

MEDITATION ON THE FOUR COMMON FOUNDATIONS.

Let us meditate on one of the Four Common Foundations. Different from the Four Noble Truths, both are common to all schools of Buddhism. First let us bring our focus internally and relax the body. Bring to mind the seven point posture of meditation: sitting in half lotus or with the feet flat on the floor, elbows slightly away from the sides, left hand cupped holding the right hand, shoulders relaxed and loose, head tilted slight forward and down, tongue placed gently behind the upper teeth, and eyes only slightly open.

Let's begin with a five minute meditation on the breath. We focus on the breath and count to seven. We focus firmly on the breath saying "I am breathing in. I am breathing out". Doing this we count to six in and out breaths. Then we count back again. When our mind strays from the breath we gently bring it back and continue focussing and counting.

1. PRECIOUS HUMAN REBIRTH.

It is extremely important to cultivate an appreciation of the value of this human life we have so fortunately acquired. If we just take our life for granted and we allow ourselves to wallow in negativity, suffering and unhappiness, it is like using a precious diamond container as a rubbish bin. This precious body is like a boat crossing the ocean of samsara. It isn't only precious for ourselves but we can take with us all other mother sentient beings.

The Buddha himself discovered the preciousness of this human life and based on this finding, he started the practice of the profound Dharma. Our bodies are like that of the Buddha and we can gain enlightenment just as he did by following his teachings.

We have acquired these human lives that have not only allowed us to become aware of the Buddha's teachings but allow us the time, nourishment and comfort to pursue those teachings. There is no guarantee that we shall acquire such a fortunate life again.

2. This brings us to the second Common Foundation which is IMPERMANENCE.

We know that life is impermanent but somehow our minds play a trick on us, leading us to believe that we can depend on the future, on tomorrow. We believe this even though we see others die unexpectedly around us. The nature of mind and illusion of self leads us to think we are secretly protected from this fate.

If we really embrace impermanence we will not think "I have plenty of time to practice the Dharma", we will use every moment to practice positive thought, positive speech and positive actions and follow the Buddha's teachings which are the supreme guide to peace and happiness.

3. The third foundation is the LAW OF NATURE WHICH IS KARMA.

Karma is not a matter of reward and punishment meted out by an omniscient or any other being, but a law of nature that exists in the natural world. The Buddha discovered that the only source of happiness and peace is good (positive) thought, positive speech and positive actions.

Whether you are a Buddhist or non-Buddhist, a good action only produces good results, a bad (negative, harmful) action can only produce a bad (negative, harmful) result. Understanding that, we must always take responsibility for our thoughts, speech and actions on a daily basis if we seek happiness for ourselves and others.

4. The fourth foundation is that the NATURE OF SAMASARA IS SUFFERING.

Because of the nature of our minds we always hope that good times, loved people, and times of plenty will be permanent. However because of the very nature of material existence we are always destined to lose loved ones and favourite possessions, become sick and also suffer and die ourselves. There is good and joy in samsara but it is not permanent and no amount of clinging will make it so. There are no lasting results of this lifetime no matter how wonderful our good fortune. Only with the Dharma can we achieve lasting results that we can take into our future lives.

So the Four Foundations teach us that:

- this human life is precious and we must appreciate and use it for good.
- life is impermanent and relatively brief and we should not waste precious time.
- all happiness and suffering is the result of the law of karma.
- this world is transient and by its nature brings us suffering.