
The Return to Calm

The Zen Book of Everyday Life – Tibetan Tonglen, Giving and
Taking

Editor Sebastiano Vottari

INTRODUCTION

The art of anchoring when there is a storm

I know exactly how you feel right now. Or, at least, I know what prompted you to open these pages.

There's a background noise in your life that never seems to go away. Sometimes it's a subtle, barely audible buzz that accompanies you as you shop for groceries or drive in traffic. Other times it's a deafening roar, an alarm siren that goes off in the middle of the night, making you gasp for breath and leaving your stomach gripped in an icy grip. It's called anxiety. It's called fear of the future, mental overload, emotional exhaustion.

We live in an era that demands us to be constantly on, performing, and connected. Our minds are bombarded by thousands of stimuli every second, trapped in a digital world that travels at a speed our millennia-old biology cannot sustain. Faced with this chaos, modern society offers us solutions that often prove empty: they tell us to "think positive," sell us the illusion of instant calm, and suggest we sit cross-legged and "empty our minds," as if our brains had a magic switch we can turn off on command.

But anyone who's felt the pang of anxiety knows that when you're out at sea and the storm rages, shouting at the waves to calm them down is useless. Emptying your mind is impossible when it's already saturated with fear.

This little manual isn't written to sell you cheap enlightenment, nor to teach you unattainable mystical techniques. You won't find

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miraculous promises of instant healing here. On the contrary, this book is an invitation to come back down to earth. It's a return to the essentials: to the wisdom of small things.

I've written these pages thinking of you as an exhausted traveler who needs to stop. I want to offer you shelter, an *Inner Refuge*, built not with the abstract bricks of incomprehensible theories, but with the solid matter of your daily life.

In the next four chapters, we will discover together that salvation is not found by escaping reality, but by immersing ourselves in it with a new awareness.

You will discover the healing and physiological power of crossing the threshold of your home, allowing the outside world to disinfect your dark thoughts. You will learn to use your own hands to "turn off" your mind, transforming the most humble gestures—like washing the dishes or tidying a room—into powerful lifelines capable of draining away stress. I will accompany you in the dead of night, when darkness is most frightening, to show you how to transform insomnia from a battlefield to a sacred temple, lulled by poetry and the words of those who have known how to express the soul. Finally, I will teach you to reprogram your gaze to find the gold of gratitude even in the darkest days.

You're not broken, you're not flawed, and most importantly, you're not alone. The anxiety you feel isn't a condemnation; it's simply a sign that you've been trying to be strong for too long, fighting against yourself instead of listening to yourself.

Make yourself comfortable. Take a deep breath, let your shoulders drop, loosen your jaw. The journey we're about to embark on doesn't require herculean efforts; it just requires the gentleness of small, tiny steps.

Let's turn the page. Let's start rebuilding your peace.

Chapter 1: Beyond the Walls (The Healing Power of the Outside World)

There's a specific moment, when anxiety begins to mount or when a subtle sadness creeps into our bones, when our primal instinct takes over. Like wounded animals, we feel the uncontrollable urge to retreat, to hide, to seek shelter. And where can we find this shelter if not within the walls of our own home?

The house suddenly becomes much more than just a place to live: it transforms into a fortress. We double-lock the door, draw the curtains to filter the sunlight, lower the blinds. The couch or bed seem like the only safe places in a world that, outside, seems too noisy, too fast, too demanding. We convince ourselves, with a logic dictated by fear, that if we remain immobile and invisible inside our nest, the pain will not be able to find us. We believe that by limiting external stimuli, we can finally find peace.

Yet, anyone who has ever suffered from anxiety knows perfectly well that this is the greatest and most seductive of illusions.

The Echo Chamber and the Spiral of Thought

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When we lock ourselves in our homes to escape our inner demons, we simply lock ourselves in the room with them. Without realizing it, we transform our refuge into an emotional prison. The still, silent walls of our homes offer no escape for our excess mental energy. On the contrary, they act as a sounding board.

In a quiet house, where nothing changes and our gaze is constantly fixed on the same static objects, the human mind—designed to constantly process information—begins to feed on itself. What psychology calls *rumination begins*. A small, negative thought, which in the open air would be swept away like a dry leaf in the wind, echoes in the confines of a room, amplifies, distorts, until it becomes a gigantic, menacing monster.

You notice that the air in the room suddenly feels heavy and stale. The ticking of a clock, the hum of the refrigerator, the sound of your own breathing seem to mark the rhythm of your agitation. Being cooped up indoors constantly alienates our senses, alters our perception of time and space, and ends up convincing us that our problems are the only real and tangible things in the world. The world outside ceases to exist, and all that remains is the gilded cage of your fears.

Threshold Therapy: Breaking the Spell

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How do we escape this paralysis? The antidote is as simple as it is seemingly insurmountable in these dark times: we must...

END PREVIEW