

OUTLINE FOR MEDITATION ON THE FOUR THOUGHTS

Based on the 'Ngondro Commentary' by Jane Tromge
and excerpts from the Longchen Nyingthig Ngondro

PRECIOUS HUMAN BIRTH

Contemplate on the importance of having a precious human birth with all the freedoms and conditions necessary for practice:

“At this time I have gained this *leisure free from the eight kinds of bondage*:

from 1) hell, 2) hungry ghost and 3) animal realms;

from 4) the realms of the long-lived gods, 5) barbarians, and 6) perverse philosophers;

7) from being a fool, 8) from a place in which no Buddha has appeared.

1) To have been born a human being 2) complete with sensory faculties, 3) in a central land congenial to Dharma; 4) not to have reverted to extreme wrong deeds and 5) to have faith in the Buddhist teachings - *these comprise the five personal endowments*.

1) When a Buddha has appeared, 2) has expounded the truth of Dharma; 3) when the teachings survive and 4) are being followed; and 5) when one has been accepted by a spiritual friend -- *these are the five circumstantial endowments*.

1) To be entrapped by harmful influences or 2) polluted by the five poisons, 3) to be struck by the lightning of evil karma or 4) to be distracted by laziness; 5) to be enslaved by others, 6) to practise the dharma as a defence from fear or 7) with pretension, or 8) to be thick-headed and the like - *these are the eight unfree states caused by temporal events*.

To lack 1) remorse and 2) the jewel of faith; 3) to be bound by the lasso of desire and greed or 4) to behave crudely; 5) not to refrain from unskillful and evil actions, or 6) to live by dishonest means; 7) to undermine one's vows and 8) rend precepts asunder – *these are the eight unfree states caused by mental aberration.*”

Meditation:

How rare it is to find such a rebirth! How uncertain it is that we will find it again, since the mind can easily lead us into a non-human realm or a human birth without all the freedoms and advantages. Our virtues and aspirations in past lives must have been very great for us to have created the present good conditions. *Reflect, then rest the mind.*

Remember with compassion all those who do not have the freedoms and advantages we now have – animals, ghosts, those suffering so much, those who cannot generate enough merit to create conditions for practice and those who waste their precious human birth through negative actions. *Reflect, then rest the mind.*

When thoughts arise, pray to the lama -- may I not waste this precious human birth, but instead use it well to create merit and gain recognition of the true nature of mind. May all

beings in all realms find human rebirth, may they find spiritual conditions, and use them to fulfill their highest aspirations. May I attain the power to help all beings. *Rest.*

IMPERMANENCE

Meditation:

First contemplate the progression from birth to old age and death. The people who have come and gone, changing possessions, changing scenery, changing phenomena. See the universe in constant motion, the subatomic particles in our own bodies, moving so fast, so subtle. Contemplate death – the countless deaths we have already experienced, and the ones to come, the uncertainty of the time and place of death, the sudden separation from friends and family. Eventually we realize that what we think of as the cohesion and continuity of life is a transparent illusion. *Reflect, then rest the mind.*

When thoughts arise, we turn our minds to compassion, remembering how normally we all try to deny impermanence. We rely on things as solid and lasting, but they disintegrate and disappear. Remember the suffering at the time of death – the fear, the separation from loved ones and possessions, and the experiences in the bardo after death. Remember how beings suffer because they deny impermanence. *Reflect, then rest the mind.*

When thoughts arise, pray to the lama – may all beings gain such a deep realization of impermanence that it purifies their tendency to think of things as real. May their realization of impermanence reduce their attachment and aversion to phenomena. May I maintain recognition of the mind's true nature while going through the transition of death and may my realization become so strong that I can rescue others from the difficulties of the bardo. May I always live and practice with recognition of impermanence, and realize the true nature of all phenomena, positive or negative. Rest.

KARMA

The Ten Non-Virtues

(body) killing, stealing, sexual misconduct; (speech) lying, slander, harsh speech, idle talk; (mind) envy, ill-will (wanting to harm others) and wrong view.

The Ten Virtues (opposite of non-virtues)

(body) protecting life, not taking without permission, practicing sexual morality;
(speech) speaking the truth, speaking harmoniously, speaking gently, not chattering meaninglessly; (mind) rejoicing in the good fortune of others, having goodwill, training in right view

Meditation:

First we assess our own karmic situation. Look at the circumstances of this life to see what the karmic patterns of past lives were. Look at present thoughts and actions to see what the future holds. See that although all beings want happiness, we almost all create causes and conditions for misery. We act as we wish, ignoring karma, then blame our bad luck on negative outside circumstances.

Now without making excuses, explanations, we make an honest assessment of our behaviour. Only we know the truth, whatever people say or think about us. Only we know if our motivation is pure or poisonous. *Reflect, then rest the mind.*

When thoughts arise, we use them to arouse compassion. We remember the terrible karmic forces that will affect those who have been cruel, aggressive, murderous. Remember how anger and aggression rebounds as endless lifetimes in hell. We feel compassion for those who use up their past good karma and don't plant seeds for future happiness, and for those who have no opportunity to act virtuously – hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals. *Reflect, then rest the mind.*

When thoughts arise, pray to the lama – may all beings learn what to accept and what to reject. May I stop blaming others, and begin to purify my own mind. Through virtues of body, speech and mind, may I create the causes and conditions for fortunate circumstances. May all beings escape the web of karma and enter a state of pristine awareness. May I act in accord with the most proper conduct, and meditate until I establish the highest view. *Rest.*

SUFFERING (for traditional descriptions, see texts like “Words of My Perfect Teacher)

Meditation:

First we contemplate on the suffering of the six realms, clearly imagining what it is like in each one. Our mind can enter other realms through the power of visualization, which allows them to unfold in our experience. From a moment of pain, for example from being burned, or feeling extreme cold, we can extrapolate, extend the experience to understand what it must be like in the hot or cold realms. From moments of hunger or thirst, we can imagine the spirit realm.

If it is too difficult to imagine other realms, it is enough to focus on the human realm. For example, we can put ourselves into the place of someone in a war zone, helpless, hungry, separated from loved ones, living in constant fear of attack and injury, seeing constant violence. The power of our contemplation depends on really imagining ourselves in these situations, feeling what it is like to be in these positions. *Reflect, then rest.*

When thoughts arise, generate compassion – for all the beings in the six realms who have been our parents. All of them are caught in cycles of suffering and do not know how to escape. *Reflect, then rest.*

When thoughts arise, pray to the lama – may suffering not sweep me away. May I see whatever arises as purification. When I am confused by suffering, may I not create the karmic causes for more misery. May I attain the power to lead others from the depths of samsara to a state beyond sorrow. May all beings be liberated from the endless cycles of samsaric suffering. May I practice the path until I attain liberation for the sake of all beings, and not give up, or abandon mother sentient beings. *Rest.*