

Treasure Trove 4: The Mandala of Ignorance

Now we have roughly set out the basics of what mind is and how mental events arise, it's time to dive into the much more familiar world of *our* mental events. That is, all our reactions. Much of the time, we are responding to moments of circumstance that trigger us somehow. The perspective we now have on our experience is incredibly useful, and I hope this gets clearer as we go on.

The way we are seeing things currently, life consists simply of moments with different mental events in them, shifting into other moments, with a shift in the mental events as well. That is what goes on all the time. And when we see this clearly, we have it all in the palm of our hand. Because we always have some capacity to intervene and influence the next moment. This is the true value of 'being in this present moment': if we are tuned into its content, and if we are alert, we can change the next one. In terms of the nidana chain, in dependence on feeling arises craving. Or it could be hatred. Or it could be any of the positive mental events, or any of the root kleśa, or any of the secondary ones. Each of these is a particular response to what life dishes out to us, moment by moment. We are reacting in every single moment.

And it is possible to see this as it happens. It is possible to do that right then and there but it is easier to notice after the event, and sometimes it is a long time after. Usually at the time we notice, we recognise, we samjna--"something". We don't know what it is.

And maybe there is a response which causes us to suppress that thought we just had, and cover up the memory with another thought that justifies our response. These movements within the citta can be subtle or they can be very explicit. For example maybe someone says something that feels somehow threatening. They don't mean it to be so but our response is to go on the defensive. Again it maybe very slight, but it's enough to make the communication go a bit funny.

Then we feel that oddness, and we respond to that inwardly with a justification that hardens our position. We were right and this is why. And we resolve to stick by that justification. So here you see a series of rather unhelpful emotions.

And actually the series never ends. It has never ended. We go on to other feelings, other stimuli, other reactions, on and on forever. Many of these chains of reaction become habitual. This is what is known as 'becoming' -

we are becoming whatever we turn out to be, all the time, and the end product is us as we are right now at this very moment. Sometimes people say about someone, "they were never the same again after that." Actually we are never the same again, ever. We are constantly moving on.

Knowing this is an incredibly useful and powerful tool.

So on our A4 sheet the three lists of positives, root and secondary klesas, show us the main ways that people react.

First, let's go to the Root Klesas. Doubt, Greed, Ill Will, Conceit, Ignorance and Views. I will say more about these tomorrow but let's have a brief dekho.

The primary one is Avidya, Ignorance. If we created a mandala of Klesas, this would go in the middle, perhaps along with Drsti, Views, as their consort. While we are unawakened we are influenced by Avidya all the time. Essentially, A-vidya means we don't know, we are in the dark, we are acting out of ignorance. This is huge. And we construct all these ideas that give us some kind of stability and sense of identity, that is we construct our views, construct them out of ignorance. So View or Wrong View and Ignorance belong together. Then two more klesas spring forth from Ignorance at the centre of the mandala. In the East: Pratigha, Ill Will, Aversion. In the West: Raga, Craving, Greed, Clinging. The ignorant responses of pushing away what is disliked and clinging to what is liked. Then spring forth two more: in the South: Mana, Conceit. In the North: Doubt. Conceit is clinging to a self as a way to find some kind of stability in the darkness of ignorance. Doubt is a delusion also based on clinging to self, that blocks energy, and poisons our actions.

And the mandala, the dark mandala, gets even denser sometimes. Suddenly out of the Eastern Quarter of Pratigha there leap out five more klesas based on illwill - Krodha, Rage; Upanaha, Resentment; Pradasa, Defensiveness; Irsya, Envy; and Vihimsa, Malice. What a horrible crew!

But wait, there's more. Suddenly, out of the Western Quarter come four secondary klesas based on Craving: Matsarya, Avarice; Mraksa, slyness-concealment; Maya, Deceit; and Sathya, Dishonesty. Lovely.

And then, another leap, this time from the Southern Quarter, there leaps forth a klesha based on Conceit: Mada, Intoxication or self Intoxication

Another leap, from the Northern Quarter of Doubt, and four more klesas pop up. Asraddha, Lack of Faith; Ahrikya, Lack of Shame; Anapatrapya, Disrespect.

And then there is an explosion from the Central Region of Ignorance and Wrong View and seven really complicated klesas pop up: Kausidya, Laziness; Styana, Stagnation; Pramada, Heedlessness; Asamprajanya, Purposelessness; Musitasmrtita, Unmindfulness; Auddhatya, Restlessness; and finally Viksepa, Distractedness otherwise known as Mind Tossing.

Happily.. there is a positive mandala that arises - perhaps you could say out of the six klesas or in a sense they arise in a positive reaction to those six negative tendencies.

From the centre, instead of Laziness we have, with a cheer perhaps: Virya, Positive Energy. Instead of Stagnation, Prasrabhdi, Serene and Tranquil energy. Instead of Heedlessness, Purposelessness and Unmindfulness, Apramada, Heedfulness and vigilance. Instead of Restlessness and Distractedness, Upeksa, Equanimity.

From the East, instead of all the Hate-inspired klesas, there springs Advesa, Goodwill, and Avihimsa, Compassion!

From the West, instead of Greed, springs Alobha - Contentment!
From the South, instead of all the Egoistic Conceit, springs forth Amoha, Clarity!
And from the North, that horrid realm of Doubt, come three of the brightest: Sraddha, Confidence or Faith; Hri, Shame or Integrity; and Apartrapya, Respect!

What a lot of beauties. We never mentioned the four variables, Torpor, Worry, thinking of and thinking about, because they don't fit in very easily, since they can be positive or negative. Slippery.

So there we have the whole mandala. When we did the Book of the Dead last year we discovered a practice where you visualise all the 100 deities of the Bardo Thodol in different parts of your body. This seems a bit similar somehow. I think we could find deities, or make them up, that correspond to each of these states.

Anyway, I think that mandala gives a good way to imagine how all these mental events relate to one another, and to us as well. Maybe I can try and draw it.

Maybe also this overview gives us some way we can also think about the way each moment of our life is populated with various mental events, and

as life moves on, moment by moment, we have new choices all the time.

Thank you.

Now Vajrasattva.