

# SENDING AND TAKING

## TONGLLEN PRACTICE INSTRUCTIONS

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Why is it so difficult to feel our own and others suffering? One reason is that we are out of practice. In Tonglen, we practice calming feeling suffering, and train to respond to suffering with feelings of compassion.

This practice is known for its surprising results. When we are no longer fighting off others suffering and pain, we discover the tender heart of our own intrinsic courage. Therefore, Tonglen is also used when we find our own suffering to be overwhelming. By experiencing our interdependence, we tap into intrinsic resources.

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### ABOUT TONGLLEN

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In Tonglen we cultivate empathy and compassion. Empathy is the capacity to feel other's experiences and see from their perspective. Compassion is to respond to that empathy with the wish for them to be free from suffering, to generate altruism, loving kindness and loving thoughts feelings and actions.

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### ABOUT THE PRACTICE OF TONGLLEN

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Thus, Tonglen is a practice of generating empathy, compassion and awareness of our interdependence with others. The actual practice involves two steps.

The first step is extending compassion towards others by visualizing giving light. This light relieves others of their suffering. The second step is visualizing taking on the hardships of others ourselves, feeling their pain and imagining that by feeling it completely, we are relieving them of these hardships.

While some people became afraid of doing such practices, there is no harm done from feeling others suffering.<sup>1</sup>

When first learning Tonglen practice, you may do it on three stages separating them by taking a few breaths per stage. In the first stage one is focused on opening to others and sending them light. In the second state, one is opening to receive their suffering. After practicing this method a few times, then perform both visualizations within the span of one breath cycle. Inhale receive their suffering, exhale give them light of loving compassion that heals them. This is an “exchange,” where one takes on their suffering and gives them one’s own gifts and blessings.



Photo: *Illustration by Carole Henaff, <https://www.lionsroar.com/how-to-practice-tonglen/>*

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## STEP BY STEP INSTRUCTIONS

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### First: With a Loved One

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<sup>1</sup> Generating compassion is safe, however if you find it overwhelming, perhaps triggering some empathic distress then feel free to set this practice aside for another time and focus on self-compassion in the meantime.

0. Visualize someone you love dearly and imagine that person sitting in front of you.
1. Visualize white light streaming from our nostrils as we breathe out. We then visualize this light pervading the world and relieving (the person visualized) of their pain and sorrow. The light melts that person's problems and leaves them joyful and clear."<sup>2</sup>
2. Breathe in the acrid smoke of that person's misery and accept it as if it was your own. As it reaches and fills your lungs, it transforms, breathe it out again as the pure white light of loving compassion.<sup>3</sup>
3. Visualize white light streaming into yourself and that person seeing each of you illuminated into a state free of suffering, misery, karma and pain.

#### Second: With A Friend

Visualize a friend, someone who you are not most intimately close to but whom you like. Imagine that person sitting in front of you. Visualize their appearance and facial expression in detail. Repeat steps 1-3 with this person.

#### Third: With A Stranger

Visualize a stranger, someone who you are not close to and do not know very well. Imagine that person sitting in front of you. Visualize their appearance and facial expression in detail. Repeat steps 1-3 with this person.

#### Fourth: With an Enemy

Visualize an enemy, someone who has caused harm to you or hurt you in some way. Imagine that person sitting in front of you. Visualize their appearance and facial expression in detail. Repeat steps 1-3 with this person.

#### Five: With Yourself

Visualize yourself sitting in front of you. Imagine you can see your body posture and facial expression. Repeat steps 1-3 with your 'self' as the object.

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<sup>2</sup> Ngak'chang Rinpoche, Rays of the Sun, 38.

<sup>3</sup> Ngak'chang Rinpoche, Rays of the Sun, 38.