

Tonglen Practice from the Tibetan tradition – compassion for one, compassion for many and compassion for self – “Tonglen is a Tibetan way of directly contacting what’s going on.”

What is really happening inside me right now?

Let the awareness come into your body. Can I be with this now and just let it be?

Now bring to mind someone in your life who is having a difficult time (someone close but not someone you are in conflict with).

Take some moments to sense how it is through this person’s eyes, stand in their shoes. Perhaps look on to them as if you were watching a movie. Sense their fears, disappointments, hurts. Sense what they believe. Let yourself sense in your body how it is for this person.

As you sense this take a conscious breath so that as you breath in, you can feel and touch this person’s real pain. And then just let go with the out breath. Take the pain and suffering of others in and then breath out love to them

As you breathe out, you might sense that you are offering the space and the care that can hold this person. You might sense what this person is most wanting or needing.

In a way, you are breathing in and contacting what is difficult – contacting that unmet need, the woundedness, the feeling of not being loveable, the feeling of loneliness, or the feeling of shame and deficiency.

And on the out breath, you can offer a message that’s most needed – a message this person would find most comforting.

You might sense that you are sending a message from your great heart to that being – to that person’s vulnerability.

The in breath is saying “YES, I consent to feel this person’s pain”, Let me be with that and then breath out and sense the space that holds it – the vastness of the universe.

Emphasise the giving out of love and care and the space that holds it.

You are breathing in what is difficult and you breathing out a message from you heart that is comforting. You may want to place a hand on your heart.

Say the message that most resonates with you: eg I am with you, or I care. You may like to touch your own heart.

Continue to feel the breath, but begin to breathe for all those who are suffering in this way.

You're really breathing in for all of us that experience this suffering. It is not only personal.

On the out breath, let it all float and be suspended in the vastness of loving presence.

So you are breathing in this willingness to be touched and you are breathing out this great space of universal heart that can hold this life with care and understanding and compassion. There is larger system that can hold us and you are part of it for others as they are for you.

Notes:

This practice of seeing through each other's eyes is a very deep and radical training for the awakening of compassion.

It's something you can do in small pieces at any time. You can see anybody having a hard time and just the breath can be a way to support you in staying connected with your experience.

Just sense that, and just breathe in and say *let me feel that, let me imagine that, let me be with that.*

Breathe out – and that's really important – to sense the space that holds it.

Now, some people will say, "Yeah, but I'm already so sensitive and so easily overwhelmed. I breathe in the suffering of millions and billions of people and that's it!"

You have to breathe out and remember the vastness of this universe that's holding – this ocean of loving that holds the different waves that come through us.

"Breathe out and remember the vastness of this universe."

If you are one who feels like *too much*, emphasize the out breath when you're experiencing your own suffering or that of another.

"Emphasize the giving out of love and care and the space that holds it."

Keep emphasizing that and gradually you will find that the space you are breathing out to is big enough to breathe into, too – it's not really a different space.

Emphasize the giving out of love and care and the space that holds it.

If you're the kind of person that instead feels kind of dissociated and it's hard for you to take in the pain of other people or your own pain, emphasize the breathing in – the real heartfelt willingness to be touched.

The key, though, is to go from individual suffering – your own or another person's – and widen it to include all who have suffering.

The gift of that widening is that we *get* that it's not so personal – it's not my loneliness, it's the loneliness and it's not my fear, it's the fear. That realization gives us a visceral sense of the vast space and belonging that is here.

When you notice that someone is having a hard time, do “on the spot” compassion (tonglen) for them. Breath in, letting yourself touch and feel what they might be feeling...and then with the exhale, release the pain with your wishes for their healing, ease, happiness...whatever most resonates.

Adapted from the work of Tara Brach