

The Wheel of Investigative Meditation

*A Thorough Training in Mental Analysis called
'The Wheel of Precise Investigative Meditation'*

By Mipham Rinpoche

*Translated by Adam Pearcey, based on a version prepared by Garth Copenhaver and Adam Pearcey
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(Title Headers Added)*

Homage

Namo mañjushriye!

The Problem

Whatever problems there are in the world
Are created by the afflictions in our own minds.
A mistaken attitude is a cause for the kleshas,
Yet the pattern of our thoughts can be refined.

1. How to Meditate on the Four Marks of Existence

Investigating the Body into Parts – Dissolving Fixation on the Quality of Being Unitary

Imagine someone who stirs in you intense attachment,
And consider them now present vividly before you.
Separate this person into five component *skandhas*,
And begin by investigating the physical body.

Consider all its impure substances
Of flesh and blood, bones, marrow, fat,
Internal organs, limbs and organs of sense,
Feces, urine, bacteria, hair, nails and the like,
And the components of earth and other elements.

Think of all these aspects, each of which
Can still be divided even further, and then,
Down to the very tiniest particle,
Mentally dissect them all stage by stage,
Checking whether you feel desire for each in turn.

Since there is nothing we could call “body”
Apart from these substances, varied and impure,
A body is nothing but an unclean contraption,
A bundle of muscles and fibres, a mound of waste,
And seething fluids that ooze and trickle.

Seeing this fact, sit and consider it mindfully.

Investigation of the Other Four Skandhas

Once the momentum of this insight fades,
Turn to feelings, perceptions, formations and consciousness,
And look into their nature,
By dividing them into their various aspects.

When you see them as insubstantial like bubbles,
A mirage, a plantain tree or a magical illusion,
You will understand how in these too there is nothing
To which one could ever be attached.

The Wheel Method of Contemplation

Continue with this thought until it fades.
Then, once it does, do not try to prolong it,
But turn instead to another investigation.

Investigation of Impermanence - Dissolving Fixation on the Quality of Persistence

Reflect deeply on how these aggregates,
Which are impure and lack real essence,
Do not remain once they have arisen,
But perish from one moment to the next.

All the civilizations and societies of the past,
Met with only destruction in the end,
And so will those of today and ages yet to come.
The nature of the conditioned can inspire disenchantment.

Death is certain for all living things,
Suddenly it comes, and without warning.
Reflect on how all that we experience in life
Is changing from one moment to the next.

In summary, to the best of your ability,
Consider all the aspects of impermanence
That characterize conditioned things.
Reflect on each in turn with lucid thoughts.

Recognize how the aggregates of those that we desire,
Are transient as lightning, evanescent like bubbles,
And fleeting like clouds in the sky.
Until the momentum of this idea fades,
Focus your attention on nothing else.

Investigation of Suffering - - Dissolving Fixation on the Quality of Purity

Then consider how within each of the aggregates,
Which are momentary and consist of many aspects,
There are experiences we might describe as pain itself,
And those that seem pleasant until they change.

Yet they all provide the cause for future woes,
And thus the skandhas are the basis of suffering.
Reflect as well, as much as you are able,
On all the misery there is within the world.

All is due to the skandhas' imperfections.
There is not the tiniest speck or pin-tip's worth
Of these contaminated aggregates
That is free from the defect of suffering.

As they are the source of suffering,
The skandhas are likened to a filthy swamp,
A pit of burning coals or an island of demons.
Remain with this insight for as long as you can.

Investigation of Essence - Dissolving Fixation on the Quality of Self

At the end, investigate these aggregates,
Which have many aspects and are impermanent,
And whose suffering nature has now been shown,
And look for what it is that we call "I."

When you see that, like a waterfall,
A shower of rain or an empty house,
They are devoid of any intrinsic self,
Remain until this conviction fades.

The Wheel Method of Contemplation

When it does disappear, then once again
Investigate in the stages as they have been shown.
Sometimes contemplate in no particular sequence,
Or else investigate a variety of things.

Practice investigating these points again and again,
Sometimes considering another's aggregates,
Sometimes looking into your own,
And at times, analyzing all that is conditioned.

Let your attachment to anything be undermined.
In short, renounce any thought that does not

Involve an investigation of these four points
[Multiplicity, impermanence, suffering and selflessness.]

And turn the wheel of analysis again and again.
The more you analyze, the more your certainty will grow.
Apply therefore a clear mind of intelligence
To all kinds of observations just like these,
And, like wildfire spreading across a grassy plain,
Practice continually without interruption.

Say to yourself: "In the past, I would always
Get caught in my mistaken ideas and attitudes,
Which led to all kinds of useless speculation,
But now I will consider only this instead."

If you find yourself getting tired,
Yet notice that the afflictions still do not arise,
Even without your applying the antidote,
Then rest in equanimity to refresh your mind.

After a while, once your tiredness is no more,
Repeat the investigation just like before,
At all times being mindful and aware
Of the insight the investigation brings.

If, at times, you slip into forgetfulness,
And the afflictions have occasion to arise,
Then take up this investigation once more,
Like reaching for a weapon when enemies appear.

2. The Measure of Progress

Result

Just as light will banish darkness,
It is almost needless to say that
A precise investigation such as this,
Even if it is only practiced a little,
Will do great harm to the kleshas.

However much one understands the flaws
Of this conditioned samsaric world,
One will also understand the unconditioned,
Nirvana's supreme and refreshing peace.

Seeing the Four Marks

Eventually, through familiarity with this practice,
You will naturally appreciate how everything
Included within the five skandhas and the unconditioned
Is manifold, impermanent, painful and devoid of self.

Even without any deliberate effort,
The whole of your experience
Will seem magical and insubstantial,
And you will overcome the kleshas.

This is the Basis for Shamatha and Vipashyana

When it is free from the waves of the afflictive emotions,
The ocean of your mind is made serene and calm.
This is conducive to gaining mental self-control,
Through which one reaches the samadhi of calm abiding.

If you can then look into the very identity
Of the mind in one-pointed concentration,
That is the extraordinary insight of vipashyana.

It is here that one finds the initial entry point
That is common to all three vehicles.

3. The Unity of Emptiness and Luminosity as Buddha Nature

Emptiness & Buddha Nature

All illusory phenomena which arise interdependently,
Have never arisen since the very dawn of time,
And so in emptiness--the lack of phenomenal identity—
They are beyond extremes such as sameness or difference.

This absolute space of great indivisible equality,
Is also known as the essence of the sugatas.
Once it is realized, one finds the great nirvana
That abides in neither existence nor quiescence.

This is supremely pure and blissful,
The great unconditioned, totally permanent,
The great self-identity—these are its
Transcendent and unsurpassable qualities.

The Tantric Perspective

This is the theme of the highest secret essence tantras,
The all-pervading space of ultimate co-emergent bliss,
It is also referred to as 'naturally arising wisdom,'
A state in which all phenomena have total perfection.

To introduce this directly through the master's
Pith instructions is the approach of the Great Perfection.

The Progressive Path

Therefore, as a preliminary training
For the mahayana path of both sutra and mantra,
Breaking through the shell of confusion surrounding the conditioned,
This path of precise investigation is excellent indeed.

First, through the power of fine analysis,
One destroys the marks of rising afflictions.

Then through confidence in the emptiness of the aggregates,
One lets go of desires and hopes based on the three realms,
And eventually, by progressing in stages, all conceptual notions
Are pacified completely within the state of emptiness.

Not wishing for any antidotes or further relinquishing,
One is freed entirely from attachment and clinging to extremes.

With the purest compassion beyond attachment,
One courses through existence without the slightest fear,
Like a bird soaring through absolute space,
And attains the level of a supreme bodhisattva.

4. The Conclusion

Pointing out the Purpose

Based on the texts of noble masters, I have here explained
The important points of the paths of the three vehicles,
Which provide a training in mental investigation,
As a preliminary to the paths of shamatha and vipashyana.

The more familiar you become with this practice
Of thorough training in investigative meditation,
The more the afflictions will diminish,
And the subtler the kleshas will become.

This will make it easier to practise shamatha,
And just like gold that is treated in fire

So it becomes malleable and ready to craft,
Mind will be refined once it is freed from attachment.

Praising the Sublime Benefits of this Practice

Imagine if someone were to offer plentiful gifts
To the Three Jewels for a thousand godly years.
It is said in the sutras that the merit of this generosity
Is surpassed by the merit of even a moment's reflection
On impermanence, emptiness and selflessness.

This is because the teachings say that
To recite the Four Seals of the Mahayana Dharma
Is equivalent to understanding the teachings
In the eighty-four thousand sections of the Dharma.

If you meditate well on the points explained here,
Since they bring together the key points of many thousands of sutras,
You will easily gain the treasure of knowing perfectly the profound and vast,
And liberation will swiftly follow in its wake.

The Author's Aspiration

By the virtue of this explanation, may all beings
Tormented by the troubles of this degenerate age,
Meet this elixir-like teaching on non-attachment,
And, through its power, reach a state of perfect peace.

*This was written by Mipham Nampar Gyalwa in the Iron Hare year [1891] on the 18th day of the tenth month.
Mangalam!*