immeasurables?

## Do something unpredictable

**Attraction** is one of the three poisons.

**Aversion** is one of the three poisons.

**Ignorance** is the basis of the other two.

These are the causes of suffering.

If you want to reduce suffering, instead of leaning away from your experience, lean INTO it.

Tonglen is a tool for interrupting habituated patterns of not being present with experience.

Confess your hidden faults.

**Approach what you find repulsive.**

Help those you think cannot be helped.

Anything you are attached to, let it go.

—Padampa Sanje's advice to Machik Labdron



# 01 Why do tonglen and the four immeasurables?

## Loving-kindness & compassion

One thing we share with all beings is the wish to be free from suffering and its causes. We all want to be safe and happy.

Unfortunately, much of what we do causes just the opposite. Seeing this in ourselves brings understanding about why others act as they do, and compassion naturally arises for both self and other.

When loving-kindness and compassion increase, our conflicted emotions decrease. This lays the foundations for awakening.

- ◆ Loving-kindness is the wish that other beings be happy and well.
- ◆ Compassion is the wish that they be free from suffering.



# 01 Why do tonglen and the four immeasurables?

## Leveraging our familiarity with the breath

Most people have practiced calm abiding or some form of breath meditation before starting tonglen.

Familiar with the 'texture' of breath practice, we can leverage that experience to give us the comfortable metronome of breathing for taking and sending.

All your previous breath-work will yield stability and clarity to the tonglen practice, in both the relative and ultimate bodhicitta practice aspects of tonglen.



# 01 Why do tonglen and the four immeasurables?

## We need to see where we are

We begin the practice with a heart that is truly committed to helping others and to working openly with our own situation.

When we look deeply into how this can actually happen, we see that to help others, we must relate with kindness toward our own suffering, our rage, helplessness, and frustration, our doubt, bitterness, and fear.

The practice of Sending and Receiving helps us to get in touch with the obstacles that prevent us from understanding and caring. Through our own experience with suffering and the development of an atmosphere of openness toward it, we can begin to accept and be with others and ourselves in a more open, kind and understanding way.

Our own difficult personal experiences then become the bridge that leads us to compassion and to giving no fear.

—Roshi Joan Halifax



# 01 Why do tonglen and the four immeasurables?

## It's both relative and ultimate practice

Other people do the practice with great expectation, with great hope. They think of a friend who is ill, unhappy or otherwise suffering and they visualize this friend during the meditation in the hope that they will remove the suffering.

When they find it does not work they lose hope and become disillusioned. This also is not what the practice is about. The point is to cherish other beings as important, rather than regarding oneself as important. So there is no need to have worry, fear or expectation.

However, it is not true to say there is no result from the practice. In the immediate present one is not able to bring happiness or remove suffering, but by doing this practice one will gradually cease to cherish oneself over others. Instead, one will develop the wish to practice in order to benefit other beings, eventually leading to the ability to help beings, teach and train them in the Dharma, and so forth. Consequently, one will be able to give them happiness and relieve them of suffering, and offer them whatever qualities and abilities that one has. This is the relative bodhicitta.

The ultimate bodhicitta is approached by pacifying concepts and dualism: all one's thoughts are calmed; one's clinging to dualism assuaged; one just rests in the state of peace, of meditation. One dissolves into emptiness and just rests in the true nature of the mind. This is the ultimate bodhicitta.

—Taken from the *Oral Instructions on the Karma Pakshi Practice* given by Thrangu Rinpoche, to the retreatants of Samye-Ling, December 1993.



## Why do tonglen and the 4 immeasurables?

The more negativity we take in with a sense of openness and compassion, the more goodness there is to breathe out. So there is nothing to lose.

—Chogyam Trungpa



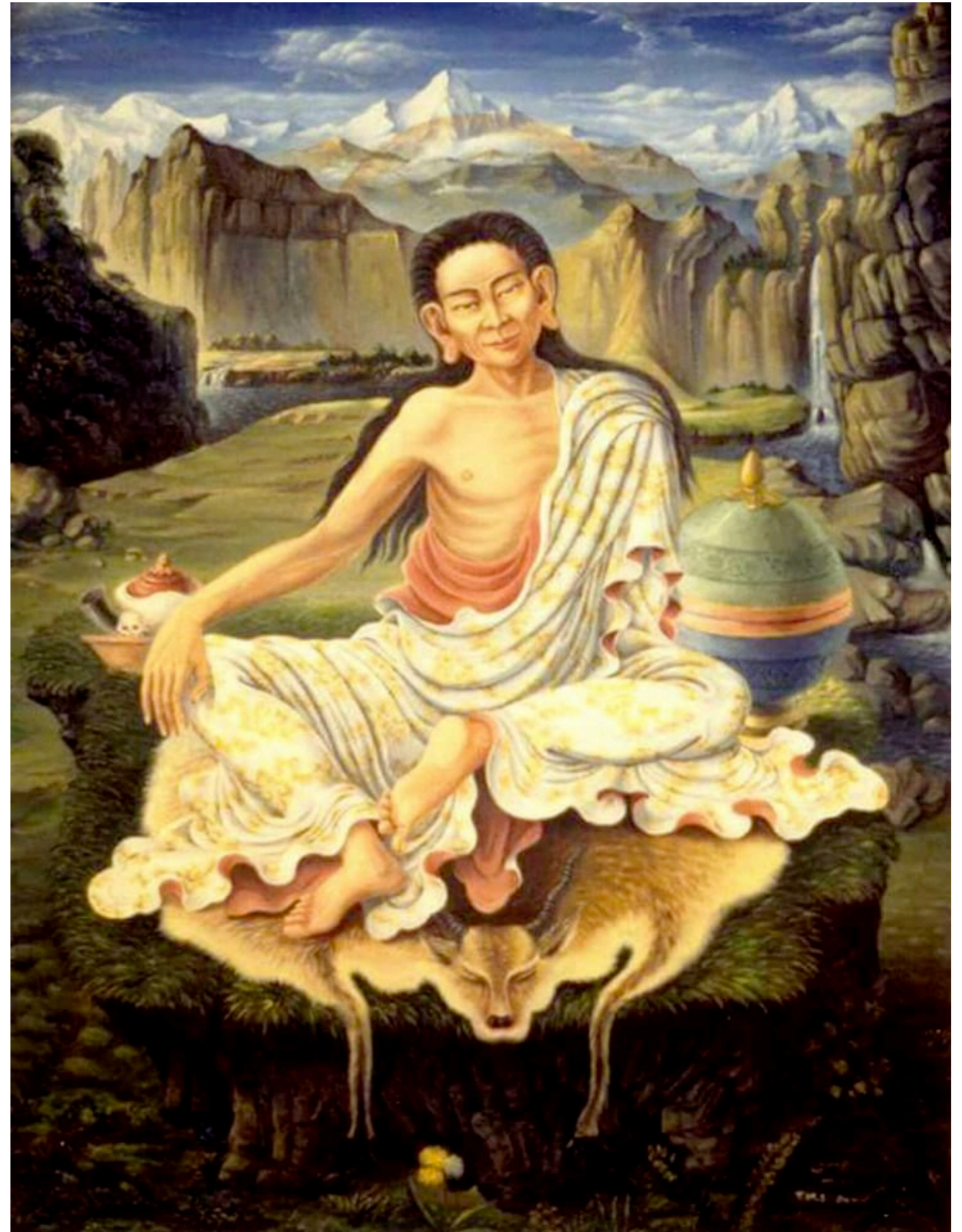
**when in doubt,  
breathe in.  
breathe out.**



# Befriending — never violent — practice is gentle

One evening Milarepa returned to his cave after gathering firewood, only to find it filled with demons. They were cooking his food, reading his books, sleeping in his bed. They had taken over the joint. He knew about non-duality of self and other, but he still didn't quite know how to get these guys out of his cave. Even though he had the sense that they were just a projection of his own mind—all the unwanted parts of himself—he didn't know how to get rid of them. So first he taught them the dharma. He sat on this seat that was higher than they were and said things to them about how we are all one. He talked about compassion and shunyata and how poison is medicine. Nothing happened. The demons were still there. Then he lost his patience and got angry and ran at them. They just laughed at him. Finally, he gave up and just sat down on the floor, saying, "I'm not going away and it looks like you're not either, so let's just live here together." At that point, all of them left except one. Milarepa said, "Oh, this one is particularly vicious." (We all know that one. Sometimes we have lots of them like that. Sometimes we feel that's all we've got.) He didn't know what to do, so he surrendered himself even further. He walked over and put himself right into the mouth of the demon and said, "Just eat me up if you want to." Then that demon left too.

—Pema Chodron in *Start Where You Are*



# Working with what is true

All practice is done through gentleness. All.

When we see where our obstacles are, we are not looking at the enemy. We are looking at the next steps forward. We are looking at our path.

Even our shortcomings and obstacles are wisdom arising. Can you trust it? Will you dare?

When you feel your aversion, stay right there.

When you feel your fear, stay right there.

When you feel your dis-ease, stay right there.

Everyone of those things is a message, a blessing.

Everyone of those things is imbued with wisdom.

Stop drawing conclusions. Stop knowing.

When you meet revulsion, look it in the eye.

When you are most afraid, be most still.

Stay right there.

Everything is OK.

Stay right there.

This is the practice of bodhicitta.

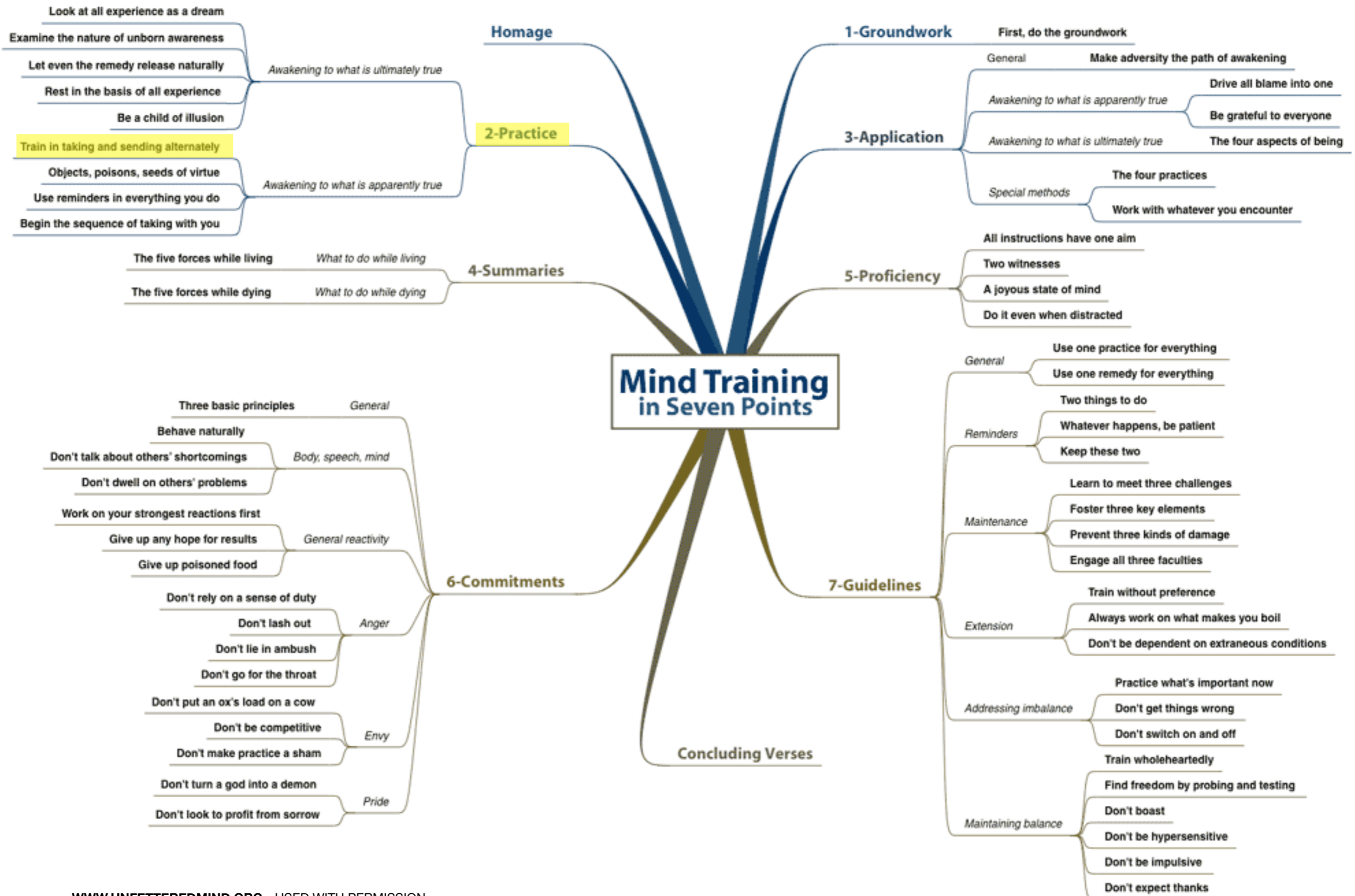
—Letter to a student, 2014



# 01 | The historical context of tonglen



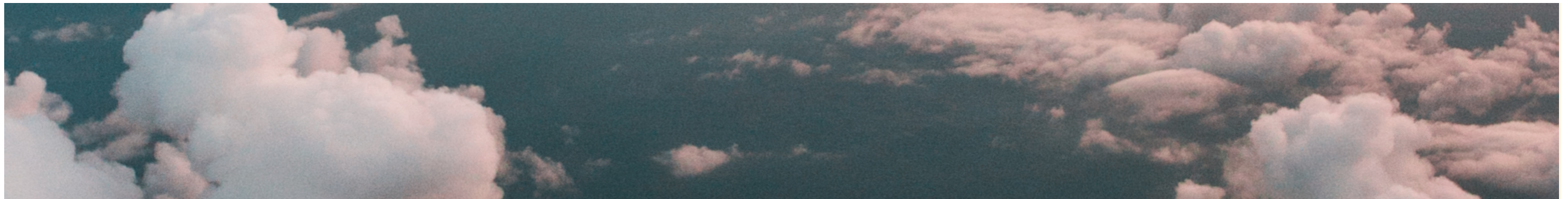
# 02 The Seven Points of Mind Training - Tonglen's context



## 03 | How to do the practice: tonglen pre-practice exercise



**Feel the texture of the breath. Rest awareness on the uncontrived breath, without interruption.**



# 03 How to do the practice - the preliminaries

## Consider why you practice

- ◆ To relieve your suffering
- ◆ To related to experience in a new way
- ◆ To understand the nature of life and experience
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_

## Contemplate the 4 thoughts

- ◆ Precious human birth
- ◆ Impermanence
- ◆ Karma
- ◆ The unsatisfactory nature of samsara

## Take refuge in the three jewels

- ◆ Take refuge in the three jewels
  - ◆ Buddha
  - ◆ Dharma
  - ◆ Sangha



## Give rise to bodhicitta

- ◆ Bodhicitta is the wish to awaken to benefit beings

- ◆ Spend a few minutes in calm abiding until you feel settled. Then engage in the preliminaries.
- ◆ Now rest momentarily in absolute bodhicitta. If you are unfamiliar with this practice, just connect with the spaciousness of your own mind—that resource which is dependable, always there.
- ◆ Now visualize yourself in front of you, facing yourself. If you feel any sense of suffering, make the wish that you be free from suffering and imagine it leaves your body as a dark smokey substance. Inhale that on the in-breath and imagine it enters your nostrils and disappears into into your heart place and that the suffering is resolved. Really feel the longing to relieve their suffering. On an out-breath, imagine that some joy or merit you have is sent out on white light and that it enters the front visualization and fills the body with ease and joy.
- ◆ Now visualize someone with whom you have a loving relationship. When you feel in contact with the sense of their suffering, visualize that as you inhale, you breathe in the suffering of this person, in the form of dark-colored smoke. It leaves their body, enters your nostrils and is drawn down into your heart, where it dissolves and disappears. Think that as this happens, they are relieved of all suffering. It actually disappears and they are filled with ease and joy.
- ◆ As you do these steps, notice your mind states and sensations in the body. Don't try to correct. Just notice.
- ◆ Now visualize someone with whom you have a challenging relationship. When you feel in contact with the sense of their suffering, visualize that as you inhale, you breathe in the suffering of this person, in the form of dark-colored smoke. It leaves their body, enters your nostrils and is drawn down into your heart, where it dissolves and disappears. Think that as this happens, they are relieved of all suffering. It actually disappears and they are filled with ease and joy.
- ◆ Finally, rest in calm abiding and let energy settle. Then dedicate the merit [goodness] of the practice.



## One step at a time, acknowledge and accept the suffering of samsara

- ◆ Tonglen for one's self when one is not suffering much
- ◆ Tonglen for when you are feeling everyday aversion
- ◆ Tonglen when one is suffering a lot
- ◆ Tonglen for all who have the suffering you relate to
- ◆ Tonglen for one's friends and people one cares about
- ◆ Tonglen for one's family if relationships are good
- ◆ Tonglen for others in conflict
- ◆ Tonglen for those who have harmed you
- ◆ **Tonglen for all**





## **No need to fake it. Feel and acknowledge your edge.**

- ◆ Where does your compassion run out?
- ◆ Stay with that experience.
- ◆ No need to judge, or even comment.
- ◆ The most powerful antidote is to bring unwavering awareness to that experience.
- ◆ Experiencing it fully, you know its essence.
- ◆ Experiencing its emptiness, change will come.
- ◆ Experiencing your own limitations, you will witness the limitations of others with a more kind heart.

# 01 Using tonglen to master fear

## What frightens us most is the thought of being afraid.

Nothing puts us in more danger than our own mind and when what we are frightened of actually happens, it is never as bad as we imagined. There is no protection against fear.

Even when we think that we have found some safety, we still wonder if our defenses are reliable and this uncertainty destroys our security.

We create fear and we can uncreate it. It is a habit that can be broken.

A good remedy against fear is to actively provoke it. Instead of feeling helpless we confront our worst fear.

If you are frightened of losing something, give it away.

If heights scare you, climb to a high place. If you are terrified of speaking in public, stand before an audience.

This is the simplest way of mastering fear.

—Ringu Tulku



**“Go to the places that scare you.” Padampa Sanje**

## Isn't it dangerous to breathe in negativity?

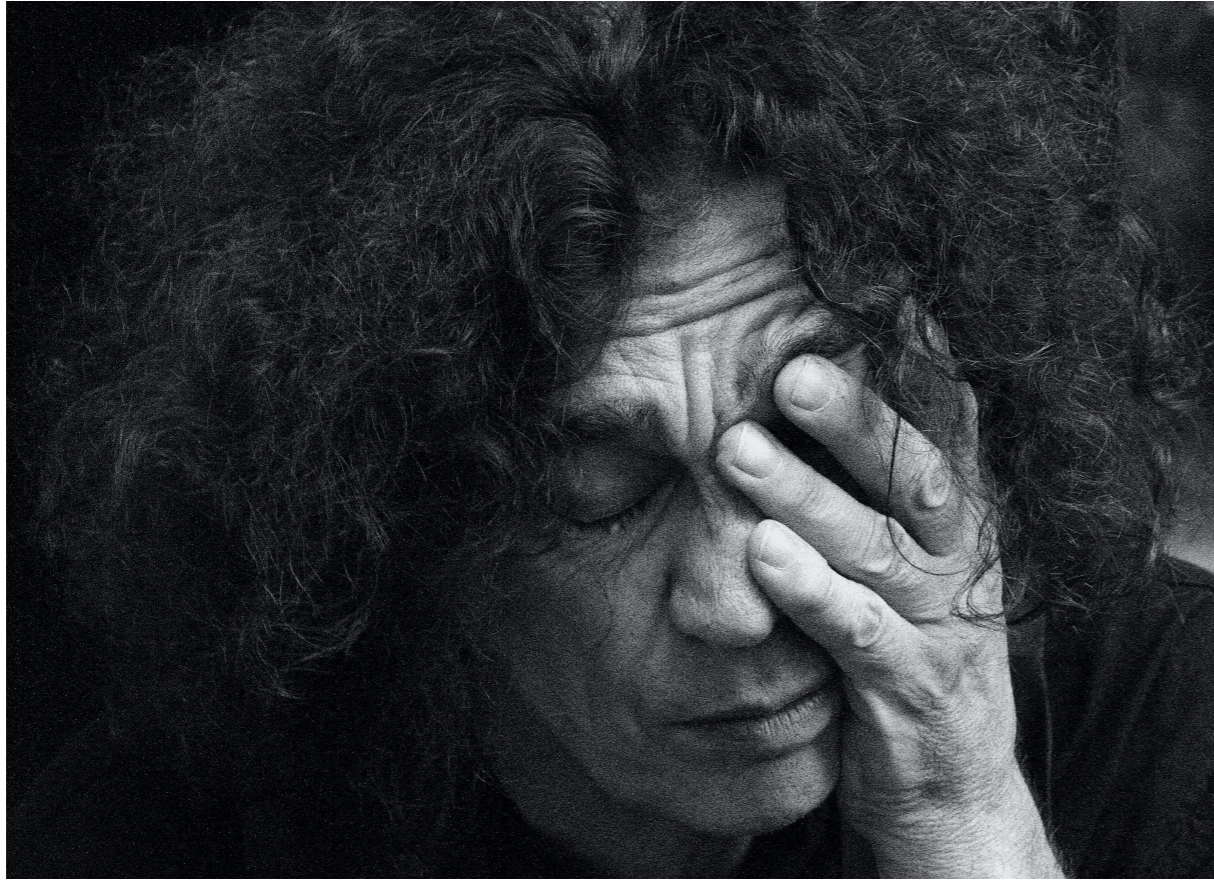
Negativity is an illusion and a symptom of our mistaken view of things, so taking on negativity cannot possibly harm us or put us at any risk. We are the cause of healing.

Our focus is not on suffering but on creating complete freedom from suffering. Tonglen does not threaten anything except our ego.

The anxiety that we may be injured by the exchange only develops because our aversion is intensified by the meditation.

Remember that the greatest source of suffering is our aversion to suffering and when we take on this aversion fearlessly, meeting it in an inclusive way, it becomes a friend and an ally.

—Ringu Tulku



To carry Tonglen is to cultivate compassion as your first response. Take it everywhere.

1. Make tonglen your first response to your own suffering. Learn to recognize anger, fear and other emotions as suffering. Practice seeing them when they are faint sensations in the body. Notice where they are located. Rest your awareness on the body sensations and then do tonglen. Instead of blaming, analyzing or disembodimenting the emotion, do tonglen for yourself.
2. Do tonglen for others. In traffic, waiting in line, on the bus, while you watch the news, at the doctor's office.
3. Do tonglen while you walk down the street.
4. Train yourself so that angst and conflicted emotions become a trigger for tonglen.
5. Whenever you suffer, do tonglen for all the people who have that exact suffering.
6. Do tonglen for animals and other beings; and other realms.
7. Do tonglen for all beings in times of difficulty. Remember that all sentient beings experience suffering. There are no exceptions. Don't pick and choose for whom you tonglen. Do it with equanimity.



When you are having conflict with others, do tonglen

◆ For self

◆ For each other person in the equation

◆ For all

It's never too late to make peace. You can even make peace with dead people. This is making peace with yourself.

# 01 | Shantideva - The Way of the Bodhisattva

## What need is there to say more?

The childish work for their own benefit,  
The Buddhas work for the benefit of others.  
Just look at the difference between them.

If I do not exchange my happiness for the suffering  
of others, I shall not attain the state of Buddhahood.  
And even in Samsara I shall have no real joy.

The source of all misery in the world lies in thinking  
of one's self; The source of all happiness lies in  
thinking of others.

— Shantideva





**See you next week for the  
Four Immeasurables!**

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home practice!**