

Questions for Inquiry Re-organized

Beginning the inquiry process can be daunting. After working with the process for some time with several people, I realized that just as the Dharma is meant to be practiced in a non-linear, holistic way and just as the four noble truths are likewise universal and non-linear, the inquiry process might be best approached from a new angle.

Starting with wise understanding seemed important, followed by moving into some compassionate investigation of negative self talk, and perhaps dishonesty towards oneself. From there, understanding is built by exploring the cause of suffering, in the 2nd noble truth and then hope is cultivated by discussing the reality of the end of suffering in the 3rd noble truth.

From this place it becomes easier to direct effort into recovery with compassion and understanding, and in so doing cultivate the skillful application of meditation through wise mindfulness and concentration. After establishing the practice and putting effort into recovery for some time, one might be ready to explore the harm that has occurred in life with a new perspective. Wise speech with a broader focus is a starting point for this, followed by the 1st noble truth inquiry, which can be heavy. The 4th noble truth, with its emphasis on taking refuge, seemed a good place to come back to after the 1st noble truth inquiry, especially with its encouragement to connect to sangha. Amends is next with wise intention and wise action gives us the opportunity to begin applying the 5 precepts in daily life. Finally, after a period of recovery, we can investigate and perhaps recommit to wise livelihood.

Questions for Inquiry of Wise Understanding:

Think of a situation in your life that is causing confusion or unease.

- What is the truth of this situation?
- Are you seeing clearly, or are you getting lost in judgment, taking things personally, in stories you're telling yourself, or repeating past messages you've internalized? How?
- Is your vision clouded by greed, hatred, confusion, clinging, attachment, or craving? How?

In what situations and parts of your life do you have the most difficulty separating desire from need?

Are there areas or relationships where the drive to get what you desire overshadows any other consideration? Has this changed as you began or continue in recovery?

Are there parts of your life where you are driven to continue unpleasant experiences because you think you "must" or "need to?"

How is karma—the law of cause and effect—showing up right now?

Where in your life are you dealing with the effects or aftermath of action you took in the past, both positive and negative?

Questions for Inquiry of Wise Speech - Self:

Have you caused yourself harm with your speech? How?

Have you been dishonest or harsh in your self talk? When does this happen most often, and in what specific ways?

Do you use speech now to hurt yourself or control your behaviours, or to present a false idea or image of yourself or of reality?

Do you say things you know are not true about yourself? What are they?

Questions for Inquiry of the Second Noble Truth:

List situations, circumstances, and feelings that you may have used harmful behavior to try and avoid.

List the emotions, sensations, and thoughts that come to mind when you abstain.

Are there troubling memories, shame, grief, or unmet needs hiding behind moments of craving? How can you meet these with compassion and patience?

What things did you give up in your desire to cling to impermanent and unreliable solutions? For example: did you give up relationships, financial security, health, opportunities, legal standing, or other important things to maintain your addictive behaviors? What made the addiction more important to you than any of these things you gave up?

Are there any beliefs you cling to that fuel craving and aversion, beliefs that deny the truth of impermanence, or beliefs about how things in life “should” be? What are they?

Questions for Inquiry of the Third Noble Truth:

What makes it so hard to quit?

What resources are available to help you abstain and recover?

List reasons to believe you can recover. Also list your doubts. What might the wise and compassionate part of you—your Buddha nature—say about these doubts?

Practice “letting go” of something small. Notice that the craving doesn’t last and that there’s a little sense of relief when you let it pass. That’s a little taste of freedom.

Questions for Inquiry of Wise Effort:

What efforts have you made to connect with a wise friend, mentor, or dharma buddy who can help you develop and balance your efforts?

Think of a situation that is causing you discomfort or unease. What is the nature of the effort you're bringing to the situation? Pay attention to whether it feels balanced and sustainable, or if you're leaning too far in the direction of either inactivity or overexertion?

Are you dealing with overwhelming desires, aversions, laziness or discouragement, restlessness and worry, or doubt about your own ability to recover? How do these hindrances affect the choices you're making?

Are you avoiding feelings by checking out and giving up, or through obsessive busyness and perfectionism?

Questions for Inquiry of Wise Mindfulness:

What are steps you can take to support a regular meditation practice?

What are steps you can take to practice mindfulness more throughout the day by checking in with yourself about how you're feeling, and pausing before reacting to situations?

What are steps you can take to sit with your discomfort instead of running from it or running toward temporary pleasure?

What are steps you can take to question the "truths" that your mind tells you, rather than automatically believing them? Identify specific instances where your mind and perceptions "lied" to you about the truth of a situation, and how being aware of that might have changed your reaction and led to a less harmful outcome.

Think about times when you felt fear, doubt, or hesitation. Now bring an awareness of their temporary nature. How might that awareness have led to an outcome that was less harmful?

Questions for Inquiry of Wise Concentration:

How do you get unfocused or distracted in meditation? What distracts you the most?

What are steps you can take to refocus your mind without judging your own practice?

Notice what value or learning you could gain by carefully and kindly noticing where your mind has gone, or what has distracted you?

What are steps you can take to use concentration to see clearly and act wisely?

What are steps you can take to be kind and gentle with yourself through this process?

Questions for Inquiry of Wise Speech - Expanded:

Have you caused harm with your speech? How?

Have you been dishonest or harsh in your communication? When, and in what specific ways?

Do you use speech now to hurt or control people, to present a false idea or image of yourself or of reality, to demand attention, or to relieve the discomfort of silence? Detail specific instances in which you used speech to mislead, misdirect, or distract.

Are you careful to avoid causing harm with your speech?

Do you say things you know are not true, or pretend to know the truth about something when you don't, to appear more knowledgeable or credible than you are? List some examples.

Questions for Inquiry of the First Noble Truth:

Begin by making a list of the **behaviors** and **actions associated with your addiction(s)** that you consider harmful. Without exaggerating or minimizing, think about the things you have done that have caused harm to yourself and others.

For each behavior listed, write how you have suffered because of that behavior, and write how others have suffered because of that behavior.

List any other costs or negative consequences you can think of, such as finances, health, relationships, sexual relations, or missed opportunities.

Do you notice any patterns? What are they?

What are the ways that you might avoid or reduce suffering for yourself and others if you change these patterns?

How have your addictive behaviors been a response to trauma, attachment injury, and pain?

What are some ways you can respond to trauma, attachment injury, and pain that nurture healing rather than avoiding?

Questions for Inquiry of the Fourth Noble Truth:

Understanding that recovery and the ending of suffering is possible, what is your path to recovery and ending the suffering of addiction? Be honest about the challenges you might face, and the tools and resources you will use to meet those challenges.

What behavior can you change to more fully support your recovery?

What does it mean to you to take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha for your recovery?

Questions for Inquiry of Wise Intention:

If you're experiencing a difficult situation or choice in your life right now, investigate the intention you are bringing to this situation.

- Are you being selfish or self-seeking? How?
- Are you being driven by aversion (running away from an unpleasant experience) or craving (grasping for pleasure)? How?
- How could you bring in a spirit of generosity, compassion, lovingkindness, appreciative joy, and forgiveness to this situation?
- How would this situation look different if you brought these factors to mind *before* reacting or responding?
- If you don't want to, can you at least have the intention and willingness to do so?

During your periods of addictive behavior, how did you act in ways that were clinging, uncaring, harsh, cruel, or unforgiving and toward whom (including yourself) were these feelings directed?

How might generosity, compassion, lovingkindness, and forgiveness have changed your behavior?

What actions have you taken that have harmed others? consider actions taken outside of your addictive behaviors that have not previously been identified.

Have you formed an intention to reconcile with both yourself and the person or people you've harmed (to make amends)? If so, have you found a wise friend or mentor you can go to for guidance and support in the amends process, which is summarized below? What support can this person provide as you begin the process of amends?

Intention Toward Making Amends

- Have you done something intentionally that you now recognize caused harm to another? Who has been harmed by your actions?
- Have you honestly formed the intention not to repeat harmful actions and to learn from the experience in future interactions? Have you begun the process of directly addressing the harmful actions of your past?
- Making amends depends on the circumstance, including your present relationship to the person and the extent to which you can undo the harm caused through direct actions (like correcting a public dishonesty or compensating another for things you have taken that were not freely offered). Ask yourself, “What can I do in the present?”
- Can you address and reconcile with the harm you have caused without forming an attachment to being forgiven? Identify the motivation for making each amends.
- What actions would restore balance in your own feelings and approach to whatever harm you have caused? Can these steps be taken without causing new harm to the person or the relationship?

Questions for Inquiry of Wise Action:

Have you acted in a way that was unskillful or that created suffering? How?

During those times you were unskillful or created suffering, how would it have changed the outcome if you had acted out of compassion, kindness, generosity, and forgiveness? Would you now have a different emotional or mental response to your past actions if you had acted with these principles in mind?

First Precept:

- Have you caused harm? How? (Allow for a broad understanding of harm, including physical, emotional, mental, and karmic harm as well as financial, legal, moral, or other forms of harm.)

- Even if you can't point to specific harms that you have caused, have you acted in a way that purposely avoided being aware of the possibility of harm?

Second Precept:

- People “take” in many ways—we take goods or material possessions, we take time and energy, we take care and recognition. With this broad understanding of taking, have you taken what has not been freely given? How? What are specific examples or patterns where this has been true for you?

Third Precept:

- Have you behaved irresponsibly, selfishly, or without full consent and awareness (from yourself or partners) in your sexual conduct? How?
- Reviewing your sexual partners or activities, have you been fully aware in each instance of other existing relationships, prior or current mental or emotional conditions of yourself and your partner(s), and your own intentions in becoming sexually involved? How or how not?
- Has your sexual activity, both by yourself and with others, been based on non-harmful intentions? Have you entered into each sexual activity with awareness and understanding? How or how not?

Fourth Precept:

- Have you been dishonest? How?
- What patterns did your dishonesty take?
- Did you act or speak dishonestly to deny or misrepresent the truth about your own behavior or status?
- Were there particular situations in which your dishonesty was particularly present (for instance: when dealing with your addictive behaviors, in job or professional settings, among friends, with family)?

Investigate the source of the dishonesty in each setting—was it based on greed, confusion, fear, denial? Why were you lying?

Fifth Precept:

- Have you used intoxicants or other behaviors that cloud your ability to see clearly?
- What substances and behaviors have you become reliant on to change or cloud your awareness? Has this changed over time, or, if you have periods of abstinence, were your habitual intoxicants or behaviors replaced by other ways to avoid awareness of your present circumstances and conditions? How?

Questions for Inquiry of Wise Livelihood:

Does your job cause harm? What is the specific nature of that harm?

How can you do your job more mindfully and with an intention of compassion and non-harm?

Do you bring an understanding of karma and kindness to your job, or do you compartmentalize it and exclude it from awareness of wise action?

What part does greed play in the choices you make in your livelihood?
Does greed get in the way of awareness or compassion?

How can you be of more service in your community?

How might you bring a spirit of generosity to your life, both in your profession and outside it?