



Meditation as Medicine

Reflections on a New Online Workshop with Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche



Photo by Janine Guldener

We tend to view emotional and physical pain as the enemy. A [new online workshop](#) with Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche reveals why we shouldn't—and shows us how meditation practice can transform our own pain and sickness through the healing warmth of loving-kindness.

Polly Turner explains.

In my year and a half as a volunteer at a local teaching hospital, many of my encounters with patients were mundane. But several were quite powerful.

For example, there was the time I peeked through an open doorway to see a gray-haired, gray-faced woman plastered with tape, gauze and a maze of wires and plastic tubing. Her head was propped on two pillows. Her hands and arms were bruised from blood draws, and they

were tugging reflexively at the lines bringing fluids in and out of her body.

It was almost too painful to watch. I introduced myself, asking if she might like a friendly visit from a volunteer. At her invitation I pulled up a bedside chair.

“It looks like you’re having a hard time,” I said with a smile.

Thus began our conversation. As she continued to tug and squirm, she told me about her agonizing itching and discomfort, her despair about her condition, and how desperately she missed her home. I listened openly, occasionally offering a tactful question or warm acknowledgement. And it wasn’t long before the topic flowed to fond stories about her family.

In time we were sharing humor. Then, we were breaking out in laughter. We started having a good time, like old friends. Suddenly, halfway through a sentence she paused. Her eyes grew wide.

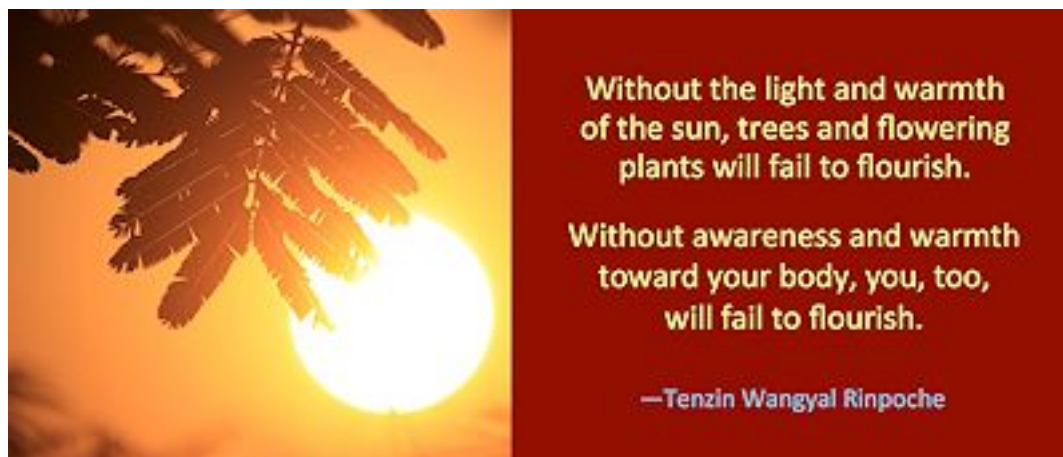
“I don’t hurt anymore!” she exclaimed.

All her tubes and wounds had been forgotten. For perhaps 10 minutes, she had neglected to tug, scratch or squirm. She was a completely different person than the one I’d seen from the doorway. She seemed 10 years younger. Her face was glowing.

I’ve witnessed similar transformations among other suffering patients I’ve sat with in open, caring attention. Nearly all the hospice and hospital volunteers I’ve met have told me the same. My meditation teacher, Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, uses the term “giving a spacious, luminous, warm hug”—when you give this kind of virtual hug to others, spontaneous healing can happen.

But in his teachings, and in particular in a brand new workshop offered through GlideWing Productions, Rinpoche is not referring so much to what we should give others, or even to what we wish others would give us—but rather, to what we should routinely be giving ourselves.

It's human nature to keep picking at our own physical, emotional and mental wounds. Whether we're sick in a hospital bed or have just woken up on the wrong side of the bed, we tend to self-criticize and punish ourselves for our bad feelings. We scratch at our itches, curse at our arthritis, tug at our anger and blame our anxiety on others. We busy our minds to avoid depression. Disturbing emotions can even make us sick, or sicker. Western research has shown a powerful link between unhealthy emotions and a weakened immune system, as well as a wide variety of other physical problems.



We do our best to deny or rise above pain. But throughout, pain is the enemy. We seldom give pain our loving attention, simply let it be and allow it to naturally express itself—as a loving mother would allow her needy child to whimper in her arms. If we can do this, the pain naturally lessens or even disappears, Rinpoche explains. If we don't, physical discomfort or deeply rooted emotional pain is more likely to insist on acknowledgment. It creeps into all our actions, thoughts, and conversations. When not driving our dreams at night, it keeps us awake with racing thoughts.

New 'Healing from the Source' Workshop

Tenzin Rinpoche has been teaching the “spacious, luminous, warm hug” in nearly all his talks, retreats and webcasts these days, in one form or another. But now he is offering a new online workshop that focuses specifically on cultivating loving-kindness as a means for preventing and healing both physical and emotional pain. Entitled “Healing From the Source: Meditation as Medicine for Body and Mind,” the three-week course begins November 14, 2015.

Based on ancient teachings of dzogchen from the Tibetan Bön Buddhist tradition, the new course helps one discover the “great healer within.” The core teachings of dzogchen introduce us to the nature of mind, to our own inner refuge, the true source of healing. Everyone has access to this source through the “three doors” — the stillness of the body, the silence of speech and the spaciousness of the mind. These “three precious pills” are a powerful medicine you can take at any time, with no side effects, to help divert you from your self-punishing tendencies, clear pain and negativity, cultivate awareness and ultimately access the healing qualities that spontaneously arise in that space.

The three precious pills serve as the foundation of the main practice in this new workshop. Their healing effects come from resting deeply in the space that opens, then gradually bringing awareness to your emotional or physical discomfort. In that unconditional openness, the pain or discomfort naturally dissolves. In time you may become aware of positive qualities naturally arising within, such as loving-kindness, joy, equanimity or compassion. As you allow those qualities to mature, you can feel their warmth.



Warmth is the active ingredient. You are encouraged to apply it as a spacious, luminous, warm hug to yourself and to the presence of the lingering emotional or physical discomfort. Your pain or illness needs this hug, and it wants it to continue. By acknowledging, accepting, respecting and connecting through the warmth, you can feel the dissolution of any negativity, self-judgment or self-criticism you may be harboring.

Nearly anyone who has attended retreats and workshops with Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche knows how skillfully and lovingly he guides his meditations, and how clearly and directly he transmits to others — newcomers and experienced students alike — his own, deep connection with the healing source within. His video-based online teachings are studied and practiced during normal life, so they are an ideal support for applying not only on the meditation cushion, but also throughout your workday, family engagements and personal time.

In the new GlideWing workshop a series of instructional videos are introduced in progression throughout its three weeks. Every few days a new set opens to course participants, allowing them to view and practice on their own schedule. Each teaching session concludes with a guided meditation, along with an MP3 audio version that can be downloaded and kept for ongoing practice. Rinpoche encourages free use of the private, protected discussion forum where participants from around the world can share experiences in writing, discover commonality in their challenges and successes, and support each other in applying the practices.

The Best of Who You Are

As Rinpoche explains in his latest book, *The True Source of Healing*, on which this workshop is based, “Conventional treatments often play an important — even life-saving — role in symptom relief and healing, but if you can harness the power of practices that connect with primordial awareness, you have the potential to go directly to the root of physical pain and illness.”

Through Rinpoche’s gentle guidance and support, this workshop has life-changing implications for those who can devote time and space for its practices. It’s not just about easing pain; it’s about becoming the best of who you are.

Whatever challenges or pain you face, when you go deep enough into the three precious pills, you can witness that pain dissolving into a fresh, new space. In that space, a new you emerges—one who is more relaxed, comfortable, open, clear, connected and more in touch with the spontaneous joy that comes with that connection.

Polly Turner assists with Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche’s GlideWing online workshops as well as his regular live webcast teachings. A freelance writer and editor, she served as editor for two of Rinpoche’s recent books, including The True Source of Healing: How the Tibetan Practice of Soul Retrieval Can Transform and Enrich your Life . Hay

House, July 2015.

[Learn more about the new GlideWing workshop](#)

[Learn more about Rinpoche's in-person and online teachings](#)