

## TONGLLEN INSTRUCTIONS

When you do tonglen on the spot, simply breathe in and breathe out, taking in pain and sending out spaciousness and relief.

When you do tonglen as a formal meditation practice it has four stages. First rest your mind briefly, for a second or two, in a state of openness or stillness. This stage is traditionally called "flashing on Absolute bodhicitta" or suddenly opening to basic spaciousness and clarity.

Second, work with texture. You breathe in a feeling of hot, dark and heavy— a sense of claustrophobia, and you breathe out a feeling of cool, bright and light— a sense of freshness. You breathe in completely through all the pores of your body and you breathe out, radiate out, completely through all the pores of your body. You do this until it feels synchronized with your in and outbreath.

Third, you work with your personal situation— any painful situation which is real to you. Traditionally you begin by doing tonglen for someone you care about and wish to help. However, as I described, if you are stuck, do the practice for the pain you are feeling and simultaneously for all those just like you who feel that kind of suffering. For instance if you are feeling inadequate— you breathe that in for yourself and all the others in the same boat— and you send out confidence or relief in any form you wish.

Finally make the taking in and ending out larger. If you are doing tonglen for someone you love, extend it out to everyone who is in the same situation. If you are doing tonglen for someone you see on television or on the street, do it for all the others who are in the same boat— make it larger than just one person. If you are doing tonglen for all those who are feeling the anger or fear that you are caught with, maybe that is big enough.

But you could go further in all these cases. You could do tonglen for people you consider to be your enemies— those that hurt you or hurt others. Do tonglen for them, thinking of them as having the same confusion and stuckness as your friend or yourself. Breathe in their pain and send them relief.

This is to say that tonglen can extend indefinitely.

As you do the practice, gradually over time, your compassion naturally expands and so does your realization that things are not as solid as you thought. As you do this practice, gradually at your own pace, you will be surprised to find yourself more and more able to be there for others even in what used to seem like impossible situations.