

# Putting the Instruction on the Purification of Mental Activity into Practice

*by Mipham Rinpoche*

*Namo guru!*

When putting the instruction on the purification of mental activity into practice remain in solitude and adopt conduct that is conducive to concentration. Focus your mind on the difficulty of obtaining the freedoms and advantages and so on as a means to inspire enthusiasm for the meditation. Visualize the Blessed Teacher, King of the Śākya, on the crown of your head surrounded by the saṅgha of the greater and lesser vehicles. Perform the seven-branch offering (*ji nyé su dak...etc.*),<sup>1</sup> and make the following prayer with fervent and heartfelt devotion: “Inspire me with your blessings, so that the stages of the practice for purifying mental activity arise in my own mind and the minds of all sentient beings here and now, while I remain upon this very seat!” Generate bodhicitta by thinking, “I will attain the level of perfect enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. And it is for this reason that I now meditate on the stages of purifying mental activity.”

## **Multiplicity**

To begin, imagine that someone to whom you feel attached, or the object of your practice, whoever that might be, appears before you. Then consider that they are dissected like a corpse in a charnel ground, beginning at the right eye socket and continuing with the skin, flesh, bones, and internal organs. Consider the smell and other features of each part as it is dissected. Continue the process, mentally dissecting each of the thirty-six impure substances right down to the level of the subtlest particles, and develop a deep understanding of the inherent flaws of the physical body. Then, in the same way, divide the flesh and bones of the body according to their elemental components: solidity as the earth element; warmth as the fire element; breath as the wind element; blood, urine and so on as the water element; and cavities as the space element. These elements with their different characteristics are combined and contained within the body like a mass of poisonous snakes. Direct the eye of your intelligence to the body’s hollowness or mask-like character. The pace and duration of the session are not predetermined; meditate until everything arises clearly in your mind.

The sūtras say that when grains such as rice, barley and corn are placed together in a pile, a skilled person may separate them by identifying what is rice, what is barley and so on; and in the same way, by dividing the constituents of the aggregates and analyzing each one in turn it is possible to understand how they are a multiplicity. First, consider form in the way described. Then, when you have gone through the contemplation once clearly in this way, consider sensations, which are divided into

pleasant, painful and neutral. Even pleasant sensations have further subdivisions, according to whether they arise from seeing a pleasant form, hearing a pleasant sound, and so on. Analyze and dissect these sensations according to their multiplicity. Then, afterwards, consider perceptions. There are various forms of perception, including good, bad and neutral, as well as all the various forms of perception classified according to their particular object—be it a pillar, vase, horse, ox, man, woman, or whatever. Develop conviction that the aggregate of perception, too, includes a multiplicity of phenomena, given that there are so many different forms of perception. After this, consider what is known as the aggregate of conditioning factors. Since conditioning factors associated with mind include the various mental events—with the exception of sensation and perception—such as attention and contact, they too are a multiplicity. For example, there are several virtuous mental states, including faith and conscientiousness. There are also several different forms of nonvirtuous mental state, such as lack of faith and lack of conscientiousness, as well as attachment and aversion, and so on. Even within a single mind of attachment or non-attachment there are particularities of object, time and features, so that the subdivisions are beyond limit. Conditioning factors thus consist of a multiplicity of various phenomena. Consider then how there are six types of consciousness, from visual consciousness through to mental consciousness, and how each has its own subdivisions. Visual consciousness, for example, includes the apprehension of blue, the apprehension of yellow, and so on. Analyze clearly how these constitute a multiplicity of different types.

A sūtra says:

Form is like a mass of foam,  
Sensations are like bubbles on water,  
Perception is like a mirage,  
Formations are like a plantain tree,  
And consciousness is like an illusion.  
So says the Kinsman of the Sun.

When you develop a special certainty that this is how things are, rest in that state without becoming subject to forgetfulness for as long as you can. When the impression fades, rather than seeking to prolong it, turn instead to the contemplation of impermanence.

## Impermanence

All entities, once they have come into being, do not remain as they are in the second instant but undergo immediate change. From the very first moment they arise until their final moment of cessation, they are subject to a continuous process of transformation. It does not matter whether something is like lightning, which disappears in a single instant, or the outer world, which endures for an aeon, as long as it is conditioned it will pass through a succession of moments during which it arises and ceases anew. Settle in the understanding that everything is similar to a waterfall or the flame of a lamp. Meditate on how all worlds—environment and inhabitants alike—are formed and ultimately perish, on the passing of the four seasons in the external world, and on the phases of life and changes in circumstances—youth and old age, high and low status, happiness and sorrow—that beings must pass through. Consider your own experience and what you have witnessed and heard concerning others. Meditate in these various ways until you develop clear certainty that all conditioned things resemble flashes of lightning, bubbles on water, or clouds.

## Suffering

When the momentum of this notion fades, investigate once more these tainted aggregates, the assemblies of various elements in constant flux, which never remain static even for an instant. Consider how, leaving aside their continuity and the coarser level of appearance, even in each passing moment, experiences of pain constitute the *suffering of suffering*, whereas moments that seem to have the nature of happiness are still liable to cease at any time and thus, being part of a constantly evolving stream, constitute the *suffering of change*. No matter whether you experience happiness, suffering or equanimity in the present moment, still, it is as if you had eaten poisonous food: there is not a single moment of experience that will not become a cause of future suffering. It is on the basis of earlier moments that subsequent moments arise; if previous moments were somehow incomplete this would obstruct the arising of their effects. All moments therefore function as causes for future suffering and thus constitute the *suffering of conditioning*.

Reflect on how the defiled aggregates included within the three realms relate to these three types of suffering until you are certain that the aggregates are the basis for suffering and similar to a pit of fire or filthy swamp. In addition, contemplate the individual sufferings of the six classes of beings, such as the intense heat and cold of the hells, and all the aspects of suffering you have seen or heard about, including the pain you have experienced directly. The sequence and duration of the reflection are not predetermined. You should simply reflect as much as you can on all the various major and minor forms of suffering within existence. Recognise that these different forms of suffering, which are so difficult to bear, will continue to arise, again and again without end, until the noble path is reached. Recognise too that they all emerge from the stream of tainted aggregates that are the basis of grasping. Continue this

reflection until a recognition of their inherent faults arises from deep within and you develop certain conviction.

### **Selflessness**

Remain in the state of mind that this certainty induces for as long as it has momentum. Then, when the force of the notion begins to fade, consider these five conditioned aggregates, which, through the certainty that the three investigations carried out so far has elicited, are now understood to be impermanent, multiple and painful by nature. Although we presume that these aggregates constitute a person or a self in relation to which we think, “I am,” they have no such inherently existent self, person or “I” whatsoever. Reflect on this, and consider how you would recognise the absence of a snake in a mottled rope in plain sight, and how the eyes of intelligence may similarly perceive the absence of a self in what are merely aggregates composed of assembled particles and successive moments, labelled as a self only where there is no investigation or analysis.

Generally speaking, selflessness is the most important point to realise. Still, this does not mean that it should be the exclusive focus, since emphasising the three preceding investigations makes it easier to understand the final one; that is to say, the momentum that they bring removes some of the difficulty. Here too, you should meditate until certainty concerning selflessness fades. When other thoughts begin to stir do not fall prey to their influence but carry out the analysis once again, beginning with the multiplicity of the aggregates. Meditate by focusing on each stage in turn and ensuring that you reach a decisive understanding of every point. Sometimes investigate your own aggregates, sometimes analyse the aggregates of others, and sometimes consider conditioned phenomena in general. Practise whichever of these three forms of analysis you prefer.

Dedicate the virtue at the end of the session and then rest in natural ease. If you are practising in multiple sessions, try to keep the wheel of analysis turning without interruption, like wildfire spreading through grass, so that there is no opportunity for other superficial thoughts to intervene. Should you grow mentally tired or fatigued, allow yourself simply to relax without contemplating anything at all. If thoughts stir, think to yourself: “What is the point of trivial preoccupations? I shall steer any movement of mind towards this most appropriate form of mental activity.” By doing so repeatedly you will arrive at a point where deliberate focus effortlessly induces an intensely powerful conviction and allowing the mind to settle during breaks between sessions causes the points of the contemplation to course spontaneously through your mind, bringing great benefit. These stages of meditation based on the sūtras are easy for anyone to understand, irrespective of their level of intelligence. They bring vast benefit without the need for exhaustive reasoning and make it possible, once the practice has become familiar, to realize the key to all dharmas. Thus:

Teaching is not paramount, meditation is.  
When meditating don't teach but learn deeply.  
To teach without meditating is to be like a parrot.  
Practise, therefore, this analytical meditation.

As requested by Pema Gyaltzen,  
Who provided the paper on which to write,  
I, Mipham, wrote down concisely  
Whatever came to mind during a tea-break.

*Maṅgalam.*

| Translated by Adam Pearcey, 2021.

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1. I.e., The seven branches from The King of Aspiration Prayers: Samantabhadra's "Aspiration to Good Actions" (Zangchö Mönlam) ←



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