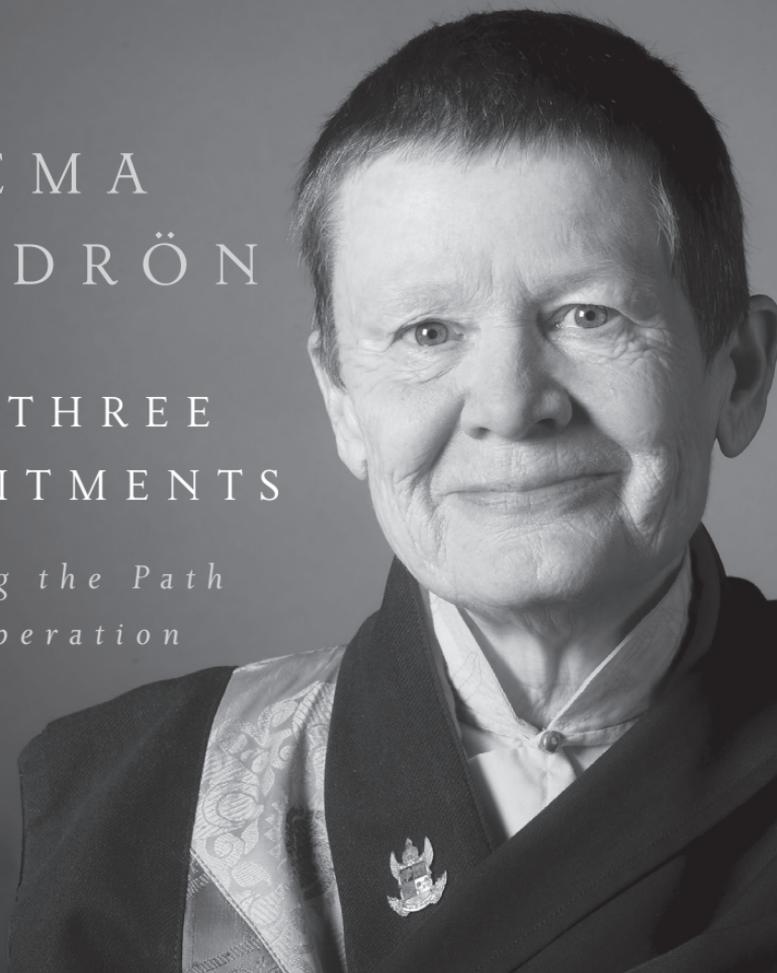


P E M A
C H Ö D R Ö N

T H E T H R E E
C O M M I T M E N T S

*Walking the Path
of Liberation*



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Supplementary Material for This Program

The following information is provided as a reference for you as you listen to this program and as you work with your ongoing practice.

Basic Meditation Practice

- A. Posture (the six points of good posture)
1. **Seat:** Your seat should be flat (or use a cushion under your buttocks to tilt slightly forward). Check that you are not tilted right, left, or backward.
 2. **Legs:** Fold your legs comfortably in front of you. If you're in a chair, your feet should be comfortably placed on the floor. If you're sitting on a cushion, your knees should not be higher than your hips. If your legs start to hurt, you can use the resting posture.
 3. **Torso:** Sit upright with an open front and a strong—but not rigid—back. Check that your chin is tucked in and not jutting out.
 4. **Hands:** Rest your open palms on your thighs.
 5. **Eyes:** Your eyes should be open. Although you can experiment with different gazes, the standard gaze is slightly downward, about four to six feet in front of you.
 6. **Mouth:** Your mouth should be slightly open, as if saying “ah.”

B. Breath:

The object of meditation is the breath. Give light attention (rather than tight concentration) to the breath as it goes in and out. If you prefer to emphasize the out-breath only, that is fine. Attention to the breath keeps you fully present and awake.

C. Labeling:

When the mind wanders, label the thoughts “thinking” and return to light attention on the breath. This is done in a gentle, nonjudgmental way.

To Begin Your Practice

1. Run through the six points of good posture.
2. If your mind is very busy, begin the session by counting 10 out-breaths. You can do this up to three times, but then stop counting and settle into the basic meditation practice.

View and Receptivity

The practice cultivates an open, nonjudgmental receptivity to whatever arises. It allows you to make friends with yourself. It allows the conceptual mind to settle down enough so that you can see your patterns and habits clearly. It is important that this self-reflection is gentle yet honest, nonaggressive yet also precise and awake. You allow the space where anything can arise and then pass away. You are moving in the direction of seeing the transparency of thoughts and

emotions (rather than getting rid of them). A light touch is an essential part of the technique: Touch the breath and let it go. Touch the thoughts and let them go.

The Bodhisattva Vow

As earth and the other elements, together with space, eternally provide sustenance in many ways for the countless sentient beings

So may I become sustenance in every way for sentient beings to the limits of space until all have attained *nirvana*.

As the *sugatas* of old gave birth to the *bodhicitta* and progressively established themselves in the discipline of a *bodhisattva*

So I too, for the benefit of beings, shall give birth to the bodhicitta and progressively train myself in that discipline.

At this moment my birth has become fruitful; I have realized my human life.
Today I am born into the family of buddhas. Now I am a child of the buddhas.

From now on I will forthrightly perform the actions befitting my family. I will act so as not to degrade the faultlessness and discipline of my family.

Just as with a blind man finding a jewel in a heap of dust, thus, somehow, bodhicitta has been born into me.

This is the supreme *amrita* which destroys death, the inexhaustible treasure which removes the world's poverty.

It is the supreme medicine which cures the world's sickness, the tree which provides rest for beings weary of wandering on the paths of existence.

It is the universal bridge on which all travelers may pass over the lower realms, the rising moon of mind which dispels the torment of the *klesas*.

It is the great sun which puts an end to the obscurity of ignorance, the pure butter which comes of churning the milk of the holy *dharma*.

For travelers wandering the paths of existence seeking happiness from objects of enjoyment, it is supreme bliss near at hand, the great feast which satisfies sentient beings.

Today, witnessed by all protectors, I have welcomed the sentient beings and sugatas. *Devas* and *asuras* rejoice!

Tonglen Meditation Practice

Tonglen practice is a method for connecting with suffering—our own and that which is all around us, everywhere we go. It is a method for overcoming our fear of suffering and for dissolving the tightness of our hearts. 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 wish to help. For instance, if we know of a child who is being hurt, we breathe in with the wish to take away all of that child's pain and fear. Then, as we breathe out, we send happiness, joy, or whatever would relieve the child. This is the core of the practice: breathing in others' pain so they can be well and have more space to relax and open—and then breathing out, sending them relaxation or whatever we feel would bring relief and happiness.

Often, however, we can't do this practice because we come face to face with our own fear, our own resistance and anger, or whatever our personal pain happens to be just then.

At that point, we can change the focus and begin to do Tonglen for our own feelings and for millions of other people just like us who at that very moment are feeling exactly the same stuckness and misery. Maybe we are able to name our pain. We recognize it clearly as terror or revulsion or anger or desire for revenge. So we breathe in for all the people who are caught with that same emotion, and we send out relief or whatever opens up the space for ourselves and all those countless others. Maybe we can't name what we're feeling, but we can feel it: a tightness in the stomach, a heavy darkness, or whatever. We simply contact what we 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, wanting everything to work out for ourselves no matter what happens to the others. The practice dissolves the walls we've built

around our hearts. It dissolves the layers of self-protection we've tried so hard to create. 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. In the process, we become liberated from very ancient patterns of selfishness. We begin to feel love for both ourselves and others; we begin to take care of ourselves and others. Tonglen awakens our compassion and introduces us to a far bigger view of reality. It introduces us to the unlimited spaciousness of *shunyata*. By doing the practice, we begin to connect with the open dimension of our being. At first, this allows us to experience things as not such a big deal and not as solid as they seemed before.

Tonglen can be done for those who are ill, those who are dying or have died, those who are in pain of any kind. It can be done as a formal meditation practice or it can be done on the spot. In the moment, we can begin to breathe in someone's pain and send out relief. Normally we see someone in pain and look away. The pain brings up our fear or anger; it brings up our resistance and confusion. So on the spot we can do Tonglen for all the people just like ourselves, all those who wish to be compassionate but instead are afraid—those who wish to be brave but instead are cowardly. Rather than beating ourselves up, we can use our personal 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 as medicine. We can use our personal suffering as the path to compassion for all beings.

The Formal Practice of Tonglen

When you do Tonglen as a formal meditation practice, it has four stages:

1. First, rest your mind briefly for a second or two in a state of openness or stillness. This stage is traditionally called “flashing on absolute bodhicitta” or “suddenly opening to basic spaciousness and clarity.”
2. Second, work with texture. Breathe in a feeling of hot, dark, and heavy—a sense of claustrophobia—and breathe out a feeling of cool, bright, and light—a sense of freshness. Breathe in completely through all the pores of your body, and breathe out—radiate out completely—through all the pores of your body. Do this until it feels synchronized with your in- and out-breaths.
3. Third, work with a personal situation—any painful situation that’s real to you. Traditionally, you begin by doing Tonglen for someone you care about and wish to help. However, if you are stuck, you can do the practice for the pain you are feeling and simultaneously for all those just like you who feel that kind of suffering. For instance, if you are feeling inadequate, you breathe that in for yourself and all the others in the same boat, and you send out confidence and relief in any form you wish.
4. Finally, make the taking and sending out bigger. If you are doing Tonglen for someone you love, extend it out to those who are in the same situation as your friend. If you are doing Tonglen for someone you see on television or on the street, do it for all the others in the same situation. Make it bigger than just that one person. If you

are doing Tonglen for all those who are feeling the anger or fear or whatever that you are trapped in, maybe that's big enough. But you could go further in all these cases. You could do Tonglen for people you consider to be your enemies—those who hurt you or hurt others. Do Tonglen for them, thinking of them as having the same confusion and stuckness as your friend or yourself. Breathe in the pain of your enemies and send them relief.

Steps three and four should be done for the major part of your Tonglen session. Start each Tonglen practice with at least five minutes of sitting meditation, and end each Tonglen practice with at least five minutes of sitting meditation.

Tonglen can extend infinitely. As you do the practice, your compassion naturally expands gradually over time—and so does your realization that things are not as solid as you thought. As you do this practice, gradually at your own pace, you will be surprised to find yourself more and more able to be there for others even in what used to seem like impossible situations.

On-the-Spot Tonglen

1. When you see someone or think of someone in distress (be it a person or an animal) breathe in their pain with the wish they could be free of it. Breathe out relief to them with the wish they will receive it.
2. When you feel emotional distress or physical pain, breathe it in and own it completely, and send out relief with the out-breath. Then

extend this to include breathing in (taking in) for all those feeling what you are feeling and breathing out (sending out) relief to them all. In this way, your discomfort becomes the vehicle for awakening the heart of compassion.

Dedication from Shantideva's *The Way of the Bodhisattva*

And now as long as space endures,
And as long as there are beings to be found,
May I continue likewise to remain
To drive away the sorrows of the world.

Dedication of Merit

By this merit, may all attain omniscience,
May it defeat the enemy, wrong doing,
From the stormy waves of birth, old age, sickness, and death,
From the oceans of *samsara*, may I free all beings.

By the confidence of the golden sun of the great east,
May the lotus garden of the Rigden's wisdom bloom.
May the dark ignorance of sentient beings be dispelled.
May all beings enjoy profound brilliant glory.



About the Author

Pema Chödrön is an American-born Tibetan Buddhist nun who has authored several books including *The Places That Scare You* and *The Wisdom of No Escape*. She is resident teacher at Gampo Abbey monastery in Nova Scotia and a devoted student of the late Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, and Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche.



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