

~From the Archives of Teachings by Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche~

## Foundations of Practice and Dharma Community

*In March of 2009, Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche sent the following message to the dharma community of Dorje Ling in Portland, Oregon.*

### Part 2

#### Examining the Four Thoughts

How do we get from “I heard” to “I know”? We have to practice. We have to take what we have heard or read about the dharma and ask ourselves, “Is this true? Does this make sense? How does this apply to me, to my situation in my life? Does this match my experience? Does this relate to how I see the outer world? Or my own mind?”

*The Words of My Perfect Teacher* and other books and teachings give us wonderful ways of thinking about the ngöndro practice, starting with the Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind to Dharma.<sup>1</sup> If you don't have a lama around giving teachings, that's okay. You have this book, which is a wonderful treasure all about ngöndro. There is no excuse! We can study many teachings with this book. And as soon as we have heard a teaching or read a little bit, we can begin to internalize it, to examine it and contemplate it. This is the process of how to get from “I heard” to “I know.”

Or, for example, with the practice of refuge, rather than just mumbling the refuge verses without meaning, you can ask yourself: “Why do I practice? Why take refuge? What am I taking refuge in, and why take refuge in that and not something else?” From *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* and from other teachings, you can read and hear about the qualities of the objects of refuge. It is only by understanding the qualities of the refuge objects—the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—that you have any sense of why they are worthy of your trust

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<sup>1</sup> The Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind to Dharma are the contemplations on: 1) the precious human birth, 2) the truth of impermanence and death, 3) the law of karma, or cause and result, and 4) the fundamentally unsatisfactory nature of cyclic existence.

and the reasons to take refuge in them. And it is only by understanding the suffering nature of samsara that you understand what you are taking refuge from.

If we are earnestly applying ourselves in this process with the ngöndro, starting with the Four Thoughts, it will begin to work changes in our mind. Understanding the law of karma, we will be motivated to engage in virtue and avoid non-virtue. Seeing the unsatisfactory nature of samsara, our minds will turn to the dharma.

With our motivation shaped by our understanding of the Four Thoughts, then whatever we do becomes dharma practice, whether or not we are sitting on a cushion.

We can engage in this process of bringing the dharma into our hearts wherever we are, whatever we are doing in our daily lives in the world. We can always contemplate impermanence, we can always consider the preciousness of our human rebirth, we can always think on the law of karma. You don't need to take a lama everywhere with you or always have a book open in front of you! You only need to recognize that you have the opportunity to engage in dharma every moment, and use those moments to recall and think about these fundamental dharma concepts again and again, and this will guarantee that you are not wasting any chance at performing virtue. In this way, all of your activities can be dharma training.

*~ teaching continues in Part 3...*