



### Teachings

**‘Reflecting on Impermanence and Living Life Fully’ – an edited excerpt from oral teachings given by Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, summer 2009**

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*Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche presented teachings from the A-Tri dzogchen tradition of Tibetan Bon Buddhism during Ligmincha Institute’s 2009 Summer Retreat. In this edited excerpt Rinpoche explains the practice of impermanence, one of the practices that comprise the A-Tri Ngöndro or preliminary practices.*

Taking time to meditate regularly on impermanence can help you to be more open, free, and resilient. Every time you have an experience that requires you to directly face the reality of impermanence, such as when you lose someone or something you care about, take some time to reflect on that situation, on the changes it brings to your life, and on what this means to you personally.

Look at your own body and the many changes it undergoes related to birth, old age, sickness,

and death. We all think of the human body as something very precious. But what makes this human life so very special and precious is that we are born in a time and space where we have access to the knowledge of the dharma, where we are able to engage in meditation practice if we want. Take the time to notice the beauty of what you have. Start the impermanence practice from that place.

In addition to reflecting on the preciousness of human life, you can reflect on your basic physical and emotional needs, the things needed to support this precious human life. What are the right foods you should be eating, what are the things you need for comfort? Maybe you will find your body is asking for healing, attention, love, and caring.

We all know that there are some things in our lives that we just love to do, right? Maybe you like to take time off to hike, bike, swim, or to see some beautiful artwork or to be with family or friends. You may think to yourself, "I'm going to do these things once I finish this deadline, or that job, or that project!" Somehow it just doesn't happen. We stay stressed out, fighting to simply get to the next step or the next goal. But there is always yet another step or another goal. We never seem able to stop and rest and give ourselves what we truly need in life; we never seem to live fully in the moment.

How are we going to end this cycle? What are the basic needs we should not put off? How can we take care of these needs? It is important to reflect on this.

At the same time, it is also important to not get stuck in the belief that we need things to be in a certain way. It can become an unending habit to think, "My body needs this; my body needs that." Instead, recognize that life is always changing and try to go with the flow. That is where the practice of impermanence helps, do you see? Reflect on living life fully with all of its changes.

Having a flexible view can make everything in life easier. For example, in this society people commonly make a distinction between work and fun. When someone asks "Are you traveling for work or for pleasure?" the subtle implication is that work is painful. People who live life without making this distinction are fortunate. They tend to have much less stress and tension and are more productive and joyful.

Change is inevitable. Life itself must come to an end, and nobody knows for sure when, where, or how they will die. It is true that we have needs and must accumulate some things in life, but this understanding must be balanced with the reality of impermanence. The needs we have in this life that are going to be met, will be met. But if certain needs are not being met, we must try not to struggle so much for them that we are swept up into a lot of tension and stress. If you drive others crazy trying to get something, you will drive yourself crazy as well!

Reflect, too, on the temporary nature of all relationships. Whoever you are with, no matter how beautiful the connection is, in the end you go your own way in life and they go theirs. But that does not mean a relationship can't be enjoyable. Life is actually much more fun knowing that it is impermanent.

So, look at your life and reflect on these three important aspects of the impermanence practice: Recognize the preciousness of your human body; acknowledge your basic needs in life; and accept the inevitability of change. We need to make the time to reflect on these three. Meditating in this way on impermanence can help prepare us for the challenging situations that arise in life.

The practice of impermanence helps us to let go of our attachments. When you let go, you suffer less and you live more fully. In the end that is what we want, isn't it? If you are suffering a lot, it means you are not letting go.

You see, when we come to realize the truth that there is no real solidity in this world, this realization helps us to turn our minds to the teachings, to the dharma. This lack of solidity does not mean nothing exists and that you should act irresponsibly; it is not like that. The effect of this realization is to turn you toward the teachings and toward your inner work as a practitioner. In your ordinary daily life it turns you toward being with family and friends, toward expressing your love for them, and toward fulfilling your basic needs as a human. As you recognize the impermanence of everything in this life, you turn in a positive direction and find fullness there. It is not just "Everything is dying, nothing is real." No, instead it is turning inward and finding a real fullness that permeates your whole life.

I truly believe that the practice of reflecting on impermanence can help you become more open, free, and connected. It can help you define what is valuable in life with more clarity and wisdom, realize the meaninglessness of many worldly things, turn away from the attachments of samsara, and be resilient in the face of change.