

## MINDS AND MENTAL FACTORS

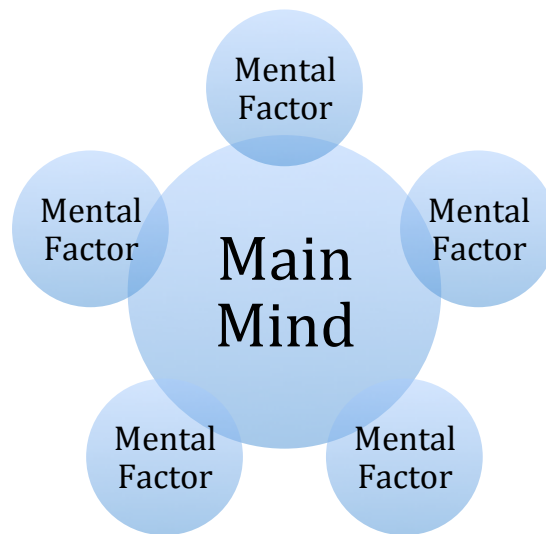
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Another way of dividing awarenences (that which is clear and knowing) is into minds/main minds and mental factors. What is the difference between these?

- A **main mind** (tso sems / གཞོ་སེམས་) is an awareness that knows the mere entity, or mere presence, of an object.
- **Mental factors** (sem jung/ སེམས་རྒྱུད་) apprehend various features of the object, and affect the way the mind apprehends the object.

Minds and mental factors always work together, never separately—a main mind can never exist by itself without mental factors accompanying it, and a mental factor can never exist by itself without accompanying a main mind. For example, when we look at a flower, there is an eye consciousness (a main mind) and together with it (as if in the same package) there are a number of mental factors. The main mind knows just the entity of the object, the flower, and the mental factors engage with the object in different ways—e.g. feeling experiences it as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral; discrimination distinguishes the flower and its details (colors, shapes, etc.) from other types of objects; if attachment is present, it sees the flower as a source of happiness and wants to possess it; and so forth.

*Each mental event consists of a main mind & a number of mental factors (at least five)*



Several analogies are used to help us understand the relationship between main minds and the mental factors that accompany them. One analogy is that the main mind is like the main part of a hand, and the mental factors are like the fingers. Another is that the main mind is like a president, and the mental factors are like his or her ministers, or secretaries, each with their own portfolio.

The term “retinue” is sometimes used for the mental factors that accompany a main mind, e.g. “the feeling that is in the retinue of that consciousness.” Another term used is “concomitant” or “having similarity,” e.g. “the feeling concomitant with / having similarity with that consciousness.”

A main mind and the mental factors accompanying it are one nature/entity, and have **five similarities** (tsung den nga/ མཚུངས་ལྡན་ལྔ་):

1. Basis/support: they arise in dependence on the same uncommon empowering condition, i.e. the sense power (eye sense power, etc. through mental sense power).
2. Object of observation: they observe the same object.
3. Aspect—e.g. regarding an eye consciousness seeing blue, both the main mind and its accompanying mental factors are generated in the aspect of blue (like a reflection in a mirror).
4. Time—they arise, abide, and cease simultaneously.
5. Substance/substantial entity –this is explained in different ways: (a) Geshe Rabten says it means their cognitive nature is always the same, e.g. mistaken or unmistaken, conceptual or non-conceptual, etc. (b) Yeshe Gyaltsen’s text on Mind and Mental Factors says it means that in the retinue of a main mind, there can arise only one mental factor of a similar type, e.g. there can be only one feeling, one discrimination, etc.

The mental factors can color or flavor the mind. For example, if a virtuous mental factor such as faith is present, the main mind and other mental factors concomitant with it become virtuous; likewise, if a non-virtuous mental factor such as anger is present, the main mind and other mental factors concomitant with it become non-virtuous. And such states of mind, in turn, influence our actions. Geshe Rabten says: “It is the mental factors that are primarily responsible for leading us to all forms of experience. When the mind is under the influence of unwholesome mental factors, such as attachment and anger, one is led into committing actions that cause experiences of frustration and suffering. But whenever the mind is dominated by wholesome factors, such as compassion and patience, then any ensuing physical and vocal activity will only result in happiness and wellbeing.”

### **DIVISIONS OF MAIN MINDS**

Main minds can be divided into **two** – **sensory** and **mental** – according to whether they arise in dependence on a physical sense power (the eye sense power, etc.) or the mental sense power (the previous moment of mind).

Main minds can also be divided into **six** (according to which sense power they depend on): eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness, and mental consciousness (the sixth can be non-conceptual or conceptual).

## DIVISIONS OF MENTAL FACTORS

There are different ways of enumerating the mental factors in different Buddhist traditions:

- Theravada Abhidharma lists 52 mental factors:
  - 7 universal
  - 6 occasional
  - 14 unwholesome
  - 25 beautiful
- *Abhidharmakosa* by Vasubhandu (Vaibhasika school) lists 46 mental factors:
  - 10 omnipresent
  - 10 virtuous
  - 2 non-virtuous
  - 6 great afflictions
  - 10 small afflictions
  - 8 indefinite
- The Sautrantika school lists 51 mental factors (this explanation is common to Cittamatra and Madhyamaka):
  - 5 omnipresent
  - 5 object-ascertaining
  - 11 virtuous
  - 6 root unwholesome
  - 20 secondary unwholesome
  - 4 changeable

Details of the above lists can be found on Wikipedia [Mental Factors (Buddhism)]. The article says: These lists of mental factors are not considered to be exhaustive; rather they present significant categories and mental factors that are useful to study in order to understand how the mind functions. The Dalai Lama has said: “Whether the system includes fifty-one mental factors or more or less, none of those sets is meant to be all-inclusive, as though nothing is left out. They are only suggestive, indicative of some things that are important.”

Here are the 51 mental factors according to Sautrantika from *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* (p. 59-68):

### **The five omnipresent mental factors**

These accompany all main minds. Without them complete cognition of an object cannot occur.

1. *Feeling* is an experience of pleasure, pain, or neutrality. Feeling experiences the results of our past actions and can lead to reactions of attachment, anger, confusion, and so forth.
2. *Discrimination* functions to distinguish “it is this and not that” and to apprehend the characteristics of an object. It differentiates and identifies objects.
3. *Intention (cetanā)* moves the primary consciousness and its accompanying mental factors to the object. It is the conscious and automatic motivating

element that causes the mind to involve itself with and apprehend its object. It is action, karma. Although the mental factor of intention itself is not constructive, destructive, or neutral, it becomes so depending on what other mental factors—such as attachment or anger—accompany that mental state.

4. *Attention* (mental engagement, *manaskāra*) functions to direct the primary consciousness and its concomitant mental factors to the object and to actually apprehend the object. It focuses and holds the mind on an object without allowing it to move elsewhere.
6. *Contact* (*sparśa*) connects the object, cognitive faculty, and primary consciousness, thereby acting as a basis for feelings of pleasure, pain, and indifference. It is the cause of feeling.

### **Five Object-Ascertaining Mental Factors**

These are so-called because they apprehend the individual features of an object. The *Treasury of Knowledge* says that these five accompany all mental states, whereas the *Compendium of Knowledge* asserts that they accompany only virtuous mental states. These five are not themselves virtuous, but become virtuous because of being associated with a virtuous mental state. In this case, the mindfulness accompanying a mental consciousness that apprehends and has aversion toward a repulsive object would not be the mindfulness of the five object-ascertaining mental factors, but would be a different mental factor similar to it.

1. *Aspiration* (*chanda*) takes a strong interest in an intended object and is the basis for joyous effort.
2. *Appreciation* (belief, *adhimokṣa*) stabilizes the apprehension of a previously ascertained object and holds it such that it cannot be distracted by another view.
3. *Mindfulness* (*smṛti*) repeatedly brings to mind a phenomenon of previous acquaintance without forgetting it. It does not allow the mind to be distracted from the object and is the basis for concentration.
4. *Concentration* (single-pointedness, *samādhi*) dwells one-pointedly for a sustained period of time on a single object. It is the basis for developing serenity and increasing wisdom.
5. *Wisdom* (understanding, intelligence, *prajñā*) functions to discriminate precisely with analysis the qualities, faults, or characteristics of an object held by mindfulness. It cuts through indecision and doubt with certainty and maintains the root of all constructive qualities in this and future lives. There are various types of intelligence:
  - a. Inborn intelligence is natural acuity of mind that comes as result of karma from previous lives.
  - b. Acquired understanding or wisdom is cultivated in this life. A person may have it with respect to various topics of the stages of the path. It is of three types:
    - i. The understanding or wisdom arising when hearing, learning, or studying a topic. It brings initial knowledge of the topic and lays the foundation for the other two types of understanding.

- ii. The understanding or wisdom arising from critical reflection or contemplation is generated by thinking about a topic on our own or debating and discussing it with others. Through it, we gain a correct conceptual (inferential) understanding of the topic
- iii. The understanding or wisdom arising from meditation is derived from deeper personal experience when understanding of the topic arises automatically in our mind because we are very familiar with it.

### **Eleven Virtuous Mental Factors**

The eleven virtuous mental factors cause the omnipresent, object-ascertaining, and variable mental factors to take on a virtuous aspect and bring peace to oneself and others. Each of the eleven is an antidote to particular afflictions.

1. *Faith* (confidence, trust, *śraddhā*) is confidence in such things as the law of karma and its effects and the Three Jewels. It produces a joyous state of mind free from the turmoil of the root and auxiliary afflictions and is the basis for generating the aspiration to develop new constructive qualities and enhancing virtuous aspirations already generated. It is of three kinds: Inspired faith knows the qualities of the object and rejoices in them. Aspiring faith knows the qualities of the object and aspires to attain them. Convictional faith (believing faith) knows the qualities of the object and has confidence in it.
2. *Integrity* (*hrī*) avoids negativity for reasons of personal conscience. It enables us to restrain from harmful physical, verbal, and mental actions and is the basis for ethical conduct.
3. *Consideration for others* (*apatrāpya*) avoids negativity for the sake of others. It enables us to restrain from harmful physical, verbal, and mental actions, acts as the basis for maintaining pure ethical conduct, prevents others from losing faith in us, and causes joy to arise in the minds of others.
4. *Nonattachment* (*alobha*) is not the mere absence of attachment, but the opposite of it and the direct antidote to it. Referring to an object in cyclic existence, nonattachment prevents and counteracts attachment and subdues obsession with attractive objects and people.
5. *Nonhatred* (*adveṣa*) is the opposite of animosity—it is love and benevolence, not just the absence of anger and ill will. When referring to someone who harms us, the harm itself, or the cause of the harm, it has the characteristic of love and directly overcomes anger and hatred. It is the basis for the prevention of anger and the increase of love, benevolence, forgiveness, and fortitude.
6. *Nonconfusion* (*amoha*) is the opposite of confusion. Arising from an inborn disposition and nurtured by study, reflection, and meditation, it acts as a remedy for confusion and ignorance and accompanies the firm wisdom that thoroughly analyzes the specific meanings of an object. It prevents confusion, increases the four types of wisdom or understanding, and helps to actualize constructive qualities.

7. *Joyous effort (vīrya)* counteracts laziness and joyfully engages in constructive actions. It acts to generate constructive qualities that have not been generated and to bring those that have to completion.
8. *Pliancy (flexibility praśrabdhī)* enables the mind to apply itself to a constructive object in whatever manner it wishes and dissipates any mental or physical tightness or rigidity.
9. *Conscientiousness (apramāda)* values the accumulation of virtue and guards the mind against that which gives rise to afflictions. It brings to fulfillment and maintains all that is good, keeps the mind from pollution, and is the root for attaining all grounds and paths.
10. *Nonharmfulness (noncruelty, avihimsā)* is compassion. Lacking any intention to cause harm, it wishes all sentient beings to be free from suffering. It prevents disrespecting or harming others and increases the wish to benefit and bring them happiness.
11. *Equanimity (upekṣā)* does not allow the mind to be greatly affected by agitation and laxity without having to exert great effort to prevent them. It enables the mind to settle and remain on a virtuous object and is important for the development of serenity. This equanimity differs from the equanimity of the four immeasurables and the equanimity that is a neutral feeling.

### **Six Root Afflictions**

These are the primary causes of cyclic existence and are the root of cause of the auxiliary afflictions. They are the basis for all distorted conceptions and emotional conflict. The six are: attachment, anger, arrogance, ignorance, deluded doubt, and afflictive views.

### **Twenty Auxiliary Afflictions**

The twenty auxiliary afflictions are branches of the root afflictions and similarly disturb the mind. These are: wrath, resentment, spite, jealousy, cruelty, miserliness, haughtiness, agitation, concealment, dullness, laziness, lack of faith, forgetfulness, nonintrospective awareness, pretension, deceit, lack of integrity, inconsideration for others, heedlessness, and distraction.

### **Four Variable Mental Factors**

These are neither virtuous nor nonvirtuous in themselves, but become so in dependence on our motivation and the other mental factors that accompany the same mental state. The four are: sleep, regret, investigation, and analysis.

Colophon: These notes were compiled by Sangye Khadro from various sources, including *Mind and its Functions* by Geshe Rabten (Edition Rabten), *A Necklace for Those of Clear Awareness Clearly Revealing the Modes of Minds and Mental Factors* by Ye-she Gyel-tsen (an FPMT Masters Program translation), and *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* by The Dalai Lama and Thubten Chodron (Wisdom Publications.)