

Preliminary/Foundational Practices

Hmm, I think we chose a topic but forgot to give ourselves a homework assignment last week (reminder to self!). It feels a little weird to write without an exercise (drawing more on memory than recent experience), but I'll just make a few notes anyway.

Last year, I attended a retreat that introduced Bon preliminary practices -- it was my first exposure to preliminary practices of any kind. My favorites were confession (without feeling guilty) and taking refuge (with all the other suffering beings). Although called "preliminaries," I came away with the feeling that I would not have been able to make heads or tails of these practices when first starting out. It makes sense that this set is also called "foundational" and that it could become the core practice for some.

The "four reminders" described in the [Wikipedia article](#) (preciousness of human birth, impermanence, samara, karma) could be read as suggestions on establishing the right motivations for practice; I'm curious how people take these and how they would describe their own motivations for practice. I see a relevance to the [discussion that started this workshop](#) -- and particularly that our modern way of practicing: "4. is more personal than before and in new way. Used to be centered around either 'action for others' or deconstruction of self etc., now more friendly to self and applied for reasons supplied by same." (Um, I think that describes my early motivations pretty well. What's interesting is the way my reasons have shifted with practice (and maturity) toward a more traditional definition).

A few more thoughts

This morning while sitting, there was this funny dreamy impression of breathing like cupcakes lined up in a pastry shop window, or rather the other way around -- each breath with a beginning and an end, nice and round, with cupcakes a worldly reflection of that delightful perfection. There was the sense of so many elements of our waking life as symbols of the dream (sort of flipping around the idea of dreams as a symbol of waking life).

I think such a flip is part of what I'm noticing about preliminary practices. As Eliza has pointed out, a lack of connection (to each other, to our own lives) is often what starts us off.