



This document is an extract from the full chapter which is available for download in the table via this [link](#) and is intended for use by participants of meetings.

45 - Penetrating Inquiry as a Support

The navigator's chart-work and the 'Lamp of Curiosity'

"Practitioners, there are wholesome and unwholesome states... wise attention, much practised, is the nutriment for the arising of the unarisen investigation-of-states enlightenment factor." ~ Gotama (The Buddha)

"The greater the doubt, the greater the awakening; the smaller the doubt, the smaller the awakening. No doubt, no awakening." ~ Zen Proverb

When 'Liberating Mindfulness' is steady, something else naturally awakens: *curiosity*: we start to notice more. The mind grows interested in what is happening, moment by moment – not in order to fix ourselves, but to understand experience more clearly. Instead of getting swept into the story, attention turns towards curiosity – the lived details: what a state feels like in the body, how it changes, what seems to feed it, and what allows it to fade. In the early teachings, this is called the second Factor of Awakening: *investigation of states* – what we are calling 'Penetrating Inquiry'. Once mindfulness is steady, attention naturally begins to explore experience more closely, and the next phase of the journey becomes less about repair and more about understanding.

Penetrating Inquiry is the first member of the ‘Energising Triad’ (Penetrating Inquiry, Enthusiasm, Energising Joy) introduced in Chapter 43. Its specific tactical role is to counter the Hazard of ‘Tuning Out’ (Sloth and Torpor). When the mind becomes heavy, dull, or uninterested – like a fire dying down – we don’t add the *wet grass* of more calmness or relaxation. Instead, we add the dry fuel of *curiosity*. ‘Penetrating Inquiry’ works by engaging ‘Appropriate Attention’. It shifts the mind from a passive, checking-out state into an active, wondering state, breaking the trance of dullness by asking simple, experiential questions: “What is the texture of this heaviness?” “Where is it felt?” “Is it permanent?” In the very act of looking, ‘Enthusiasm’ is generated – and ‘Energetic Joy’ follows. This is a clean kind of energy: brightening without agitation.

Self-reflections

1. Do I mistake worrying and analysing for genuine investigation?
2. When an unpleasant emotion arises, do I try to get rid of it, or can I lean in and see what it’s made of?
3. Do I treat thoughts as facts, or can I recognise them as events passing through awareness?
4. Can I tell the difference between the story of an emotion (“I’m upset because...”) and the felt reality of it (pressure, heat, heaviness, movement)?
5. How does it feel in the body when I’m trying to fix experience compared with when I’m simply observing it? Which one is tighter?
6. When I bring inquiry to experience, does it make the mind brighter and clearer – or tighter and more agitated? What does that tell me about whether I need more investigation, or more calming supports?
7. Can I sense inquiry emerging naturally from mindfulness — a gentle leaning-in – rather than using it as another *tool* to control experience? What changes in the body and breath when inquiry is effortless rather than forced?

Journaling prompts

1. **Outcome comparison:** Describe two different responses to the same challenge this week: one rooted in reactivity (habit) and one rooted in inquiry (curiosity). How did the outcomes differ?
 2. **Starving the narrative:** Select a recurring resentment or worry. Write out the story the mind tells. Then write the raw physical sensations present when the story is left alone.
 3. **Signature of release:** Write a sensory description of the moment a difficult state dropped away. Was it sudden or gradual? What replaced it?
 4. **Question bank:** Draft five short questions that brighten curiosity (for example, “What is this?”, “Where is this felt?”, “Is it solid?”). Keep these as a pocket practice.
 5. **Navigator’s log:** Record a moment when Penetrating Inquiry acted as a light that made the safe course visible in the midst of confusion.
 6. **The Spark:** Describe a time when you felt mentally sluggish. What happened when you applied interest to the sluggishness itself?
 7. **From seeing to doing:** After a curious pause today, note the one wise or kind action that became obvious. How did the *seeing* lead to the *doing*?
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Remember to remember

We are no longer just bailing water; we are learning the physics of the ocean. Penetrating Inquiry is the Support that turns difficulty into understanding, not by explaining everything, but by looking closely enough for illusion to loosen. In this stage we stop mistaking a wave for a command, or a mood for a verdict. The Navigator does not argue with the storm or blame the sea. The Navigator studies the conditions – the direction of the wind, the pull of the current – and learns how to set the sail so the raft continues toward the Safe Shore.

This kind of inquiry is not the anxious mind searching for certainty. It is the clear mind learning how experience works – and, at times, rediscovering a quiet sense of wonder: the surprise and mystery of what is here before

habit names it and rushes ahead. When we ask “What is this?” we step out of rumination and return to direct contact: heat, pressure, tightening, release; arising and passing; a state becoming stronger or fading. In the very act of seeing, something shifts – reactivity has less to grip, and the system finds its balance. With practice, this curious clarity becomes a reliable inner light: it helps us recognise what leads toward freedom, and what leads back into entanglement, so that wiser action can follow naturally.

“Thinking does not solve the problems of life, but it can prevent catastrophes.” ~ Hannah Arendt

“The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity.” ~ Dorothy Parker

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