



Living in Relational Wholeness

## Coalesce Podcast

### Episode 036 – Self Emptying

#### Note, terms, scripture, practice



“...when we seek what is truest in our own tradition, we discover we are one with those who seek what is truest in their tradition.” (James Finley)

“There is the free fall into the boundless abyss of God in which we all meet one another, beyond all distinctions, beyond all designations. This is the oneness that includes all distinctions.” (James Finley)

We all need such *inner experience instead of simple outer belief systems*.

Dharma, the Way of Understanding and Love, means ‘law’ or ‘rule’ but not in the sense of a dogma. It means the way reality really is.

[1 Corinthians 12:12](#)

[1 Corinthians 2:16](#)

Nonself is not a doctrine or a philosophy. It is an insight that can help us live life more deeply, suffer less, and enjoy life more. We need *to live* the insight of nonself.” (Thich Nhat Hanh)

[Galatians 2:20](#)

“Nirvana (kingdom of God/Heaven) means extinction—first of all, the extinction of all concepts and notions. Our concepts about things prevent us from really touching them.” (Thich Nhat Hanh)

## Four Noble Truths

The First Truth is the truth of suffering. By suffering, the Buddha means a pervasive discontent—that the ability to abide in inner peace and fulfillment is elusive. There is a pervasive sense of precariousness. *This suffering is the presenting problem.*

The Second Noble Truth is that there is a way of life that perpetuates the suffering. There are certain habits of the mind and heart that are perpetuating the very suffering that we seek to be free from. This way of life has its basis in wanting life to be other than the way it is. *This is the diagnosis.*

The Third Noble Truth is that it is possible to be healed from these symptoms by learning to live as one with the way life is. This is the truth of nirvana—this way of abiding peace and equanimity in the rise and fall of daily circumstances just as they are. *So this is the hope for the cure*—that it is possible to rest in this abiding inner peace and fulfillment.

The Fourth Noble Truth is the Noble Eightfold Path which is the way of life in which one is liberated from the tyranny of suffering so that one might come to this nirvanic peace, this inner peace, the peace that passes understanding in the midst of life as it is. *The way to be delivered from the problem.*

Noble Eightfold Path: Right View, Right Thinking, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Diligence, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration Thinking (“right” meaning *effective* in evoking happiness and inner peace).

[Matthew 22:40](#)

## Practice: Tonglen

Tibetan Buddhist teacher Pema Chödrön shares the practice of *tonglen* as a way of holding suffering and awakening compassion:

In order to have compassion for others, we have to have compassion for ourselves.

In particular, to care about other people who are fearful, angry, jealous, overpowered by addictions of all kinds, arrogant, proud, miserly, selfish, mean—you name it—to have compassion and to care for these people, means not to run from the pain of finding these things in ourselves. . . . Instead of fending it off and hiding from it, one could open one's heart and allow oneself to feel that pain, feel it as something that will soften and purify us and make us far more loving and kind.

The tonglen 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 others' 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.

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 is a coward. . . .

Breathe in for all of us and breathe out for all of us.

Use what seems like poison as medicine. Use your personal suffering as the path to compassion for all beings.

Adapted from Pema Chodron, "The Practice of Tonglen," [Shambhala.org](http://Shambhala.org).