



TONGLEN MEDITATION

Tonglen is a Tibetan *Lojong* practice of putting others before self. Helps to reverse self-centeredness and ego-clinging. Aims straight at the heart of the spiritual path.

The more negativity we take in with a sense of open compassion, the more goodness there is to breathe out. Basic goodness is an inexhaustible treasure.

The practice

- 1) Take an upright relaxed posture and begin to notice and “ride the breath”.
- 2) Rest the mind in a state of openness, basic stillness and clarity for a few moments.
- 3) Breathe in a feeling of heat, darkness, heaviness, sense of claustrophobia. Breathe out coolness, brightness, light, freshness.
- 4) Work with your mental contents--whatever arises, breath in the *undesirable* and breathe out the *desirable*.
- 5) Expand your “spiritual filter” to those *close to you*, then *neutral persons*, eventually including *those you consider adverse*, along with all sentient beings suffering either in the same ways as you or of their own experience.

Tonglen: The practice of sending and taking, which is designed to reverse ego-clinging and cultivate bodhichitta.

Bodhichitta: “Awakened mind/heart.” Ultimate or absolute bodhichitta is the union of emptiness and compassion, the essential nature of awakened mind. Relative bodhichitta is the tenderness arising from a glimpse of ultimate bodhichitta that inspires one to train oneself to work for the benefit of others.

What science says--

Researchers at UW-Madison working with Tibetan monks have been able to translate the mental experiences of meditation into the scientific language of high-frequency gamma waves and brain synchrony, or coordination.

They pinpointed the left prefrontal cortex, an area just behind the left forehead, as the place where brain activity associated with meditation is especially intense.

These results take the concept of neuroplasticity a step further by showing that mental training through meditation (and presumably other disciplines) can itself change the inner workings and circuitry of the brain.

“What we found is that the longtime practitioners showed brain activation on a scale we have never seen before,” said Richard Davidson. “Their mental practice has an effect on the brain in the same way golf or tennis practice enhances performance.” It demonstrates, he said, that the brain is capable of being trained and physically modified in ways few people can imagine.

In an eight-week UW study of non-Buddhists given meditation training, magnetic resonance imaging and other testing revealed changes, some lasting four months: 50 percent more electrical activity in the left frontal regions of the brain, associated with positive emotions and anxiety reduction, and an increase in antibodies of as much as 25 percent.

SELECTED REFERENCES

- Trungpa, Chogyam *Training the Mind and Cultivating Loving-Kindness*. Boston, MA. Shambhala Publications, Inc. 1993
- Davidson, Richard PhD. *How to be happy like a monk. Seminar*. Milwaukee Public Library, WI. 2005
- Lutz, A., Greischar, L. L., Rawlings, N. B., Ricard, M., & Davidson, R. J. (2004). Long-term meditators self-induce high-amplitude gamma synchrony during mental practice. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 101, 16369-16373.
<http://psych.wisc.edu/faculty/bio/davidson.html> <http://brainimaging.waisman.wisc.edu/>