
Mind and Mental Factors

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

5 October 2001

As usual please establish a virtuous motivation for listening to the teaching.

We are now going to talk about Mind and Mental Factors. Mind plays a very important part in our lives, and therefore it is essential to understand what mind is. As long as we don't control our mind, then whatever actions we engage in, to accomplish happiness or to avoid suffering, will not be successful. The attainment of happiness and suffering depends upon controlling our mind, which in turn depends upon knowing the make-up of our mind.

1. Mind

Out of Mind and Mental Factors, mind is the main one. Mental factors are described as the entourage of mind. What do we refer to as mind? *Mind is a main consciousness distinguished by mainly apprehending the identity of the object.*

Mind, main mind, consciousness and main consciousness are synonymous.

1.1. Divisions of Mind

Main mind has a six-fold division into the six types of consciousness. We mentioned these in past teachings. They are the eye consciousness and so forth. We have six types of consciousness apprehending the six types of objects, by depending upon the six types of empowering conditions. There are six types of empowering conditions, such as the eye sense power and so forth, in dependence upon which the individual consciousnesses, like the eye consciousness and so forth, arise. These then apprehend the individual objects, such as form and so forth.

If one narrows the six-fold division of consciousness down, then it can be condensed into a two-fold division of mental consciousness and sense consciousness.

1.2. Relationship Between Main Consciousness and Mental Perception

We said that the main consciousness and consciousness are synonymous, so it is important to posit a difference between main consciousness and mental perception.

- Eye consciousness, for example, is a main consciousness, but it is not mental perception.
- The mental factor of feeling in the entourage of mental main consciousness is a mental perception, but is not main consciousness.
- The main mental consciousness is the main consciousness, as well as mental perception.
- The mental factor of feeling in the entourage of eye consciousness is neither a mental perception, nor main consciousness. The mental factor of feeling in the entourage of eye consciousness is not a main consciousness simply because it is a mental factor, and it is not a mental perception because it is sense perception.

The same four-fold relationship between main consciousness and mental perception can also be found between sense perception and main consciousness.

2. Mental Factors

We said before that the main characteristic of mind is that mind mainly apprehends the general identity of the object. Mental factors mainly apprehend the differentiating characteristics of the object. *A knower that mainly apprehends the characteristics of the object and has a concomitant mind.*

Because the Sautrantika tenet asserts self-knowers, the definition of mental factors says 'and has a concomitant main mind'.

The reason for this is that self-knowers will also apprehend the characteristics of their objects, but a self-knower is not a mental factor. So in order to eliminate self-knowers as mental factors the definition mentions that a mental factor also has to have a concomitant mind together with it. Self-knowers don't have concomitant minds.

For tenets that don't assert self-knowers, it is enough to say, 'a knower that mainly apprehends the characteristics of its object'.

Mind and the mental factors in its entourage are concomitant by way of five aspects. One aspect is time. Mind and mental factors are concomitant through time, meaning that they are established simultaneously. Mind and mental factors are established simultaneously, and they are of one identity but of a different isolate. Everything that is of one identity, has to be necessarily of a different isolate.

The Tibetan word for mental factor is called *Sems Byung* (pron *Sem Jung*), which literally translates as 'arising from mind'. When we hear the Tibetan word for mental factor, the idea one gets is that mental factors arise from mind. Just now, we said that a mental factor and the mind arise at the same time, and that the mental factor is regarded as the entourage of the main mind. The main mind is like a king, who has an entourage of various mental factors that always come together with him.

As we explained before, the six types of consciousness arise in dependence upon the basis of the individual empowering condition of the various sense powers, and they do so independently. The mental factors also arise in dependence upon the sense powers, but not independently. They arise in dependence upon the main mind, in the same way as the entourage depends upon the king. They don't have their own base, as they rely on the base of the main consciousness. Therefore, because they have to rely on the base of the main consciousness, they are regarded as the entourage of that main mind. Also, because their focus will always be the same as the focus of the main mind, they are regarded as the entourage of that main mind.

Coming back to the original question, if they are always simultaneous with the concomitant mind, why are they termed as 'arising from mind'? It is because they arise from a preceding mind.

Every main mind has a concomitant mental factor of contact as well as feeling. The definition of contact mentions that contact acts as the basis for feeling. This again refers to a feeling that follows. Contact is the basis for feeling but not for the feeling arising simultaneously with it. It is the basis for the following feeling. In the same way mental factors are termed as 'arising from mind'. They don't arise from the mind with which they are concomitant, but from a preceding mind.

2.1. The Five Concomitant Aspects

Mind and mental factors are concomitant by way of the five aspects of base, focus, aspect, time and substance.

2.1.1. Base

The first of those five aspects with which they are concomitant is base. *Base refers to the uncommon empowering condition of the main consciousness.* For example in the case of eye consciousness, the uncommon empowering condition is the eye sense power, and this is the basis through which the eye consciousness and the various mental factors (which are its entourage) are concomitant. As we said before, they both arise in dependence upon the uncommon empowering condition of the eye sense power. It is not the case that the eye consciousness arises in dependence upon the basis of the eye sense power, and then the mental factor concomitant with the eye consciousness

arises in dependence upon another base. They both share the same base of the sense power.

2.1.2. Focus

The second aspect by which the eye consciousness and its concomitant mental factors are concomitant is focus. For example the eye consciousness apprehending blue is first generated in dependence upon the uncommon empowering condition of the eye sense power, and it is also generated in dependence upon the focal condition of blue. This focus of blue is shared between the eye consciousness and its concomitant mental factors.

2.1.3. Aspect

Thirdly, the eye consciousness and its mental factors are concomitant by aspect. This means that the eye consciousness arises in the aspect of blue, and also its concomitant mental factors arise in the aspect of blue. Both arise in the aspect of blue.

2.1.4. Time

The fourth aspect by which they are concomitant is time. As we said, *the eye consciousness and its concomitant mental factors are established simultaneously*. This means that they are generated simultaneously, abide simultaneously and disintegrate simultaneously.

2.1.5. Substance

The fifth aspect by which they are concomitant is by substance. They are *concomitant by being individual substances*. In the entourage of one main consciousness we will always find only one mental factor of feeling and one mental factor of contact and so forth. We will never find two mental factors of feeling in the entourage of one main consciousness.

2.2. Divisions of Mental Factors

There are fifty-one mental factors, which are:

- the five ever-present mental factors
- the five determining mental factors
- the eleven virtuous mental factors
- the six root delusions
- the twenty secondary delusions
- the four changeable mental factors.

2.2.1. The Five Ever-Present Mental Factors

The first set, the five ever-present mental factors, are called that because *every main consciousness will always have those five mental factors in its entourage*. Without a complete set of these five mental factors in its entourage, a consciousness would not be able to engage its object. As we said before, the mind is like the King, or in Australia like the Prime Minister. Each main mind has various mental factors that are like the Ministers. The Prime Minister has the general view of what is happening in the country, and he gets this overview through his individual Ministers informing him about the various situations in their portfolios, or their various specialities.

This is like the relationship between the main mind and the mental factors. If a main mind is not concomitant with the five ever-present mental factors it will not be able to engage its object.

2.2.1.1. Intention

The first of the five ever-present mental factors is the mental factor of intention. *Intention has the function of directing the mind without choice to its object*. If a mind weren't concomitant with the mental factor of intention, it wouldn't be directed to any kind of object. The mental factor of intention, which is karma, directs the concomitant main mind without choice to object.

2.2.1.2. Attention

Then we have the mental factor of attention. This is quite

similar to intention, but there is a slight difference. Attention places our mind on the focal object. We can observe this in meditation when we try to place our mind on the object of meditation. This happens through the mental factor of attention. The mental factor of intention directs the mind without choice to its object. If we didn't have the mental factor of intention, then the mind wouldn't be directed to any kind of object. On top of this we need attention to make the mind apprehend, or grasp the object to which it was directed. Without attention there would be no placing of the mind on the focal object.

2.2.1.3 Recognition

Then we have the mental factor of recognition. If the main mind didn't have the mental factor of recognition one couldn't distinguish between various objects. One couldn't distinguish blue or woman and so forth. The mental factor of *recognition apprehends the various distinguishing characteristics of the object*.

2.2.1.4 Contact

Without the mental factor of contact there wouldn't be any basis for apprehension and perception. *Apprehension of an object comes about through the coming together or contact of sense power, consciousness and object*. Without the mental factor of contact there wouldn't be any basis for the various perceptions to arise.

2.2.1.5 Feeling

There is also the mental factor of feeling. Without feeling there wouldn't be any *experience of the object*.

That completes the etymology of why those five mental factors are called the ever-present mental factors, explaining why they always need to be present.

2.2.2. Five Determining Mental Factors

The second set of mental factors is called the five determining mental factors. Their *function is determining the particular objects*. They will only be in the entourage of realisers, that is of minds that realise their objects.

2.2.3. Eleven Virtuous Factors

The next set is the eleven virtuous mental factors. They are called virtuous mental factors because they *act as the antidote to non-virtuous states*. For example faith acts as the antidote to non-faith. We also have a set of three, detachment, non-anger and non-ignorance, which act as the antidotes to attachment anger and ignorance. If a mental state acts as an antidote to any one of the delusions it is a virtuous state of mind. Therefore these eleven mental factors are called the eleven virtuous mental factors, because they are concomitant with virtuous mental states. Later when we go through the eleven virtuous mental factors individually we will explain in greater detail how they act as antidotes to various disturbing states of the mind, delusions and secondary delusions.

2.2.4. The Six Root Delusions

The fourth set is the six root delusions. They are called the root delusions because they are the six *mental states that are mainly responsible for the disturbances in our mind*. These six mental states are called root delusions because they represent the six main causes that afflict our mind. They are the six main causes responsible for making our mind unsubdued and unsuitable.

One can elaborate those six delusions into ten, because the sixth root delusion called wrong view can be divided into five types of wrong view. So if one wants to become an expert in root delusions, one can elaborate them into ten.

2.2.5. Twenty Secondary Delusions

Now we come to the fifth set which are the twenty secondary delusions. The twenty secondary delusions belong to *a family of*

any one of the six root delusions. For example the first secondary delusion is wrath. Wrath is a stronger form of anger, so it belongs to the family of anger. It is the same for all the other secondary delusions. They are usually stronger aspects of the six root delusions.

2.2.6. Four Changeable Mental factors

The sixth set is called the four changeable mental factors. We have for example sleep, regret and so forth. They are called changeable mental factors because *by themselves it is not definite whether they are virtuous, non-virtuous or neutral.* Depending upon the motivation from which they arise, they can be virtuous, non-virtuous or neutral.

We forgot to mention before that the main mind will always come together with the five ever-present mental factors. However there is no pervasion that they will always be in a manifest state. They can also be in a latent state. During the death process there is a stage where the breathing stops, and sometime after this the subtle mind of death becomes manifest. At this time the five ever-present mental factors are present, but in a latent state not in a manifest state. At that time one doesn't recognise any kind of object, the mind becomes neutral, and no virtuous or non-virtuous mental states are present.

That completes the general etymology of those six sets of mental factors. Now we can go through them one by one.

2.2.1 Five Ever-Present Mental Factors

We start with the five ever-present mental factors and the first is feeling.

2.2.1.5. Feeling¹

The mental factor of feeling is characterised **by being in the nature of experience.** Feeling and aggregate of feeling are synonymous.

Feeling has various divisions. There is a two-fold division, a three-fold division and a five-fold division.

Two-fold Divisions of Feeling

a. The two-fold division is physical feeling and mental feeling.

Physical feeling is divided into feeling associated with the five sense consciousnesses. Each of the sense consciousnesses has a concomitant mental factor of feeling. Physical feeling is synonymous with outer feeling.

Then we have **mental feelings**, which are the feelings associated with the various mental consciousnesses. There are mental feelings concomitant with the various types of mental consciousness. Mental feeling is synonymous with inner feeling.

b. Feeling can be divided into common feeling and superior feeling.

Common feeling is contaminated feeling. It is the feeling arising through contact with ordinary objects. This refers to our everyday feelings, which are all contaminated.

Then there is the **superior feeling** arising in the mental continuum of an Arya being. These feelings are uncontaminated feelings.

Three-fold Division of Feeling

Then we have a three-fold division of feeling - happiness, suffering and equanimity. As we have been saying, feelings are in the definition of experience. Feelings experience the various objects. Happy feelings experience happiness, suffering feelings experience suffering and equanimity experiences equanimity.

Happiness experiences the ripening result of virtuous karma.

Suffering experiences the ripening result of non-virtue. There is a pervasion that if it is happiness then it has to be the experience of the mental factor of happiness. If it is suffering, then it has to be the experience of the mental factor of suffering. However there is no pervasion that if it is equanimity it has to be the mental factor of equanimity.

There are three types of **equanimity**.

- The mental factor of equanimity
- Boundless or immeasurable equanimity, which is one of the four immeasurable thoughts
- The equanimity experienced in meditation which is one of the eleven virtuous mental factors

Five-fold Division of Feeling

Then we have the five-fold division of feeling.

- happiness
- mental happiness
- suffering
- mental suffering
- equanimity

This five-fold division of feeling includes happiness and mental happiness. Happiness refers to the physical feeling of happiness, as opposed to mental happiness. If we talk about mental happiness in the context of the five-fold division, then we say that mental happiness is not happiness. That is because in this context happiness refers to physical happiness, which is different from mental happiness. Of course in general mental happiness will be happiness.

It is the same for suffering and mental suffering. Suffering in the context of the five-fold division of feeling refers to physical suffering, which is different from mental suffering. In the context of the five-fold division, mental suffering is not suffering, even though it will be suffering in general.

Of the five ever-present mental factors, this completes the first one, feeling, and The second one is recognition. We can do this one next time.

© Tara Institute

¹ From the Compendium of Knowledge: What is the definition of feeling? The definition of experience. The identity of experience through which the ripening of the results of virtues and non-virtues karmas are individually experienced.