**Tonglen - “giving and taking”.**

This is a skillful form of meditation practice that allows us to cut through our habitual tendency of closing down both our hearts and minds to pain and suffering. This applies equally to our own pain and suffering as well as to other people’s pain and suffering. Instead of trying to block out pain, it is embraced and transformed into loving kindness and helps us to cultivate our own relative Bodhicitta. Tonglen achieves this by using suffering to crush our own ego which potentially enables us to release our true Buddha nature. There are four types of Tonglen practice. Self Tonglen, Tonglen for our family and friends, Tonglen for our enemies and Tonglen for the dying. It is a very powerful practice that requires guidance either from accomplished practitioners or from practitioners who have had comprehensive instruction from realised Tonglen practitioners. We in Bodhicharya are very fortunate to have a teacher such as Ringu Tulku Rinpoche who has a deep understanding of the practice of Tonglen. All Tonglen practice must always be preceded by heart felt motivation, then actual practice and concluded with the dedication prayers. Our motivation comes from the understanding that all of us all want the same thing. To be free from pain and suffering and be happy. It is our own ignorance and ego which is the cause of all our suffering. In order to fully engage with an appropriate motivation our minds must be inclusive, loving and joyous. Tonglen has the potential to destroy the harmful aspects of our ego and at the same time can reveal our true Buddha nature. This means, counter intuitively, that the greater the pain and suffering we can take on, the greater the benefit will be for all.

The stages of the Self Tonglen practice:

[1] After you have achieved a stable Shinay meditative state, remind yourself about the pain and suffering you have previously experienced. This could be physical pain or emotional pain.

[2] Focus on your pain and suffering and visualise them all cumulating outside your body in the form of a ball of thick black acrid smoke.

[3] Then inhale this hot black acrid smoke through your nostrils.

[4] Visualise this black smoke entering your body and collecting

 around an entity located near your heart. This entity is the symbolic representation of your ego.

[5] Visualise that the black smoke gradually begins to penetrate and destroy parts of your own ego entity.

[6] As the shell of the ego entity is breached powerful luminous white light radiates out of your body. This white luminous light has the qualities of pure moonlight and reaches out to all sentient beings with the power to heal both pain and suffering of others.

[7] Rest in this luminosity and then dedicate the merit before concluding the meditation

**The Origins of Tonglen**

The acclaimed Buddhist master Atisha Dipankara Shrijnana born in Bengal India in 982 CE gave the transmission of Tonglen to Tibetan Kadampa master Langri Thangpa sometime after 1100CE. The practice then became more well known when Geshe Chekawa Yeshe Dorje(1101-1175CE) summarised the transmission in his “Lojong” or seven points of mind training. His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who is said to practice Tonglen every day, has said of the practice: *“Whether this meditation really helps others or not, it gives me peace of mind. Then I can be more effective, and the benefit is immense” \**

HH the Dalai Lama(1999)\*

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