

Four Thoughts that Turn the Mind

These freedoms and advantages are hard to find and easily lost; Everything changes, nothing stays the same, and death comes quickly; Every thought, word, and deed is a seed that inevitably grows into experience; The cycles of confusion and conflicting emotions do not lead to happiness or peace.

This Precious Human Life: *these freedoms and advantages are hard to find and easily lost*

Food, water, shelter, safety, freedom and leisure, intelligence and interest, teachers, teachings, and community -- we have the good fortune to have them all, right here, right now. But the causes and conditions for all these freedoms and advantages may end at any time. This precious life has great potential for good or harm. We should take advantage of these resources and opportunities and use them for the genuine benefit of ourselves and others.

The Truth of Impermanence: *everything changes, nothing stays the same, and death comes quickly*

Every event and circumstance is dependent on complex causes and conditions that are constantly arising and disappearing. The world and its inhabitants are subject to change. Though we see change, impermanence, and death all around us, we act as though we were going to live forever. But we too will die. Every day, this precious human life with all its freedoms and advantages becomes one day shorter. The time of death is uncertain, but nothing can prevent death: not wealth, intelligence, strength, power, or friends. We should not waste this life.

The Inevitability of Karma: *every action is a seed that inevitably grows into experience*

Every experience and all phenomena come about through innumerable causes and conditions. Nothing arises without causes, and nothing occurs without itself becoming a seed of future phenomena, large or small, immediate or distant. Greed, hatred, and delusion inevitably lead to suffering for ourselves and others. Generosity, kindness, and wisdom lead to genuine happiness. Although we cannot know exactly how and when, our actions do inevitably ripen into our experiences of happiness and suffering. Every thought, word, and deed we do becomes easier to repeat. Repeated actions become habits; habits become character. We alone are responsible for our actions and our experience of life.

The Faults of Samsara: *confusion and conflicting emotions do not lead to happiness or peace*

The aches and pains of the physical body, the grief of losing what we hold dear, old age, sickness and death: some things are unavoidable. But we create additional suffering for ourselves and others with greed, hatred, delusion, jealousy, and pride. When we measure life by wealth, pleasure, praise, and reputation, we allow our happiness to depend upon circumstances beyond our control. Understanding the causes and futility of samsara, filled with weariness and revulsion, we turn to a genuine refuge: the aspiration and determination to awaken, not just for our own freedom, but for the sake of all beings.

**Until enlightenment, I go for refuge
In the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Noble Sangha.
By the merit of generosity and other virtues,
May I attain buddhahood for the benefit of beings.**



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