

# Class 6: Starting a Daily Practice

On the cushion, we contemplate the importance and necessity of Dharma practice. Off the cushion, we practice being aware and mindful in daily life.

The idea is that our **on-the-cushion practice will inform our off-the cushion practice**. This means we try to:

- become more mindful of our thoughts and actions; -
- let go of the negatives in our life; and –
- create a strong connection with mindfulness and awareness.

“**The Four Thoughts that Turn the Mind to Dharma**” or - “The Four Thoughts.”

## 1. The Preciousness of Human Life

Here, we contemplate that we are fortunate in two ways.

*First*, we’ve been born as a human being, with a human body and mind and all the other resources we have. *Second*, we’ve encountered the dharma, a genuine path of spiritual transformation. Both of these are **fortunate and rare**.

## 2. The Truth of Impermanence

This means this precious human life can end at any time. Now, this second contemplation is *not designed to make us morbid or depressed*. Instead, the idea is to motivate us to practice, by *reminding us of a fact of life that we’re in habitual denial about*.

This means we should *practice diligently now, while we can*.

## 3. The Truth of Karma

The Buddha taught: “We are what we think. “All that we are arises with our thoughts. “With our thoughts we make the world.”

This is the basic teaching on **karma**. All our words and actions begin as thoughts.

When we act on these thoughts, we create a **momentum and habit that eventually determines who and what we become**.

**We can either reinforce our confused states of mind. Or, we can discard them and embrace more enlightened states of mind.**

The element that divides positive from negative is selfishness.

## 4. The Defects of Samsara

This contemplation is about the dissatisfaction and suffering inherent in mundane, conditioned existence.

The need to look for lasting happiness beyond conditioned existence. - *let go of our clinging*, - *practice dharma*, and - *attain enlightenment*.

Once we've spent the beginning of our session contemplating The Four Thoughts, *we're ready to move on to the next part of our practice session*, which is shinay, or tranquility meditation.

**Shinay Meditation** When we begin our meditation session by contemplating the Four Thoughts, we increase our motivation and make our meditation more meaningful. Shinay trains us to: - relax our mind, - let go of negative thoughts, and - experience the peace that is part of our basic nature.

**When?**

**Where?**

**How Long?**

**At the beginning of the practice session, recite:**

### The Four Immeasurables

May all beings be happy and have the causes of happiness.

May they be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

May they never be cut off from the ultimate happiness, which is free from sorrow.

May they come to rest in the great equanimity (impartiality), which is free from attachments and aversions.

At the end of the practice session, recite:

### Dedication of Merit

Through this may all obtain omniscience.

May it defeat the enemy, wrong-doing

From the stormy waves of birth, old age, sickness and death

From the ocean of samsara, may we free all beings