

Lama Aria Drolma

*Building a Strong Foundation: Four Guided Meditations*

Week 3: "Tonglen Meditation"

September 19, 2020



Hello and welcome to this Tricycle online Dharma Talk series. My name is Lama Aria Drolma. Today I'll be continuing week three of my Dharma Talk series titled "Building A Strong Foundation." This week, the topic is cultivating happiness during challenging times. I want to share some insight on how to cultivate happiness and peace during difficult times from the Buddhist perspective.

One of the most important things from the Buddhist teaching is that the only permanent thing is change. Everything is impermanent. This brings us to the first noble truth that the Buddha taught. The Buddha's insight was that our lives are a struggle. Life is challenging for everyone. All of our life circumstances are fragile and subject to change. And we can clearly see what is happening today. The entire world has changed and everyone has been affected by this pandemic. So how do we deal with the situation? We deal with difficult situations by transforming our own minds, attitudes, and behavior. We can use this opportunity to transform ourselves, our attitudes, our behavior, and transform our minds that cause all the suffering.

How do we deal with our minds? There's a wonderful quote by His Holiness Dalai Lama, "The best way to have inner calmness, inner peace, and inner happiness is to be warmhearted and to have a compassionate heart for a meaningful life. For one's inner happiness and inner calmness, and also to have day-to-day happiness, developing a compassionate heart is the key factor." So how can we cultivate compassion and lovingkindness? We just need to train our minds to shift attention from negative thoughts to positive thoughts of lovingkindness and compassion. It's a learned skill, it's just like learning to play the piano. Every time you practice you become better and better.

Lovingkindness and compassion are your own innate nature. So whatever your difficulties may be, always remember that you are free in every moment to set the direction of your thoughts and your reaction. You can offer the best of yourself in any circumstances, including difficult times. This is our human will. We have a choice of how we can respond. We can choose to respond with fear and hatred and ignorance. This only brings more suffering. Or we can choose to respond with generosity, lovingkindness, and compassion. This is the time to choose compassion, lovingkindness, and patience with oneself and others. It's as simple as breathing and putting the intention of lovingkindness and compassion.

So today the guided meditation will be the practice of lovingkindness and compassion. The practice is called tonglen meditation in Tibetan. The word tonglen literally means "sending and taking." It refers to being willing to take in the pain and suffering of oneself and others and to



send out happiness to all. We normally react to pain and fear by trying to avoid it or by distancing ourselves from it. We try to move towards pleasant and pleasurable things and people who bring us comfort. Tonglen meditation helps us move towards discomfort and suffering that we tend to avoid. It also opens us up to the reality that our personal pain and suffering isn't just me. The pain and suffering is experienced by all humans across the globe. Tonglen is a meditation practice for cultivating love and compassion, and our ability to be present for our own suffering and the suffering of others. So how do we practice tonglen meditation? It's very simple, I will do a guided meditation, it's very easy. You just have to follow the guided meditation.

At some point or the other we all have experienced unconditional love towards someone. It could have been a child, your mother, your father, grandparents, or a friend. We wanted absolute happiness for them. So when we start the meditation, imagine someone close to you that needs your help, someone who's perhaps not well or in pain. It could be a child, your mother or your father, grandparents, or someone close to you. Just breathe in, you know they're suffering and as you breathe out from your heart, just breathe out a form of white, brilliant light.

Send out all of your joy, happiness, and peace to the people you're picturing. Visualize and see that it touches them and all the beings are filled with happiness and joy. This is a visualization meditation. And it also includes oneself. It's like the sun coming out as bright, radiant light from your heart center, healing, and purifying oneself within. It totally erases every trace of negativity. Breathing out, you breathe out positive energy of love, joy, wisdom, and happiness from your heart in a form of light and it touches all the beings and they're all filled with happiness. During meditation, it's important that you breathe normally. And it's also not necessary to make the exchange on every breath. Take a breath, do the visualization of sending out light, rest in that present moment, and then you can do it when you're ready, you can do that again. You can do this meditation for a minute, you can do this meditation for five minutes, ten minutes, and then you feel happy to sit and meditate as long as you wish. So when we actually start the meditation sessions there are two essential points: one is your body, it's very important to sit upright and be comfortable. The second essential point is your mind. The mind is what does the meditation and the mind also needs a focus or an anchor for your attention, and your mind should be relaxed in the present moment of awareness.

Sometimes your mind can wander off and you're somewhere else, maybe back in your office, so it's important to bring your mind to the present moment. The mind needs a focus or an anchor so that it doesn't keep wandering away. The mind tends to jump from one thought to the other, just like a monkey; it's called the monkey mind. So when you give the mind an object, the mind can



keep the focus on that object. So for today's meditation session, we will focus our mind's attention on our breath combined with the feeling of unconditional lovingkindness and compassion.

Please sit upright and be relaxed and I'll go through the following guided meditation. To start, let's all put our attention on our breath. Feeling each breath as it comes in and goes out. Breathe normally, letting the breath just be as it is without trying to change it or regulate it, allowing it to flow easily with its own rhythm and pace. As you breathe in, bring to your mind's attention the feeling of the suffering of others. And as you breathe out, feel the unconditional lovingkindness and compassion in your mindstream. Just imagine you're sending out pure lovingkindness and compassion in the form of a brilliant white light from your heart. The light goes out to all directions, and you see all the beings are filled with happiness and joy. Just rest in that present moment of awareness. Inhale and exhale, breathe normally. And as you breathe in bring to your mind's attention the suffering of others. And as you breathe out, bring you to your mind's attention the feeling of unconditional love, and lovingkindness and compassion.

Just imagine you're sending out pure lovingkindness and compassion in the form of white light. The light goes out in all directions and all the beings are happy and filled with joy. Rest your mind in that present moment of awareness. Any time your mind wanders off and starts thinking any thoughts, just acknowledge it, say "thinking," then drop it. Don't follow your thoughts. Don't engage in it, just come back. Bring your mind's attention to your breath. It doesn't matter how many times your mind wanders off. All that matters is when you notice it, just bring your focus back to your breath. Do not follow the past, the past is finished. Do not follow the future, the future isn't here. Just rest your mind in the present moment of awareness without distraction.

You can sit in this present moment of awareness for a while or you can even do the breathing meditation again. As you breathe in, bring to your mind the feeling of the suffering of others, and as you breathe out, bring to your mind the feeling of unconditional lovingkindness and compassion into your mindstream. Just imagine you're sending out pure lovingkindness and compassion in the form of a brilliant light that goes out in all directions. And all the beings are filled with happiness and joy. Rest your mind and that present moment of awareness.

The idea is to not block your thoughts. When you push them away there will be more thoughts. The thoughts can arise and they can come and go just like the clouds in the sky, they come and go. Just rest your mind without distraction in the present moment of awareness.

Lama Aria Drolma

*Building a Strong Foundation: Four Guided Meditations*

Week 3: “Tonglen Meditation”

September 19, 2020



You can sit as long as you wish, whatever suits you: five minutes or ten minutes doing the same repetition. Bringing the suffering of others into your mindstream, breathing the suffering in, and as you breathe out, filling the entire space and universe with lovingkindness and compassion in the form of white, brilliant light, and seeing every being as being happy and joyous. Just rest your mind in that present moment of awareness and you can continue doing it as long as you wish. Tonglen meditation is one of the bravest practices that one can do. The practice is very beneficial and has helped heal people with their own fears around pain, suffering, dying, and loss, and has given them real strength. This is a very courageous, very brave practice. This is one of the greatest meditation jewels that offers a way for us to cultivate our own compassionate nature, bringing about positive energy to oneself and others.

Thank you for joining me for this week's Dharma Talk series. I hope you'll join me next week when I'll lead a guided meditation on self-love and compassion. Thank you, be well, be happy, and be safe.