

This meditation is called Tonglen for Creative Blocks. Tonglen is a Buddhist practice, often using the breath, and in Tonglen, we use our breath to build compassion. When we breathe in, we breathe in our suffering or the suffering of others. And when we breathe out, we breathe out a wish for relief or an offer of support.

Pema Chödrön writes in an article, “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 a path to compassion for all beings.” For creative blocks, often we'll notice that they're arising, and it can be very hard to actually sit with what's there and to notice it in a compassionate way.

When we sit with a creative block using the practice of Tonglen, we remind ourselves that we're capable of being with difficulty and intensity when it arises, and that we're also capable of being compassionate and offering support to our internal system. You can also consider others who might be having the same creative block as you in Tonglen, breathing in the creative block you are experiencing, and naming that others are probably feeling the same block. And when you offer your wish for relief or support, you can offer that wish to other beings to.

So in Tonglen, if you notice you have a creative block, you may first get to know the block a little bit, seeing what's behind it. In this example, maybe I noticed I have some fear of working on my creative project and I'm avoiding it. So I would breathe in like this: I breathe in this part's fear about my creative projects, and when I breathe out, I would say I breathe out my care for this part and my desire to help this part find safety.

Extending that to others, I might say I breathe in our fear of working on our creative projects. And as I breathe out, I might say I breathe out our care for our parts and our projects and our desire to help ourselves find safety. I'll guide you through that a little more closely in the meditation. And I also want a name that the breath isn't necessarily a good focal point for everyone. So please choose an anchor that works for you. You can also use movement. You can write down your wishes or anything else you dream up.

For this meditation, begin by finding a posture that feels supportive to you right now.

This might be laying, standing, or sitting.

And you might begin by just noticing the ways in which you're supported right now.

Take a moment to notice the surface you're sitting on. Where does that surface make contact with your body?

Can you feel that surface holding your body?

You might also notice the way the Earth holds the surface that holds you.

You can also take a moment to notice anything else that feels supportive right now. This could be a sensory friendly outfit. You're wearing something. You're standing with a heating pad or acupuncture mat if you're laying on one. Anything at all feels like a support.

And now I invite you to think specifically about your creativity and your creative project.

You might scan your body, mind, and your internal system. Your thoughts. Your emotions. Just noticing anything that's present right now when you consider working on your creative project.

If that feels okay to, you might ask what's arising? What's really going on for it? Is there something that it's afraid of, or just having trouble processing?

Is there something about your creative project or how you work on your creative projects that brings up difficulty, intensity, or avoidance or overwhelm?

I invite you now to choose one item that's arising, whether that's an emotion apart, a thought, a sensation. And to begin practice Tonglen with that experience.

As you breathe in, breathe in the suffering or the difficulty.

As you breathe out, breathe out a wish for that suffering or an offer of support.

I breathe in my fear.

I breathe out my care.

And you might consider the reality that we are never alone as we think. And that the same block you're experiencing or the same suffering, there are other artists who may be feeling that in this moment.

So I'll invite you to expand the Tonglen beyond yourself.

I breathe our fear.

I breathe out our care.

Continue noticing anything that's arising for you that you'd like to offer Tonglen to.

It can be a creative block. Or it might just be something else arising in your life that's asking for your kindness, your compassion and your attention.

From Pema Chödrön, "Use what seems like poison as medicine. We can use our personal suffering as a path to compassion for all beings."

I breathe in our suffering.

I breathe out our support.

You can stay with this practice as long as you'd like, noticing what's arising. Offering your gentle attention. Practicing the art of being with what's here. Letting your compassion guide you.