

~From the Archives of Teachings by Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche~

SEEING OUR OWN SITUATION CLEARLY

Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche gave this teaching as his parting advice at the end of his visit to Osel Nyingpo dharma center in Ojai, California, January 2010.

Part 12

The Four Thoughts Are Crucial to Understanding Our Situation

There is no practitioner of the Great Vehicle who is engaged in the Great Vehicle path but lets their Foundational Vehicle training or discipline lapse. That is not possible. That doesn't work. You must know what to take up and what to let go, what to pursue and what to avoid.

For the benefit of all beings, you need to study, contemplate, and meditate on the dharma. For the good of sentient beings and for the survival of the dharma, you need to learn and understand the meaning of the teachings. Know that this is the only way to be of any real benefit to others or to the doctrine. This is the essence of the Great Vehicle. This contains the Foundational Vehicle also. Everything is there.

But you would rather disregard the real meaning. When a lama teaches on refuge, or bodhicitta, or the Four Thoughts, you think, "Why is he wasting time? Why is he wasting his energy on this?"

I ask you in return: What is the cause of the suffering in the six realms of existence? Do you know?

Is someone using our sufferings as a form of punishment? No. We made them ourselves. We can be certain that, at this moment, the seeds of our own hell experience already lie waiting in our mindstreams. The seeds of hungry ghost experience already exist in our minds. The human realm seed is in our minds, too—we carry with us all kinds of seeds from virtuous and non-virtuous actions. We have the demigod and god realms' seeds, too. We are not poor! We are so rich with karma!

So, among these realms, where do you want to go? Now is the time to think about that! To this end, you can read in the ngöndro commentaries about the Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind to Dharma, and they will explain if there is joy or suffering in the hells. They will

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reveal what compels beings to go there. Likewise for the animal realm or hungry ghost realms, why do we have to go there? And should we want to? Should we avoid them? Will we find happiness or misery there?

But you don't listen. You ignore the Four Thoughts that can turn your minds to dharma. Therefore, you don't understand the suffering that is the nature of the six realms of existence.

Without an understanding of the suffering of samsara, you don't want to give up that which needs to be given up: your negativity. You don't want to take the time and go to the trouble of changing your bad habits. Likewise, you don't exert yourselves to engage in virtue, either. Why? Because you have no sense of the benefit of virtue and the harm of non-virtue! Such an understanding is absolutely necessary in order to practice on the path. How do we develop such an understanding? By learning and contemplating the Four Thoughts.

Without this understanding, you might think you are taking refuge or think you are practicing a Buddhist path, but you are only fooling yourself. In the same way, trying to develop bodhicitta will be of no use. Generation and completion stage practices—in fact, any of the practices—all will be of no use. Why? Because you won't understand the meaning and purpose of practice!

If you clearly understand that you are sick, then you recognize that a doctor and medicine are useful. Similarly, through the Four Thoughts we come to know how we are all stricken with the disease of samsara, and with this realization we recognize the usefulness of the Three Jewels. We will see that study, contemplation, and meditation on the dharma are useful. They become meaningful because we understand their purpose.

When we first take refuge and became Buddhists, we must have some sense of the Four Thoughts, because they are the basis of refuge. If we understand the Four Thoughts, we will take refuge properly and sincerely. If we grasp the meaning of the Four Thoughts, we will be able to cultivate bodhicitta, the basis of the Great Vehicle path. Stage by stage, we can employ the various methods taught on the paths, but only if we have the basis which is the Four Thoughts.

~ teaching continues in Part 13...