

CHAPTER 11 – THE FOUR THOUGHTS THAT TURN THE MIND TOWARD THE DHARMA

To begin teaching the young Garchen Rinpoche about the Dharma, his father gave him many teachings on the four thoughts that turn the mind toward the Dharma. These four thoughts make you remember that life is not for being lazy and enjoying as much as possible, but that you have a very important reason to be here!

The first thought that turns the mind toward the Dharma is that birth as a human being is rare and precious. There are so many other types of beings – so many more animals and insects, ghosts and other unhappy beings in other dimensions – than human beings. Human life is where we have great opportunity to work toward the continuing happiness of having a good heart, a pure mind, and wisdom – or, spiritual happiness.

The second thought that turns the mind toward the Dharma is impermanence. When we know that nothing on Earth lasts forever, we will always be upset from losing what we love, and losing the people we love, we must find the kind of peace and happiness that we can't lose.

The third thought that turns the mind toward the Dharma is karma, the law of cause and effect, action and its result. Whatever we do that is loving, compassionate, according to Dharma, results in good things happening to us. Whatever we do that is hurtful to others results in ourselves being hurt.

The fourth thought that turns the mind toward the Dharma is the endless sufferings of life. Being born, living your life, dying, and again being born, living, and dying, are all full of some kind of suffering and pain. We want to find a way out of the pain and suffering of life experiences.

These four thoughts lead us to try to find real, continuing peace and happiness, from learning and practicing the Dharma.

In the beginning, young Garchen Rinpoche didn't seem to have much faith in what his father was teaching him. He couldn't understand the sufferings of other people and animals. They looked like they were alright - eating, sleeping, working and relaxing - not suffering so much. He had everything he needed – good food, a reasonably comfortable place to live, a loving mother. So he didn't know what it's like not to have these things. And he couldn't relate to sufferings of ghosts and other unseen beings. He didn't believe that human life is so rare and precious that one shouldn't waste time falling asleep during the day – which was something he loved to do!

He understood impermanence as the sun coming up and going down, warm summer days coming and going away, his mother being with him in the monastery for awhile and then going away. Okay, those are examples of impermanence but they are not so bad! Why should he have to devote the rest of his life to such an extremely strict lifestyle so he could escape the coming and going of his mother, and the coming and going of summer?

He understood karma, the law of cause and effect, action and its result, as his father being angry and beating him as a result of his falling asleep during study time. That was the worst suffering

he could imagine. That is probably the only thing that motivated him to want to be liberated from the suffering of life.

One very cold winter day, when it was snowing and the snow was getting very deep, the young tulku did some misbehavior that made his father very upset.

His father shouted, “Aren’t you afraid of the suffering of the hell-world?”

The hard-headed tulku replied, “No, I am not afraid!”

His father said nothing, but immediately grabbed him and began removing his many layers of warm clothing. The little tulku began to scream and cry, knowing that some horrible punishment was about to happen. His father then dragged him to the door, opened the door and placed him outside, and then closed and locked the door. He was locked outside in the freezing cold with no clothes!

Everything around him was white, with heavy flakes of snow blowing in the fierce wind. The sky was white with snow, the trees were heavy with snow, and the ground was covered in snow.



And it was so shockingly and terrifyingly cold that he thought he was about to die. He was alone, with no one to help him. Surely his father would not let anyone dare to let him back inside. The snow stung his feet and hands, and whipped against his face and body. The freezing cold wind seemed to blow through his whole body so he could hardly breathe. The world around him seemed to be just one beastly and deadly blast of ice-cold closing in on him. He didn’t want to die!



With all the breath he had left in him, he screamed and screamed. His screams must have shaken up the whole earth and sky, valleys and mountains!

And suddenly, his father - the “second Marpa“ - opened the door and whisked the freezing boy back inside.

“If you were born in the cold hells, that’s what it would be like! That’s how cold you would feel in the cold hells, day and night without end!“ his father roared.

The “second Marpa“ roared again “Do you understand hell now?“

Not long after that experience, the little tulku became ill with chicken pox. He developed a high fever, and he was either freezing cold and shivering, or hot and sweating. His body was burning hot to the touch. Then red bumps and blisters formed all over his body, and they itched terribly! He wanted to scratch and scratch. But he was told not to scratch, or the sores would become infected.



His body became even more hot, like it was floating over hot coals.

He was so weak and helpless, he felt again like he was going to die. The world around him seemed to blaze with heat.



What he saw seemed so strange – he wasn't sure that what he was seeing was real. Everything around him seemed to slowly fade away, like swirls of smoke, rising and then disappearing under the summer sky.

This time, he didn't have any fear of dying. But then he suddenly thought of his mother. The thought of having to be separated from her was terribly painful. It was a powerful, unbearable fear of being cut off from his mother forever. He began to cry out in anguish and struggled in his mind to hold onto her, clinging to her like she was his own life.

After these experiences, the young Garchen Rinpoche had some understanding of the suffering of beings in the cold hell world and the hot hell world. He understood what real misery is, and how all beings suffer from illness, discomfort, fear and pain, and from the anguish of forever being separated from loved ones.

He also understood that happiness can only be experienced for a short time, and then some kind of discomfort or discontent always comes next. He kept thinking about what suffering is, and of how beings have to face the results of their bad actions, their negative karma.

He kept thinking about death. About the fact that one day he would have to face his own death. He thought about how he would be all alone at that moment, just his own mind totally alone without any companion. And these thoughts led to thinking about the preciousness of human life. But most of all, he thought about the suffering of life, and the suffering of dying.

And then he began to wonder about whether beings in the hell worlds have bodies. He asked his father, "Do you really have a body after you die? Do hell beings have bodies?"

In response to his question, his father hit him hard, and asked him,

"What do you think? Who said you don't?"

Then his father gave him a short explanation. He said, "Whatever happens to you after you die is just a continuation of how your mind is, and of what is happening to you now in this life. If you don't stop clinging to your idea of your self, then there is always a body, and there is always suffering no matter which world you take a birth in. There is a body and suffering also in the *bardo*, the place between death and the next birth."

All the shock treatments little Garchen Rinpoche had endured from his father – his father's anger, extreme cold, extreme heat, illness, and fear of being separated forever from his mother - made him realize more the love and longing he had for his mother, which itself became a source of mental pain.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why didn't Garchen Rinpoche have faith in what his father was teaching him, at first? (He couldn't understand the sufferings of other people and animals because he had not really suffered before)
2. Why did his father throw him outside in the freezing cold? (Because he was not afraid of suffering in a hell world)
3. How did he experience the suffering of a hot hell world? (When he was ill with chicken pox and had a high fever)
4. He suffered mental pain from attachment to which person? (attachment to his mother)
5. Do people have bodies after they die? (yes, if they are attached to the idea of their self)

DHARMA DISCUSSION:

“Knowing how precious this human life is, one would not waste one’s time with meaningless activities....[O]ne would be happy, knowing that one possesses a precious human body, the ship that can bring one beyond the ocean of suffering.” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 39.

“The Buddha said, ‘If you would like to know where you will go next, look at your present actions. ‘ You will only be able to practice the true dharma if you trust in karma, cause and effect“ Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 37.

“,...[Y]ou will understand that everything...happiness, wealth, and pleasure, pain and suffering—is impermanent and will not last... You will stay focused and not be carried away by indulgence in pleasure, and you will not be much affected by difficult circumstances.“ Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 14.

“We suffer without choice. We do not want to suffer and we try everything to be happy but suffering happens regardless of our wishes, and we can’t do anything about it. Why is this so? It is because we have already created the causes for suffering in the past.“ Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 35.

“Whoever has not realized the nature of mind, reality itself, suffers. Whether they are rich, poor, beautiful, powerful, smart, or not, if they have not realized how things really are, they are bound to suffer. Do not forget their suffering....“ Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 25.

What are the four thoughts that turn the mind toward the Dharma? (1)The preciousness of human life, (2) Impermanence, (3) Karma, and (4) Suffering of life.

It's quite obvious that suffering makes us turn our mind toward the Dharma – because when we suffer, we want to escape! We don't want to feel hurt, anger, illness, fear or sadness anymore, we want our mind to be peaceful instead! And, remember that all people suffer - even if they are rich, beautiful, powerful and smart - because of their karmas, and because they don't yet have the wisdom, the full understanding of their mind, from practicing Dharma.

What about impermanence? What do we mean by impermanence? Everything that we can think of, changes. We get things, and we lose things, we don't have them anymore. We have friends, and then they are away from us. We are successful in something, and then we are unsuccessful. Someone likes what we do, and then someone doesn't like what we do. We are lucky, then unlucky. We can't keep things going just as we want them. We will always suffer disappointments and unpleasant experiences in life. So after some time, we get frustrated that we can't have things just the way we like them, regardless of how hard we work or how much money we have. We start to think, "There must be a better way. Look how peaceful the lamas are, and the people who practice Dharma. They seem to know how to stay happy and peaceful."

We learn to calm ourselves by remembering the Buddha's teaching that unpleasantness, problems and difficult situations won't last - they are impermanent. We learn not to get too carried away by the pleasant things, remembering that they too won't last, so we don't get too upset when they aren't there anymore.

And why does thinking about the preciousness of human life make you want to learn and practice the Dharma? If life is so precious, wouldn't we all want to just have as much fun as possible? Or try to get the most money, and have all the best things we can buy? No. Why not? Because, even if we get everything we want, we don't feel happy for long. We get bored. We want something else, or we want to do something else. Having fun never lasts very long – there is always something unpleasant that comes up. So instead of wasting time trying to have fun and more fun, we should spend our precious life time trying to find a way to make our minds more peaceful and happy.

So these three thoughts – preciousness of human life, impermanence, and the suffering of life – make us want to find a type of peace and happiness that goes on and on.

And how does thinking of karma turn our mind toward the Dharma? We know that by doing good actions, good karmas, like doing things that are helpful, generous, and compassionate, and avoiding doing or saying things that are unkind, we get good results - like good health, the things we need, good friends, and help when we need it. That inspires us to do more good actions and avoid bad ones – in other words, to follow the Dharma.

So, by following Dharma we can find the kind of peace and happiness that gets better and better, and that leads to enlightenment – no more suffering.

PRACTICE THIS WEEK: Think about the things that you have that you like the most, and then for each one, think, "It is impermanent. One day I won't have it anymore."

Next, think about any things that bother you. For each one of them, think, "It is impermanent. One day it won't bother me at all."

ACTIVITY: With a pencil, find your way through the maze to the Dharma. Try to stay away from the impurities!

