

TONGLEN: MENTAL FENG SHUI

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By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

I can see from your previous comments that I have to give a little more detail here about tonglen. Let's take an example that is easy to understand.

Let's say I see a small puppy or child being hurt or suffering. It is quite natural for my heart go out to such an innocent creature. I am instantly compassionate. I wish I could lessen the suffering and take the small creature in my arms and hold it, giving it comfort. Tonglen is like this.

We recognize and take on the suffering or pain wherever we find it and send back all that we have that might be comforting and kind. As mentioned, our heart goes out in these situations. This is the process. And while it is easier to imagine with something like a hurt puppy, the same transaction can be practiced with all who suffer. This is what tonglen is all about, regardless of whether the object is a cute puppy or a gnarly old what-you-have. All beings are deserving of compassion, even more so if they are mean and hurtful. Somewhere in there someone is suffering

And while learning to have compassion wherever suffering is found is where tonglen shines, it can have other practical uses throughout our life each day. It is easy to see where we would have compassion for a hurt child or puppy, but perhaps less easy to see where we ourselves are constantly hurt, often by our own biases and prejudices.

It can be as obvious as the not-so-friendly co-worker that we suddenly meet as we round an office corner. What is our reaction? You know what it is. There is nothing kind about it and we tend to react with dislike and probably fear of the unknown. It can be painful when we know someone has singled us out and made a point of not liking us. When they suddenly appear in our day, the tendency is to shrink back and put up defenses. Am I right? Use your own words.

Tonglen would have us do just the reverse from reacting in fear or dislike, rather to open up and take in all that we fear or loathe, breathe it in, and absorb it, and then send back whatever we can manage that is kind and open in return. It would seem that we are being vulnerable by doing so, but in fact it is we who become stronger through the process. This is what tonglen is all about. This is mind training folks!

Our prejudices and biases define the boundary between what we consider safe (our self) and everything 'other' outside ourselves. When we do tonglen in a situation, we are gradually moving those boundaries so that they are more inclusive and embracing of others. What was once 'other' is slowly weakened and eventually vanishes, becoming known and part of us. We have made friends with the 'other' parts of ourselves. We are more inclusive.

Tonglen is exactly the opposite of being divisive or polarizing. It weakens and breaks down duality rather than strengthening it. Instead of reinforcing fear and hatred, tonglen gradually removes the otherness out there somewhere and reclassifies it as part of ourselves as something now known. We are making friends with ourselves through tonglen.

Are the others we are doing tonglen for (and with) helped by our action? They are certainly not

hurt by it and the fact that it makes us a friendlier and more compassionate being can't help but be useful to all who have to come to know us. I would say yes it is helpful to others as well to us.

Let me summarize please. Many of us are busy; we don't manage to find enough time for sitting meditation and/or we may not have done enough meditation to begin to reap the rewards of doing so. Sitting meditation takes time until a habit is formed that can really be of use to us. Tonglen is something we can do at anytime and anywhere. It does not take long and we don't have to interrupt whatever else we are doing. And it works.

Tonglen need not only be a somewhat drawn-out affair with lots of breathing in and breathing out. We only do tonglen until we feel that we have weakened, neutralized, and otherwise softened the duality we experience, the 'us' and 'them' of it, until we make friends with that other part of ourselves.

It can also be used for smaller and smaller events like wincing, grimaces, and so on, whatever we come across in a moment that provokes us. In fact, tonglen is like mental Feng Shui in that when we encounter something that disturbs or upsets us we change its location from outside our mandala to within our mandala. Tonglen allows us to rearrange our self just as Feng Shui lets us rearrange our home.

Questions welcome!

Note: A free book by you-know-who on Feng Shui can be found here:

<http://astrologysoftware.com/books/index.asp?orig>

