

Going Toward Our Pain and Toward The Pain Of Others

Our Work For The Last Several Months

The usual human tendency is to go away from pain and to go toward pleasure. When we go away from our own pain, we create separation inside. Hiding from or pushing away our pain doesn't heal the pain or the problem.

For the last several months, the primary aim of our work has been to come closer to ourselves when we're uncomfortable: when we're angry, fearful, jealous, envious, when we blame others or when we shame ourselves.

Two Very Different Ways To Be With Our Pain

A way many people go into their emotional pain can create more story about the pain; reinforce the pain, help the pain to grow. Many people spend years energizing the story and increasing the uncomfortable feelings about what happened to them. This way of going into the pain increases the pain and increases the suffering.

The way that we've been working is very different from what I just described. This way has four parts for us to be with what is uncomfortable.

Bringing Together The Four Parts Of Coming Closer To Ourselves

I've taken many dance lessons. The instructor will have us practice a movement pattern with our feet. We're awkward in the beginning. As we practice more and more, our feet are able to move in these patterns without our mind thinking about how our feet are moving. Then maybe the hips are added in if we're practicing salsa. Then the hands and arms. And finally the whole body including the head and torso.

As I write about the four parts of coming closer to ourselves, it takes repeated practice for these four parts to flow and support each other. Parts one and two can be practiced together. Then parts three and four can be added in.

One (in no particular order) is to breathe into our bellies so that we soften as we are with these painful emotions and the painful accompanying stories. **Two** is to keep coming back to loving-kindness toward ourselves during this process.

Anytime we're being swept up into the story, come back to steps one and two. Anytime in dance that I 'wasn't getting it,' the instructor would tell me to come back to the movement of my feet. Once I was re-established with my feet, then add in another part. And continue to rebuild my entire body movement.

When we catch ourselves listening to the story of why we're uncomfortable, it's time to come back to abdominal breathing and loving-kindness. Abdominal breathing and loving-kindness are the foundation of our strength to be with the uncomfortable emotions inside of us. When we listen to the story, we're not *being* with the uncomfortable emotions; we're *thinking about* the uncomfortable emotions.

Three is to let go of the story when we can. **Four** is to be with the uncomfortable energy in a bare way; without a lot of story, and without aversion or a feeling of pulling away from our uncomfortableness.

Parts three and four develop over the years of our lives. A master dancer is never accomplished on their first day of dancing. This four step practice deepens as we come back, over and over again, to being closer to ourselves.

The Next Step Is Already Here

Last Thursday, the people in group took a big step that I didn't see coming. It's a step that when I was given the opportunity to take, I put off for three or four years. I wasn't going to go in that direction.

The group, as a whole, embraced this step. One of the wonders of group work is that we move together. If you weren't at the meeting, the energy is being established that will make it easier for everyone to take this step.

This step was initiated by a song by Michael Stillwater called Breathe. This song opened everyone, and brought up questions. I was surprised at how receptive the people were to what the song says. The song is about tonglen. (More about tonglen soon). Because of the response of the people, a door has opened much wider for compassion toward ourselves and compassion toward others.

My History With Tonglen

When I was introduced to tonglen, I didn't want any part of it. I had more than enough of my own pain and I wasn't even handling my own pain very well. I stayed away from tonglen for three to four years. Over the last twenty years, I so value and appreciate tonglen.

Tonglen

There is a Buddhist practice called tonglen. This practice is found in all religions. This practice is natural to compassion, and goes against our human nature of wanting to get away from pain. Tonglen also takes us out of becoming intertwined with other's suffering, and brings us to supporting others more during their time of suffering.

Tonglen is to breathe in the pain of others and to breathe out love to them. [Click here](#) to read a fairly short writing by Pema Chodron about tonglen.

When Others Are Sharing In Group

We each find our ways to support a person in group when they're sharing. They're immersing themselves in something difficult; often painful. We can have love toward them and empathy, and wish for them to be free of the painful emotion or the painfully trapping story. We find our own way to support the person speaking. Tonglen gives a way for us to support others and to open to ourselves while they share.

Mastering Tonglen

We will never master tonglen. We can grow ever deeper and deeper in our compassion toward ourselves and toward others. This compassion continues to open us to our heart's desire: To be more loving toward ourselves and toward others.

May each of us be the peace and the love that we seek.