

THE SAYINGS OF PATRUL RINPOCHE – IN FOUR PARTS

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By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

INTRODUCTION: Profound Four-line Teaching

I have been studying and practicing dharma for a good many years now and in all of that time I have read many dharma books, texts, and teachings. And I have attended many hundreds of live teachings here in the U.S. and in Canada, Nepal, India, Sikkim, China, and Tibet.

Every once in a while a passage or text really hits me hard. It affects me and I take it deep within. This is the case with this very concise teaching from the dzogchen master Patrul Rinpoche (1808-1887). It is said to comprise in four lines the essence of this master's entire teachings. I can't speak to that, but I can assure you that in my experience these four lines are very profound and strike at the heart.

I want to share them here with those of you interested in this kind of mind training. Here are the four lines of Patrul Rinpoche:

“Don't prolong the past,
Don't invite the future,
Don't alter your innate wakefulness,
Don't fear appearances.

There is nothing more than that!”

Again, this very short teaching may roll off the tongue easily or pass through the mind without sticking, but I urge those of you given to such things to contemplate these four slogans. They are still 'working' inside me and over the next few days I would like to talk about each one and also see how they hit you. I will start with the first one tomorrow.

Michael



PART ONE

Patrul Rinpoche says:

"Don't Prolong the Past"

Again and again I find that the dharma confirms and gives me confidence in what I already sensed and knew but had no support in. This first slogan is the one that caught my attention and confirmed what I had discovered on my own, which went something like this:

The past has passed and is over, done with, and finished. It is only a memory for us, a memory that changes as we change our mind. This is the idea of the "Last Judgment." It is not how we view things right now that is the decider, but how we will view things when we finally get it all together that counts. In other words, everything short of our last judgment is prolog and premature. We may see it all differently as we become more kind, enlightened, or whatever-are-the-words, so why stick our finger in the wounds of the past when we can change our attitude about whatever our past is/was in the present.

I can't change my past by monkeying with it and my attempts to do so have been close to futile. My personal history is not like a time machine such that if I jiggle something in my past I somehow will turn out different. I can't fix the past. It is what it is, what it was, and it is gone. I have only the present now and it is the present that makes the past – any past.

Moreover, most attempts to analyze, re-think, re-imprint, regress, and otherwise modify the past do little to no good in my experience. And IMO this includes many kinds of therapies, counseling, analysis, and so on. I am not saying that these things don't have some benefit; they do, but it is a question of degree.

There is a much more immediate, easy, and successful way to handle the past, one that we can do now in the present. Simply create a new and (hopefully) more acceptable past right here and now in the present. We can each make a new past right now in the present moment by being mindful of what and how we act right now. The result will be a new past created now that we can more easily identify with than the one we are trying to forget, but which won't go away – haunts us with its baggage.

I have done this myself and seen it done by others. What we do right now and in future “now” moments will create a new and better past, one that we can own, live up to, and be proud of or at least accept. In even a short time our new past, if made mindfully and with care, will outshine whatever we are trying to forget, forgive, make amends to, etc. from history and time before.

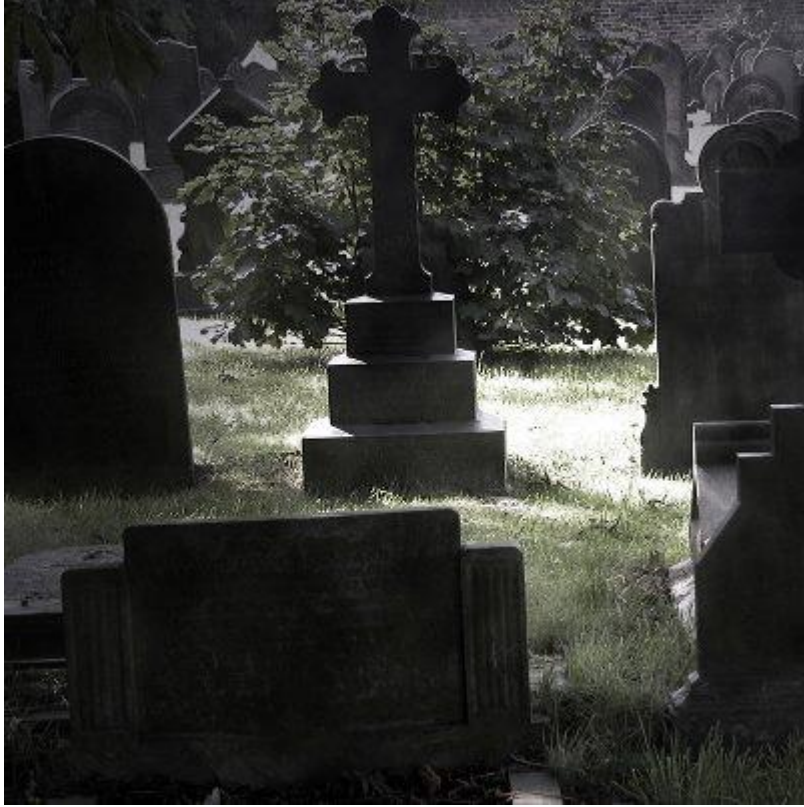
I am not saying that this is easy. I am saying it is ‘easier’ than trying to rejigger the past and somehow smooth over whatever we are trying so hard to forget from back then. The admonition to not prolong the past is great advice and it works. It says “Don't prolong the past,” don't mess with it trying to get it right and make a new start. Just make a new start and have the courage to be “pure’ in what we do, even in the face of all that we have done that we are not proud of.

My greatest obstacle has been thinking I am being a hypocrite by trying now to make small efforts to do better in the face of a past that speaks otherwise. I can remember when I was younger and I would go back to visit my parents. I felt I had made progress in being more mindful or a “better person,” only to have them draw me back into my same old behavior and then point it out to me: “See, you have not changed at all.” That is what I mean by the courage to make a new past in the face of all that we have done that suggests otherwise. It takes guts to change. We have to humble ourselves to our self. Anyway, let's hear from some of you on this concept.

For those of you who want to better understand the actual physical techniques of mindfulness please see my booklet “Training the Mind: A Brief Guide to Dharma Practice” at:

<http://astrologysoftware.com/books/index.asp?orig>

Tomorrow we will look at the second slogan (and corollary) “Don't Invite the Future.”



PART TWO

Patrul Rinpoche says:
“Don’t Invite the Future”

This is sometimes translated as “Don’t Beckon the Future” and we would not be far wrong to say “Don’t speculate” or don’t waste time dreaming if you are not going to do something to make your dreams real right here in the present. Some of you may have your own view on what this means. I am no expert; just trying to make sense of it. Let me hear you.

Just as we cannot change the past, neither can we figure out the future. If we could, all the Wall Street investors would be rich. Oops, they already are rich, but by probably through other means than intuition. Anyway, we all would be rich too if there was a sure-fire way to predict the future. There does not seem to be.

We might also rephrase this and say don’t speculate or don’t hope on the future. The Buddhists say that hope and fear are never our friends, but always obstacles.

Hope, dreams, plans for the future, etc. without action in the present take our energy and leave us with our pipe dreams but nothing else. For me, this slogan (just like the previous one) is saying that “now” is the only solution to anything -- past or future. When I was coming up I came up with a mantra I repeated to myself relating to my spiritual ideas: “For spirit must be made to matter.” Here is a fun poem about this concept some time ago:

WHO YOU ARE

If who you are is who you will be,
And who you will be will be,
Who you were,
Then,
Who you are is not,
Who you are,
Or
Who you will be.

So, who are you?



PART THREE

Patrul Rinpoche:
Don't Alter Your Innate Wakefulness

This is a little more difficult to grasp, but not much. It is like the game of Pick-Up-Sticks we used to play as kids, where you carefully remove sticks until there is nothing left to remove.

Wakefulness, awareness, enlightenment (whatever we want to call it) is not something that we have to somehow get or add on to ourselves but rather an innate quality already within us. We become more aware or awake not by accumulating any more of anything, but rather by removing the obscurations and whatever other baggage we have been carrying around.

Our innate or true nature has always been there, only it is obscured or hidden by our own various bad habits and what-not – our obscurations. It is like seeing through dirty glasses. We

have never managed to remove our obscurations and see clearly in all this time.

In other words we don't have to change or add or alter anything but rather just discover or uncover what is already there. We want to remove or take away what needs to be removed (whatever that is for us) revealing our innate nature.

Removing obscurations requires some kind of mind training and the most common type used throughout the world are the simple Shamata meditation and Tonglen practices, which for those of you interested are explained in this small booklet "Training the Mind: A Brief Guide to Dharma Practice" at:

<http://astrologysoftware.com/books/index.asp?orig>



PART FOUR
Patrul Rinpoche:

Don't Fear Appearances.
(Don't Be Deceived by Appearances)

There are two main or primary mind training techniques that generally are taught. One of course is sitting meditation (Shamata), which is learning to relax or let the mind rest in awareness. This is not as easy as it sounds and takes a considerable amount of practice to build the habits necessary to just let the mind rest. Most readers will probably have some awareness of this technique as it falls under the popular notion of "meditation."

However the above slogan "Don't Fear Appearances" essentially points to the lesser known (but also very important) technique known as Tonglen practice. In this technique whatever appears outside of our personal mandala (be it friend or foe) we learn to recognize as outside of us (as in: we mentally put it outside) and having recognized it, we take it in or integrate it, sending out

in return our very best and kindest energy back toward it. This is especially true if what appears outside ourselves frightens or intimidates us.

I am not speaking here of something frightening like a speeding car heading for us while in the crosswalk. In that case we should just step aside. I am referring here to things that appear as foreign or “other” to us, things or people that we instinctively dislike. It could be the co-worker at the office who somehow has polarized with us and every time we see them our hackles go up in fear or repulsion.

This is what “fear of appearances” refers to and this type of polarization is something we CAN do something about and Tonglen practice is an ideal technique to work with fear or antagonism. The point of this practice is to learn to be aware when we have designated or labeled someone or something as foreign to us and reacted or created a duality with it/them. Tonglen removes dualities in our life that we have created or that have been handed to us by society.

The Tonglen practice is the most efficient way I know to remove differences and to widen our world, learning to accept and get to know more and more of the so-called “otherness” out there as self-created. The slogan basically says not to judge from the external, not to read or take from the outside and react, and above all not to polarize ourselves from what we see out there. Make love, not war. I wrote a little poem years ago that expresses something of the nature of Tonglen practice.

OPEN

I am so round and such so,
A treading finally and letting go,
As spreading circles open so,
An even inward outward flow.

I won't describe the Tonglen technique here as it is explained (along with Shamata) in this small booklet “Training the Mind: A Brief Guide to Dharma Practice” at:

<http://astrologysoftware.com/books/index.asp?orig>

So there is a brief look at the four slogans of Patrul Rinpoche:

Don't prolong the past,
Don't invite the future,
Don't alter your innate wakefulness,
Don't fear appearances.
There is nothing more than that!”

I find them very pithy and to the point. Your comments are welcome.

Michael



Don't Fear Appearances