

I think "first, training the preliminaries" is about seeing ordinary/samsaric mind, and its inability to engage in practices like exchanging self for others, because its energy goes toward promoting/enhancing self's projections. So the intention is made to address that. The preliminaries seem to break down unwise motivations.

For instance, how can one treat all perceptions as dreams, if one hasn't spent time contemplating and considering impermanence and cause/effect (karma)?

A teacher online (lodro) wrote this week:

*If we die, our universe dies with us. The way the dharma works, we are kindly invited to the edge. This is not the edge of a precipice, but edge as periphery. We're invited to step aside and leave our watchtower. Instead we need to engage actively, from the edges working inwards. The first thing we encounter is a cremation ground and a wall with a gate. Obviously we need to acquaint ourselves with death and dying first. Then we can start our journey.*

So, in my own practice, we recite the "four thoughts that turn the heart toward the dharma", and my feeling is that it is a way of entering into practice with a kind of humility that fathoms the spectacular interplay of circumstances that appear to have brought one to a place of being privileged to practice for a fleeting moment ... to be open enough not to be an obstacle.

The natural extension of stirring this contemplation is less desire to protect self and therefore a stronger desire to connect/ability to see in a less frozen way, which is the only way many of the other slogans make sense.