

## SUNLIGHT ON SHADOWS: Embracing Great Compassion

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### Meditation 34

#### *Tonglen Meditation*

As we begin, we refresh our motivation to do this meditation not just for the sake of one or a few people but for all beings—that they, too, may have happiness and the end of suffering.

We start the practice with one particular person in mind, but we do it on behalf of all beings. We think of someone we love deeply. Maybe this is a child, a parent, a partner. It can be anyone who we love purely with an open heart, so much so that we would do whatever is needed to take away their suffering and give them happiness.

We start out by thinking of how much we want them to be happy and not suffer. We might choose someone who's suffering right now. The suffering could be due to a physical illness, their life situation, or their feelings and thoughts related to those situations. We don't think about the details of their suffering or specific ways of addressing it, but simply the fact of it. We imagine we're taking away their suffering and breathing it straight into our heart. We picture all the causes and conditions of their suffering taking the form of sticky tar, swampy water, or a smoky haze rather than as images of the circumstances of their life.

Then we imagine that, from the center of our heart, a pure light—like that of a full moon in a cloudless sky, a radiant pure light that symbolizes all possible causes and conditions of happiness without ideas of what they might look like—radiates out and infuses their body, speech, mind, environment, and entire experience. We imagine that we send them benefit and happiness by joining that wish with our breath. We breathe their suffering straight into our heart, and we send them happiness directly from our heart. Then we imagine others who we have a similar relationship with—we love them, and we don't want them to suffer. We breathe in their suffering as well and send them short- and long-term benefit and happiness. We breathe all their suffering into our heart, and we send them great joy joined with our breath.

Next, we expand the visualization to include those we may have a more neutral relationship with and can easily access the wish for their happiness and end of suffering. We breathe all their suffering right into the center of our heart. We breathe out benefit and happiness with the wish that these transform their experience.

We continue to expand the visualization to include people that we find it more difficult to wish for their happiness or to take away their suffering. We remember that they, just like us, want to be happy and don't want to suffer. We breathe in their suffering so that they and all beings may have happiness.

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We expand the visualization to include an ever-increasing circle of beings that we find it hard to feel love and compassion for. These may be people we know or people we've just heard about. We remember that, just like us, they want to be happy and don't want to suffer. We imagine that, through our intention, visualization, and breath, we completely absorb all of their suffering and send them endless benefit and happiness.

Having started with a pure motivation that's truly selfless, we maintain that motivation as we expand the scope of our visualization until it embraces all beings throughout space and time. We imagine ourself as the vehicle by which their suffering is completely uprooted and the causes of their happiness are fully established. We can't picture everyone, but we have a sense of the enormity of beings and the endlessness of suffering. We're cultivating a vastness of intention in wanting to take away all suffering and give each what they need. Our heart space includes all of them.

When we complete the practice, we dedicate the merit we've created to the end of suffering and the ultimate awakening of all beings.