

## ***Buddhist Practice & Scripts Relevant to Clinical Work***

**Mindfulness:** The practice of awareness of everything that arises within and around us from moment to moment. It is reverence for the full spectrum of our experience, the willingness to enter into reality without our habitual patterns of attachment or aversion. It is a depth of seeing that allows us to work with our own minds in the spirit of receiving what is discerned without judgment.

**Mindfulness Practice:** Observe what arises in your experience without imposing anything on it, without letting yourself be either drawn to it or put off by it. See whatever is in front of you, a flower or any other object; listen attentively to the sounds nearby or far away, smell the fragrances and odors; feel the texture of what you are touching. Register your various sensations, clearly perceiving their various characteristics. Be entirely present to what you are doing, whether walking, sitting, writing, doing the dishes, or drinking a cup of tea. With mindfulness, it doesn't matter what you are doing or whether you judge a task to be pleasant or unpleasant. What matters is how you do it - with a mind that is clear and peaceful, attentive to what is happening, and full of wonder at the present moment, without superimposing mental constructs such as attachments or preconceptions onto reality.

When doing this practice, one stops swinging back and forth between attraction and aversion. You are just attentive, lucid, and aware of each perception and sensation, of each thought that arises and passes away. Feel the freshness of the present moment. Do you find that it brings up a vast, luminous, and serene state of mind in you? (From Matthieu Ricard's Why Meditate, pp. 50-51).

**Loving Kindness Prayer:** This practice is used to generate feelings of connection with and care for all beings, including those we consciously love, those with whom conflict has arisen, and those for whom we have no conscious feelings other than feelings of neutrality. It is a way to cultivate a deeper and more authentic experience of others, and to remember that all beings have the wish to be happy and free from suffering. Most importantly, it is a way to ritually practice the truth that the experience of others is as important and meaningful as our own.

*Example:* First recite the following prayer to yourself, then to your loved ones, then to people for whom you have no conscious feelings, then to people with whom conflict has arisen, then to all people everywhere:

*May I/You/All beings be happy  
May I/You/ All beings live with a sense of ease  
May I/You/All beings be free from suffering  
May I/You/All beings be peaceful and content*

**Tonglen:** This practice is a method for connecting with suffering —ours and that which is all around us— everywhere we go. It is a method for overcoming fear of suffering and for dissolving the tightness of our heart. Primarily it is a method for awakening the compassion that is inherent in all of us, no matter how cruel or cold we might seem to be.

We begin the practice by taking on the suffering of a person we know to be hurting and who we wish to help. For instance, if you know of a child who is being hurt, you breathe in the wish to take away all the pain and fear of that child. Then, as you breathe out, you send the child happiness, joy or whatever would relieve their pain. This is the core of the practice: breathing in other's pain so they can be well and have more space to relax and open, and breathing out, sending them relaxation or whatever you feel would bring them relief and happiness. However, we often cannot do this practice because we come face to face with our own fear, our own resistance, anger, or whatever our personal pain, our personal stuckness happens to be at that moment.

At that point you can change the focus and begin to do tonglen for what you are feeling and for millions of others just like you who at that very moment of time are feeling exactly the same stuckness and misery. Maybe you are able to name your pain. You recognize it clearly as terror or revulsion or anger or wanting to get revenge. So you breathe in for all the people who are caught with that same emotion and you send out relief or whatever opens up the space for yourself and all those countless others. Maybe you can't name what you're feeling. But you can feel it —a tightness in the stomach, a heavy darkness or whatever. Just contact what you are feeling and breathe in, take it in — for all of us and send out relief to all of us.

People often say that this practice goes against the grain of how we usually hold ourselves together. Truthfully, this practice does go against the grain of wanting things on our own terms, of wanting it to work out for ourselves no matter what happens to the others. The practice dissolves the armor of self-protection we've tried so hard to create around ourselves. In Buddhist language one would say that it dissolves the fixation and clinging of ego.

Tonglen reverses the usual logic of avoiding suffering and seeking pleasure and, in the process, we become liberated from a very ancient prison of selfishness. We begin to feel love both for ourselves and others and also we begin to take care of ourselves and others. It awakens our compassion and it also introduces us to a far larger view of reality. It introduces us to the unlimited spaciousness that Buddhists call *shunyata*. By doing the practice, we begin to connect with the open dimension of our being. At first we experience this as things not being such a big deal or so solid as they seemed before.

Tonglen can be done for those who are ill, those who are dying or have just died, or for those who are in pain of any kind. It can be done either as a formal meditation practice or right on the spot at any time. For example, if you are out walking and you see someone in pain —right on the spot you can begin to breathe in their pain and send out some relief. Or, more likely, you might see someone in pain and look away because it brings up your

fear or anger; it brings up your resistance and confusion.

So *on the spot* you can do tonglen for all the people who are just like you, for everyone who wishes to be compassionate but instead is afraid, for everyone who wishes to be brave but instead feels cowardly and frightened.

Rather than beating yourself up, use your own stuckness as a stepping stone to understanding what people are up against all over the world. Breathe in for all of us and breathe out for all of us. Use what seems like poison, whatever seems unbearable, as medicine. Use your personal suffering as the path to compassion for all beings. (*From Pema Chodron at Shambhala.org*).