

Precious Opportunity **Dan Brown, Kripalu, '08**

We're going to come full circle back to the beginning. As I said way back in the first days of the course, we're doing something irregular. We skipped over a whole sea of preliminary practices that are designed to make the mind fit, to try and see if we could work around the difficulties as much as possible and interferences. Had we begun with the preliminaries it starts with a series of reflections on motivation, things that are designed to enhance your motivation for the practice, and since you are leaving the course, we'll come full circle to those motivational practices, so that you can find a way of continuing these practices in your everyday life and be motivated to do that by seeing the preciousness of it. The problem in everyday life is the problem of getting lazy with it. I was once teaching the stages of the elephant path with Denmo Locho Rinpoche who was then the head of the Dalai Lama's monastery, Nam Kyel, and one of the western students asked him about laziness, and he said no, no, no, in the monastery the big problem is laziness, but for westerners your version of laziness is called busyness. So for those of us who are either lazy or busy, it means the same thing. It means that we don't find the occasion in our everyday life to keep doing what would keep us on track with these things.

So this is the first of the blo bzhi or attitude change meditations or motivational meditations. It's called precious opportunity. And the idea here is that in the scheme of infinite lifetimes that we all go through, the idea that we have a human birth is extremely rare, and the fact that we have a human birth with all of our faculties and reasonable health and available teachings and conditions to support the practice is remarkably rare. It's likened to turtle hunting. In the big lakes in Tibet they have these boats that sort of look like this, they're sort of round, coracles, and they're made out of yak hide, and they're not very stable because they're round and so if it's a choppy sea it's bouncing around and these turtle hunters go out there with a lasso in this boat that's bouncing around. And they wait for the turtle to poke his head up and see if they can they throw the lasso and try and catch the turtle and the odds that a turtle will poke his head up near the coracle on the one hand and that the boat is stable enough and that you can actually lasso the turtle aren't very high, and so finding a precious human life is like turtle hunting. The odds aren't very high.

So the way you do this meditation is it's sort of a rapid visualization. You bring to mind certain scenarios, and you imagine that that was your life. You feel your way into the life of some unfortunate being, and then you come back to here on the pillow and you contrast your here and now life circumstances to what you imagine. And each time you make the contrast it is said to deepen the preciousness of what you have.

Take your meditation posture and do something simple like the rising and falling of the breath and just concentrate. Bring to mind now all those that you can think of who suffer from serious physical conditions, life threatening conditions, HIV, cancer, those whose main preoccupation in life is simply staying alive, the pain and noxious medical procedures, suffering every day, so many people out there. I recall treating a lung cancer patient earlier this year, and the main thing was to help her to breathe somewhat easily, because it was so hard even to breathe. And imagine all those who suffer like that, whose main preoccupation is with just living without discomfort or pain. And let the scenes fade and return to being right here with the simplicity of watching the rising and falling enjoying reasonable health and the preciousness of this opportunity of life, of health.

Now bring to mind all those you can imagine who suffer from serious mental disabilities, mental retardation, so many people these days with dementia or Alzheimer's, schizophrenia. I think of my dad who died of mad cow disease, Creutzfeldt Jakob syndrome, and the hell realm that that was. Imagine so many people who lack the mental faculties to do even basic spiritual practice. And let the scenes fade and return to the simplicity of being right here and watching the rising

and falling and the preciousness of having your mental faculties and the intelligence to do this practice.

And now think of all those people throughout history who lived at times when there were no spiritual teachings available or no teachers. Even in Tibet all the dharma teachings disappeared for three hundred years after a king suppressed them. And so many people at so many times in history never had the occasion to even know that spiritual practice existed. And imagine that was your lot in life. And let the scenes fade and come back to the simplicity of the rising and the falling, here, right here, living at a remarkable time in history, when all the secret teachings have been dumped on the West. Everything is available. You can get them and pop them into your DVD player and get CEU credits for them. There's never been a time in history such things were available. And this week because of what was made available to me you've been given a complete explanation of all the teachings from the beginning to the end of the path, and you can take it with you and the recordings: the preciousness of the opportunity.

Now bring to mind all those throughout history who've lived in war-torn times where the environment is never stable enough to even consider spiritual practice, all the fighting and destruction, the sea of blackness and blood that's everywhere, right now throughout the world. And imagine that was your lot in life to live in a war-torn country. And then return to the simplicity of the rising and falling right here right now. Let the scenes fade. And even after 9/11 we live in a relatively safe environment. Most people don't have that. I recall in the mid-80's when I was serving as a trauma consultant during the Central American war I was interviewing a woman who said you don't understand we've known nothing but war for five generations.

And now think about all the masters who've walked this path and the hardships they endured, the avalanches and snowstorms in the mountains, the heat and disease potential of the jungles, practicing for many, many months with little food or bad food, and of course the insects. And let the scenes fade and return to the rising and falling, and note the preciousness of being right here in a comfortable environment with having everything to support you so you have to do nothing except practice. Few of the great masters had such supportive conditions. Note the preciousness of this opportunity.

And lastly think of all the masters who practiced alone, in isolation, rarely having anyone to talk with about their practice. It's usually the way it was. Imagine that was your lot in life. Return to the simplicity of the rising and falling being right here right now, right here with everybody else in this room, with all the unique and special people that you've shared this with, all supporting you as you find your way. And note the preciousness of this opportunity.

Let your vantage point be as stable as a mountain. Let your meditation become as vast as the ocean. Let whatever appears seem like the rays of the sun, empty and luminous. Let your fruition be recognizing your own face as the face of a Buddha.

