

## 2018\_03\_04\_am1\_Shamatha\_LMC.mp4

*positive transformation using 1st of 4 Thoughts - Precious Human Birth (quoting Tsoknyi Rinpoche)*

[00:05:37] So today being the first Sunday of March, we have an extended practice session. // On the breaks... up until lunchtime, it will be very helpful if you can... observe silence during those periods. Helpful for you. Helpful for everyone engaging in the practices today.

[00:07:54] So we'll begin with... I think I'll first say this. Normally... [laughs] normally! ... on this... first Sunday... of an odd month... not odd in the sense of... unusual since they're all unusual. But it's an odd numbered month... March, so we normally practice shamatha during this time and we will *do* some of that. However, we'll *lean*... in a slightly different direction. Hopefully... both interesting and helpful. ... Do you all have the recitation for refuge and... heads... sort of nodding... somewhat.

[00:10:29] So we will start with the Refuge and Bodhicitta.

**sangha** [00:10:43] *reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer*

[00:13:24] In our practice of calm abiding, or shamatha, as it is called in Tibetan... our method is to... place our awareness upon... an object... external to ourselves, or internal like our breath. Or internal like an experience that we're having. And so on. In previous sessions over the past... month or so... we have... sometimes *focused*... on the importance... of resting our awareness on an experience.

[00:14:46] So in wanting to continue with that... progression... and also to... go deeper... I looked around for some starting points. ... It's hard to find a starting point in a tradition which goes back millennia. It's much easier to find an ending point. But not wanting an ending point, I persevered and found... a starting point. ... And that starting point has a name, so I'm going to... say it in a moment, but first, a warning. It's quite likely that most of you... have heard of this *particular* teaching many times. And therefore, we'll have a hard time listening to it. ... Which is why, generally, personally, I'm not interested in... giving that teaching... because I also fall asleep. But I came across a very nice presentation... that I found personally inspiring. And so I wanted to share it with you.

[00:16:50] It's divided into four sections. And each of those sections are relatively easy to understand. You can use your *intellect*... and understand them... quite easily... if you're willing. But the intellect is just the door... to the *actual* thing. And so once understanding... each of these four... then we went to... relax... and rest our awareness... upon the *experience*.

[00:17:57] So we are all involved in many things in our lives in this world... with our families and friends... our challenges, our careers... our children. We're all involved in these things. And the reason we're all sitting here today is because, *not* that we would like to be involved in something else necessarily, but we would like what we're doing... to be more *enlightening*... in a kind of ordinary sense. *Uplifting* in a kind of ordinary sense. *Friendly*... in a kind of ordinary sense. And we would also like a change... in the direction of positive transformation. ... So that's what today is about. Positive transformation.

[00:19:12] Most of you will recognize the title of the teaching... as simply... 'The Four Thoughts That Turn The Mind'. There's a quote from Tsoknyi Rinpoche which... starts out... he also does not like to give this teaching. Says because... immediately in the West... everyone begins to chant the mantra: "I already know that, I already know that, I already know that, I already know that." And I thought that *myself* when I first saw it, "Hmmm. I already know that. Wonder what he has to say." [laughter] ... So I think actually, if you can put that mantra aside... you will find that what he has to say, is... of the *utmost* interest. I've never heard him, but having read... his description of this... makes me want to hear him.

[00:20:37] So to jump right in... the first thought is the... thought of the preciousness of human existence. ... Now, I know many people... don't necessarily consider their existence as a human to be particularly precious, perhaps because of illness... or something else. Or perhaps... by embracing a kind of equanimity... like not caring whether I'm a dog or a cat or a human or whatever. But in this tradition... we want to... give rise to a sense of deep appreciation... for *whatever* we have. Since most of us in this room are humans... maybe all. We would like to... *use* that opportunity in a way which is helpful for ourselves and for others. So I want to read one paragraph as a kind of starter. ... Don't worry, I'm not gonna read this whole thing.

[00:22:02] "When you read about the preciousness of a human birth one or two times, you'll know the concept intellectually. But to feel that having this human life is precious, that is something else. Do you feel it? Most of the time, no. Each morning when you wake up, do you feel how precious it is to have this birth? Maybe. But most of the time, no. And before you fall asleep, do you feel, Wow, I'm so lucky to have a nice bed, a warm blanket. Maybe. But most of the time, no. More often you feel the opposite about your life and yourself. You say, 'I want more. I want things to be different, better.' Or... 'I'm bad, worthless... I've been abandoned... I'm unlovable.' Generally, this is because you're caught by the ego, which is never, ever satisfied. It always needs something, wants something because it's hollow. It's like a hungry ghost that is never ever fulfilled. So many, many people stay caught right there.

[00:23:42] "But honestly, your life is really good. That's what you need to consider about your precious human birth. Think about how much freedom you have because of this human birth. How good this circumstance is for learning the Dharma. You have food, warmth, safety, and you have teachers. In every session of meditation you need to purposely reflect on this because Buddhist training is based on thinking and then resting the mind. You need to influence your emotional understanding about the preciousness of your human birth, and that influence comes through conscious, repetitive mind training. You just have to think about it again and again until you feel it in your whole system, until everything inside your body agrees that, 'I know I have a precious human birth. How important this opportunity is!' Once you have conviction about the preciousness of human existence, you'll want to use all the time you have in this life as best as you can. As the master, Longchen Rabjam said, 'We now have the independence to genuinely apply the sacred Dharma, so do not squander your life on pointless things.' " [end of Tsoknyi Rinpoche quote]

[00:25:26] It's like he said, easy to understand. ... If we just take a moment... occasionally... during every day... or every hour or every minute, if we could... we can see... that we are *constantly*... training our minds. Training them to hate. Training them to love. Training them to be skillful. Training them to be careless. On and on, we are the master trainers of our own mind. Every word we think and utter... becomes part of the training. Every action we engage in becomes part of the training. On and on and on. ... So it should not be surprising... that to give

rise to a genuine sense of *appreciation* for being born a human being... reasonably intact... is not something that *just comes naturally*.

[00:26:41] Which is why... so many people have heard this teaching so many times. Because it does not come naturally. And we do not spend the effort and the time, to... nurture it... to the point where we *feel*... all the time, every day in our dreams... that we are *lucky*. I think most of us would *like* to feel lucky... appreciative of our human birth. ... Perhaps we've given up. ... So, this is ... Tsoknyi Rinpoche... we see then why... we have to *shift*. We have the right training model. We've just used it to train ourselves to something that... it's not so helpful for us. So once we... *conceptually* understand what we're doing... Yes, I see... I train myself continuously. Once we do that... we've started. Then it just needs to be kind of... encouraged... along the way. Every time you meet someone... on the road or on the street... think to yourself... they're like me. They actually have... a *precious* human existence. But maybe like me, they don't *know* it yet. Or maybe... like me, they do.

[00:28:49] So first, take a few moments to *conceptually* remind yourself... that since birth, we have been training our minds... to *relate* to ourselves, to our own minds, to our own bodies in a certain way. ... And now conceptually understanding that there are methods... to enhance that, to improve that, to repair that and so on. ... We at least give rise to the aspiration that we might be able to do it. ... So spend a moment... and I mean, like... just a few moments, like 30 seconds at most... *conceptually*, mull over the idea... that having been born a human being... is a *precious* opportunity. Whether we're making use of it or not, it's a precious opportunity.

[00:30:09] Having mulled it over for a moment and held the *view*... so here we have to also say what the view is. Conceptually looking to see, is it *true* that this is a precious existence or not?! We need to... *test* the theory, if you will... by holding the view that it *is* a precious human opportunity. This is a moment, not of exploration, but a moment of exploration through the lens of certainty. It is *certainly* a precious human existence. We look at it through that lens, not in order to fool ourselves, but in order to have the experience... of what it's like... if we *feel* that it is precious.

[00:31:06] And when we feel that it's precious, through that kind of conceptual lens, that view... then *relax*... relax completely! Let go of the conceptual understanding one hundred percent. Just relax into that view. That in *this* body... and *this* time and *this* place... it's as good as it gets or ever will be. And so you give rise... to that level of appreciation... and *rest* in that.

[00:31:50] *period of meditation*  
**sangha** [00:46:24] *dedicating the merit*

The Four Thoughts That Change the Mind, This Precious Human Birth  
By Tsoknyi Rinpoche (copyright 2010 Pundarika Foundation)  
<http://www.tsoknyirinpoche.org/2575/web-teaching-i-2/>