

~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 3

The Transformative Power of the Four Thoughts

Now, sometimes we read an inspiring teaching or a lama gives an electrifying talk and we get all excited about dharma, jumping up and down almost, like we would be excited about any worldly thing. And, like any sense of worldly exhilaration, it will pass. If this is our only connection to dharma and our only reason for doing dharma, this excitement, then when it inevitably fades we will drop our practice. Sincerely practicing the dharma means not just doing it for a weekend while the inspiration lasts or as a cool thing to try with our friends, which will never bring us real benefit. It means to really practice sincerely with a long view and with commitment. This is how the teachings can permeate our lives and bring about profound change. If we want to practice in this heartfelt, transformative way, then we need these Four Thoughts as our foundation.

The Four Thoughts *will* turn our minds to dharma, just like their name, if we internalize them and let their implications naturally shape our behavior. This is particularly true with the contemplation on the truth of the impermanent nature of all things and the inevitability of our own fast-approaching death. Understanding impermanence, you will really change!

But you have to take the time and put out the effort to recognize this truth for yourself. No teaching will do that for you, no book can do that for you. Books and teachings give us the tools we need to understand and contemplate, but we each have to grapple with the ideas and bring them into our own hearts ourselves.

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~Translated and edited by Shashi Reitz~*

However, this is a practice that we can do anytime, anywhere. If you ask, how can I contemplate impermanence? You need only look around! Externally, our environment and the things and people we interact with are always in motion, never remaining the same for even an instant. Internally, our thoughts rush in an unceasing, ever-changing flow. You don't have to think abstractly or be terribly clever to find an example of impermanence—just look at your own mind! Just look at our world! Our experience is made up of one example of impermanence after another. You don't even need to ponder deeply—just look and there they are, anytime!

But we usually ignore this truth that is before our eyes all the time, and so of course we ignore its implication for our own lives, which is that we have no time to waste.

Taking the time to understand impermanence, and then similarly investigate each subsequent stage of the ngöndro practice, our minds will naturally turn toward dharma. We will want to practice, because we will understand why. We will understand the benefits of exerting ourselves in this most meaningful of activities, and then it will be easy to make dharma practice a priority in our lives and to engage in practice wholeheartedly.

What will get in the way of this deep transformation is laziness, which is not wanting to take the time and trouble to think these ideas through for ourselves.

And pride! In dharma, pride is the biggest obstacle. And pride is very sneaky, because our egos are strong and skilled and sneaky. Thinking, “I'm a busy guy, I can't be bothered with these preliminaries! Just give me the real thing, I want to go straight to the main attraction!” This is a kind of pride, the pride of thinking you are too good to start at the beginning of the practice.

Sorry! That doesn't work!

~ teaching continues in Part 4...