**MEDITATION: MINDFULNESS AND TONGLEN**

**How to do Mindfulness Meditation**

In mindfulness meditation, we are trying to achieve a mind that is stable and calm.

Begin your meditation practice with short periods of time: 10, 15, or 20 minutes.

Most meditation is done sitting down in either a chair, on meditation cushion or

meditation bench. Make sure your posture is erect. When you sit down, remind

yourself that you are there to train your mind.

Next, inhabit your body. Spend time settling into your posture. If you find

yourself getting dull or hazy or falling asleep, you should check your posture.

You may choose to close your eyes during meditation or merely partially shut

them and gaze softly focusing downward a few inches in front of your nose.

As you start the practice, you have a sense of your body, and a sense of where you

are, and then you begin to notice your breathing. The breath should not be forced,

but rather just breathe naturally.

As you begin having thoughts, just label them. In your mind, say, “Thinking”. Do

so gently, and without judgment, and then come back to the breath.

**Another way to practice Mindfulness Meditation**

1. Being in the body – When you first sit down to practice meditation first ask

yourself, “What is going on right now?” Then be in touch with your

physical, emotional and mental state. The point is not to think about the

body, the emotions, or the environment, but to actually feel them. Then

bring your awareness to your breath. Feel the actual sensation of it entering

and leaving your body. The practice is to be aware, to simply observe and

experience whatever is happening. Attempt to see and experience life as it

arises by letting it just be there – minus our opinions or judgments.

2. Labeling and experiencing – As we sit, emotions arise. As emotions arise,

we can ask, “What is this?” Where do you feel that emotion in the body?

Notice the quality or texture. The practice is to label the thoughts over and

over to see them clearly and to break our identification with them.

3. Opening into the heart of experiencing – Is the third aspect of sitting

practice. This is where we breath the painful reaction into the center of our

chest. Why? Because experiencing our emotions fully will allow them to

break through the layers of self-protective armor and awaken our heart.

Fully felt, our emotions will clear the deep well of love and compassion

that is the essence of our being.

Ultimately that what practice is all about, experiencing the present moment, just

being there.

**The Practice of Tonglen**

(From *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times* by Pema

Chodron)

“Each of us has a "soft spot": the place in our experience where we feel vulnerable

and tender. This soft spot is inherent in appreciation and love, and it is equally

inherent in pain.”

Often, when we feel that soft spot, it's quickly followed by a feeling of fear and an

involuntary, habitual tendency to close down. This is the tendency of all living

things: to avoid pain and cling to pleasure. In practice, however, covering up the

soft spot means shutting down against our life experience. Then we tend to narrow

down into a solid feeling of self against other.

One very powerful and effective way to work with tendency to push away pain

and hold onto pleasure is the practice of *tonglen****.*** Tonglen is a Tibetan word that

literally means "sending and taking." The practice originated in India and came to

Tibet in the eleventh century. In tonglen practice, when we see or feel suffering,

we breathe in with the notion of completely feeling it, accepting it, and owning it.

Then we breathe out, radiating compassion, lovingkindness, freshness; anything

that encourages relaxation and openness.

In Tonglen practice, through our compassion, we take on (embrace without

resistance) the various sufferings of all beings: their fear, hurt, frustration, pain,

anger, guilt, bitterness, loneliness, doubt, rage, and so forth. In return, we give

them our loving-kindness, happiness, peace of mind, well-being, healing, and

fulfillment.

Traditionally, we begin by doing Tonglen for someone we care about. However,

we can use this practice at any time, either for ourselves or others. Tonglen can be

done for those who are ill, those who are dying or have just died, or for those that

are in pain of any kind. Tonglen can be done either as a formal meditation practice

or right on the spot at any time. For example, if we encounter someone in pain,

right on the spot we can begin to breathe in their pain and send out some relief. At

any time, when we encounter our own emotional discomfort or suffering, or that

of others, we open our heart and fully embrace what we are encountering on our

in-breath. Breathing out, we offer the heartfelt radiance of acceptance, lovingkindness,

and compassion. This is a practice and a way of life.

Practicing tonglen on one friend in pain helps us begin the process of gradually

widening the circle of our compassion. From there, we can learn to take on the

suffering and purity the karma of all beings; giving others our happiness, wellbeing,

joy, and peace of mind. Tonglen practice can extend indefinitely, and

gradually, over time, our compassion will expand. We will find that we have a

greater ability to be loving and present for ourselves and for others in even the

most difficult situations. This is the wonderful goal of tonglen practice, the path of

compassion.

In this practice, it's not uncommon to find yourself blocked, because you come

face to face with your own fear, resistance, or whatever your personal stuckness

happens to be at that moment. At that point, you can change the focus and do

tonglen for yourself , and for millions of others just like you, at that very moment,

who are feeling exactly the same misery.

I particularly like to encourage tonglen, on the spot. For example, you're walking

down the street and you see the pain of another human being. On-the-spot tonglen

means that you just don't rush by; you actually breathe in with the wish that this

person can be free of suffering, and send them out some kind of good heart or

well-being. If seeing that other person's pain brings up fear or anger or confusion,

which often happens, just start doing tonglen for yourself and all the other people

who are stuck in the very same way.

When you do tonglen on the spot, you simply breathe in and breathe out, taking in

pain and sending out spaciousness and relief. When you tonglen as a formal

practice, it has four stages:

1) First, rest your mind briefly in a state of openness or stillness.

2) Second, work with texture. Breathe in a feeling of hot (red), dark, and heavy,

and breathe out a feeling of cool (blue), bright, and light. Breathe in and radiate

completely, through all the pores of your body, until it feels synchronized with

your in-and out-breath.

3) Third, work with any painful personal situation that is real to you. Traditionally,

you begin by doing tonglen for someone you care about. However, if you’re stuck,

do the practice for your pain and simultaneously for all those just like you who

feel that kind of suffering.

4) Finally, make the taking in and the sending out larger. Whether you’re doing

tonglen for someone you love or for someone you see on television, do it for all

the others in the same boat. You could even do tonglen for people you consider

your enemies--those who have hurt you or others. Do tonglen for them, thinking of

them as having the same confusion and stuckness as you find for yourself.

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, at

your own pace, you'll be surprised to find yourself more and more able to be there

for others, even in what seems like impossible jealousy, loneliness, or suffering, be

it our own or others. We breathe in with the desire to completely embrace this

experience; to feel it and accept it.

*Use what seems like poison as medicine. Use your personal suffering as the path*

*to compassion for all beings.*

**Another Excellent Form of Tonglen**

1. Clearly imagine a situation where you have acted badly, one about which

you feel shameful or guilty, and which may be difficult to even think about.

2. Then, as you breathe in, opening your heart, accept total responsibility for

your actions in that particular situation. Do not judge or try to justify your

behavior. Simply acknowledge exactly what you have done wrong and

wholeheartedly ask for forgiveness. Now, as you breathe out, send the

compassionate radiance of reconciliation, forgiveness, harmony, healing,

and understanding.

3. Breathe in the pain and the blame, and breathe out the undoing of harm.

Breathe in taking full responsibility, breathe out the compassionate radiance

of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

This exercise is especially powerful. It may give you the courage to go see the

person(s) whom you have wronged and the strength and willingness to talk to

them directly and actually ask for forgiveness from the depths of your heart