

The 51 mental factors

– a brief introduction –

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INTRODUCTION

The root of samsara as well as of liberation lies within the mind. We have the choice and might ask: What is the mind which is the root of samsara, and what is the mind conducive to liberation? What is actually a ‘healthy’ mind from the point of view of the dharma, a mind that is apt to attain liberation? What is a healthy personality structure conducive to liberation?

When looking in meditation we see that a continuity of a so-called self or person at a given time cannot be found. The illusion of a ‘self’ falls apart, since there is always space between one’s thoughts, there are always moments of discontinuity. The only thing we can find are mental factors operating from instant to instant. These determine our mental functioning and make up what we usually call a “person”. An individual is described, according to the Buddha, as being the agglomeration of **five aggregates** (*skandha* in Sanskrit, *phung po* in Tibetan), the first one representing the physical or material aspect or “body” and the other four representing the knowing mind (tib: *shes-pa*). It is the constant presence and interaction of these five which is mistakenly perceived by dualistic mind as “I” or “self”:

1. Form (tib: *gzugs*, skt: *rupa*), also translated as “matter”. Form is characterized by the constant change and transformation of the elements (earth, water, fire, wind) and their combinations. The skandha of form also includes the five sense organs and their objects, as well as immaterial kinds of form (visualisations, visions, invisible forms and the imperceptible form of infinitely small particles).
2. Feeling (tib: *tshor-ba*, skt: *vedana*), also translated as “sensation”. Due to the contact of the sense-organs with their objects agreeable, disagreeable and neutral sensations arise which are the result of previous harmful or beneficial actions.
3. Discernment (tib: *’du-shes*, skt: *samjna*), also translated as “perception”. It knows and identifies the specific characteristics of an object (or also their absence); it recognizes the object of experience by comparison and expresses whatever has been discerned.
4. Compositional Factors (tib: *’du-byed*, skt: *samskara*), also translated as “karmic formations”, because – based on volition – they direct the mind towards helpful, harmful or neutral actions. They ‘construct’, form or colour experience.
5. Consciousness (tib: *rnam-shes*, skt: *vijnana*) includes three aspects of knowing or being aware: (a) the basic “storehouse” consciousness that contains the seeds and traces (*sarvabijakam alaya-vijnana*; tib: *kun-gzhi rnam-shes*); (b) its constant object, the clinging to a self, called the “mental organ” (*manas*) or “emotional/obscured mind” (tib: *nyon-mong yid kyi rnam-shes*); and (c) the six aspects of consciousness (*vijnana*) that enable mind to know and interconnect all sense perceptions and mental reactions/events.

Each one of the five skandhas corresponds to an aspect of our identification as “I”, “me” or “myself”: it is clinging to my body (outer form), my feelings or sensations, my perception or personal experience, my mental capacities, emotions and mental states, and finally my mind or consciousness. And this clinging continues to project itself onto past, present and future. The skandhas are arranged in this order because due to form arises sensation, due to sensation arises discernment (perception), due to discernment arise thoughts (karmic formations) – and consciousness is present in all these states.

Abhidharma, the buddhist research into the mind and its functioning, looks at mind with the particular buddhist question: What helps us, and what hinders us to reach enlightenment? Which factors are necessary and need to be cultivated in order to reach liberation? And which factors obstruct the path and need to be overcome? The answer is given in short in the description of the **fourth skandha**, called **compositional factors**

(or karmically conditioning factors), where we distinguish neutral (e.g. ever-present and object-ascertaining factors) as well as wholesome, unwholesome, and variable mental factors or states of mind. There are countless such mental factors, but traditionally (according to the Compendium of Abhidharma by Asanga) the most important ones are enumerated as the **51 mental factors** (tib: *sems byung lnga bcu rtsa gcig*) that condition our personality and direct the course of our inner development. A correct understanding of these factors will enable us to cultivate those which lead to happiness and liberation and to discard those which lead to suffering and imprisonment:

- 5 omnipresent factors
- 5 object-ascertaining factors
- 11 wholesome factors
- 6 primary unwholesome factors
- 20 secondary unwholesome factors
- 4 variable factors

This is a list of quite divergent mental factors which work on different levels of mental functioning. For example the ever-present factors accompany every movement of cognition; of the root afflictions ignorance is almost ever-present while the others are at times mutually exclusive (attachment versus aversion) and at other times arising together (like in jealousy) to give the mind a specific emotional colouring which is then further described as the secondary mental afflictions. The idea of this list is to give a rather complete description of our samsaric functioning and of what we need to develop to find liberation. However some mental states cannot be put into these black and white categories and for this reason we find the last group of variable factors. The primal intention of the Abhidharma is to give us guidelines for practice and not to make an analysis of mind free of such underlying intentions. This is something we have to keep in mind: it is a form of psychology intend on liberation and not free of all intentions.

At any given moment we experience mental states which are coloured by these mental factors. This is described as the **primary mind** (*gtso-sems*) with its accompanying **mental factors** (*sems byung*). The term primary mind denotes the totality of a sensory or mental state or the primary cognition of the six senses apprehending the presence of an object. Primary mind is composed of a variety of mental factors, like a hand with its individual fingers, the palm, back of the hand etc., or like an overseer who is aware of what all the individual workers of his group are doing. A mental factor is a cognition that apprehends a quality of an object. It arises simultaneously with a primary mind with which it has certain similarities (being wholesome, unwholesome, deluded, non-deluded, related to sense perception or related conceptual perception etc.)

The four Abhidharma schools: Before we enter the subject more deeply we should keep in mind that there are different ways to present the Abhidharma in the four main streams of buddhist transmission:

(a) the **Theravadin** approach of Hinayana Abhidharma based on the seven *Abhidhamma Pakarana*, the *Abhidhammapitaka*,

(b) the **Sarvastivadin** approach of Hinayana Abhidharma based on the *Jnanaprasthana*

(c) the **Madhyamika** approach of Mahayana Abhidharma founded by Nagarjuna in the 2nd century A.C. based on his *Mulamadhyamikakarika* and *Mahaprajnaparamitashastra*, and

(d) the **Yogacara** (or Vijnanavada) system of Mahayana Abhidharma which we are principally following in the Kagyu lineage (and also in the present explanations) founded by Asanga based on his *Yogacarabhumi-shastra* and the summary of his work, the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*,. The *Abhidharmakosha* of his brother Vasubandhu counts as the second monumental work of this tradition.

These four schools of explanation are each valid and comprehensive in their own right but should not be mixed in one explanation. Otherwise this gives an “indigestible soup” as Khenpo Chödrak said. We are following the fourth school.

A. The five ever-present factors (tib: *kun 'gro lnga*; skt: *sarvatraga*) (**factors 1-5**)

These five factors are present in every state of consciousness or mental act (e.g. primary mind in connection with the six senses) and are indispensable for the perception of an object – they are therefore called the five

omnipresent factors, even if there are rare exceptions (e.g. just before and during death or rebirth or in certain states of deep meditation) when one or more of these factors are not active. In an ordinary mind they build up the subject-object dichotomy: going towards an object and holding onto it in order to receive some further information about that representation of an object in our mind. This describes the basic mental capacity of every sentient being enabling it to perceive an object, the simple ability to establish a relationship between mind and its objects. These omnipresent factors function (almost) simultaneously in an extremely rapid succession, like lightning. To be aware of something perceived by mind means that these five factors are present. Their order of presentation varies in different commentaries but for the sake of clarity most presentations mention again “feeling” and “discernment” which were already discussed as the second and third skandha.

Asanga only mentions “attention” and “contact” in the group of ever-present factors. He leaves away the two already mentioned skandhas and speaks of “interest” (volition) apart from the rest of the list as the basic directing factor that accompanies all mental activity, all karma.

1. Interest or intention, volition (*sems-pa; cetana*) directs the primary mind and its accompanying mental factors towards a general field of reference within one of the six senses (the five physical senses and thought perception). It is both the conscious and automatic motivating element of consciousness that causes the mind to involve itself with and apprehend its objects. Without such a general interest in the world of the six senses mind would not go towards an object. Interest or intention is the actual principle of activity, it is what gives rise to a mental act (*yid kyi las; karma*) – often followed by verbal or physical acts – and thus acts as the basis of conditioned existence.

In describing the functioning of pure, liberated beings the Abhidharma of the Theravadins speaks of a purely functional intention free of clinging to self and thus free of karmic consequences.

2. Contact (*reg-pa; sparsha*) is the stimulation of mind due to the coming together of three aspects – object, sense faculty and perceiving consciousness. Without their coming together the sense faculty (organ) would not be activated or re-activated and mind could not encounter the object and establish a relation with it. “Contact” describes the normal functioning of the six senses. It provides the basis for subsequent (not simultaneous) feelings in the corresponding sense field to arise.

3. Feeling or sensation (*tshor-ba; vedana*) is a distinct cognition of an object of the six senses (including the mental sense) experienced as pleasant, unpleasant, or indifferent (neutral). We thus have six kinds of sensations: pleasant, unpleasant and neutral physical sensations and pleasant, unpleasant and neutral mental sensations. Without feeling mind would not experience its object. It is the inherent quality of experience present in every mental state. Feelings can be impure (contaminated by ignorance) or pure (accompanied by an understanding of emptiness). The general function of feeling is to fully experience the ripening effects of our previous actions. Its specific function is that of leading to the reactions of attachment, hatred and bewilderment.

4. Attention (mental engagement, *yid-la byed-pa; manaskara*) is the repeated movement of the mind towards a certain object of interest in order to apprehend it including its specific details. It focuses and holds the mind on the object, without allowing it to move elsewhere. Without attention mind could not remain fixed on an object of the six senses and there would be no stability. It forms the basis for the more developed mental functions of recollection and alertness. While interest for example directs the mind to a landscape in general, attention focuses the mind on its details like mountains, trees etc.

5. Discernment (identification, discrimination, differentiation; *'du-shes; samjna*) apprehends the particular marks of an object of the six senses. It (a) identifies the object and (b) differentiates it to be one thing as opposed to another. Without discernment mind could not distinguish the characteristics of the object and could not give a name to the object by comparing it to similar objects of one's experience. There are six types of discernment referring to different kind of objects or mental states: with a sign, without a sign, limited (realm of desire), vast (all three realms of existence), infinite (beings of the formless realm and realized beings), and of nothing at all. Also one distinguishes deceived discernments accompanied by ignorance from non-deceived discernments free of ignorance.

Such discernment is said to be based (a) on direct personal sensory perception, (b) on what others have told us, (c) on logical conclusions or (d) on direct mental perception including the intuitive discernment of a realized being or yogi. Discernment usually occurs in two steps: an initial direct, non-conceptual discern-

ment of an object with its characteristics without conceptual labelling followed by a conceptual discernment of further attributes of the object including thinking and labelling processes. This discernment including labelling happens in the sixth or mental sense. However, a subtle form of discernment without labelling is also active on the level of the alaya ground consciousness where it refers to the quality of objects appearing distinctly (“unmixed”, e.g. without being confused one with the other).

B. The five object-ascertaining factors (tib: *yul so-sor nges-byed lnga*; skt: *vinīyata*) (factors 6-10)

These five factors ascertain individual aspects or characteristics within the objective field. Together with the five ever-present factors they constitute the basic mechanism of mind. Although morally neutral in themselves, when they come under the influence of wholesome and unwholesome mental factors, they play a major role in moulding the character of the personality and the quality of individual experience. Their function in the dharma is to stabilize the mind in going towards wholesome objects such as enlightenment. Their presence is needed to reach the goal of awakening.

1. Aspiration (*'dun-pa*; *chanda*) is the wish to do something concerning a desired object. It ascertains that which is desirable within the objective field and having focused on the intended object it takes a strong interest in it. Thus the wish or yearning to obtain the desired object is formed. Aspiration motivates the search for objects judged as desirable (which can be wholesome or unwholesome). Aspiration towards a goal serves as a basis for joyful perseverance (*brtson-'grus*), the fourth paramita. Aspiration includes the wish to encounter once again the object, the wish not to be separated from (and perhaps obtain) the object, and the wish to fulfil one's aspiration in the future. The objects of aspiration can be material, sensual, conceptual or liberation.

2. Appreciation or determination (*mos-pa*; *adhimoksa* or *adhimukti*) stabilises the apprehension of a previously ascertained cherished object. It further defines the object already grasped with conviction and establishes definite certainty or conviction about the object and thus prevents changing opinions or decisions concerning it. Appreciation is the factor that makes the mind sure of the object's qualities as being worthwhile or valuable and secures the recollection of it. Appreciation serves as the basis for faith and confidence and can be either mistaken or unmistaken/realistic.

3. Recollection (*dran-pa*; *smṛti*) is not forgetting the thought concerning the experienced object. It can also be translated as **mindfulness**. It repeatedly brings the already familiar object to mind and protects against forgetfulness and distraction. It acts as the basis of concentration, mental stability and absorption. Recollection makes us be mindful of the various mental factors that arise, it makes us remember our commitments and decisions, it helps us to remember what we have learnt, it gives structure to our daily activity by not letting us forget what we set out to do. Thus it is compared to a treasure house that can store many wholesome qualities without letting them perish. There are mentally disturbing and undisturbing recollections.

► All three factors mentioned above work together as the basis of the fourth paramita, joyful perseverance. So these three are essential in order to perform an action. You have to want it, you have to be determined to do it as well as having to remain mindful of it as you are doing it (keeping it in memory). Thus one can work towards enlightenment.

4. Absorption or concentration (*ting-nge 'dzin*; *samādhi*) is the one-pointed, continued focusing or collecting the mind on an object to be examined, not being distracted by any other object. This kind of stable abiding on the object can last but a short moment or several minutes or longer. The steadier our absorption/concentration becomes, the clearer becomes our understanding of a given object.

► Recollection (mindfulness) and absorption work together to form the fifth paramita (mental stability, *bsam-gtan*) and allow the sixth paramita (understanding and wisdom) to develop. In general, when one speaks about meditative concentration, it refers to *shine* meditation, stabilising the mind, bringing it to rest calmly without distraction. Absorption from the point of view of mahamudra is to be one-pointedly engaged in letting go of all clinging to the seeming reality of illusory phenomena. What is meant here by concentration should not be understood as a tense state of mind. True concentration is only possible through relaxation and not being interested in anything but the present task or object. This is true renunciation.

5. Understanding, wisdom or intelligence (*shes-rab; prajña*) is the capacity of fine discrimination which examines and distinguishes the specific characteristics or value (e.g. the defects and qualities) of a recollected object. It analyses the object from every angle, compares alternatives and dispels doubts and indecision.

“Understanding” does not accompany every act of cognition and is thus different from the ever-present factor “discernment” which accomplishes the moment to moment activity of distinguishing objects. Discernment only has the function to differentiate various objects in order not to confuse them and to be able to label them, but understanding goes beyond this initial discrimination to know – whenever necessary – all aspects of any given object of cognition in order to make good use of it.

Understanding is also different from “non-bewilderment” because it can be accompanied by emotional obscuration like ignorance and so on. But it is different from doubt which always arises from ignorance – it rather has the capacity to dispel such doubts.

The difference with the 51st variable factor “investigation” is that understanding is specifically concerned with the values of the object and that it does not entail an elaborate mental discussion.

Due to the capacity to distinguish precisely all phenomena one comes to an increasing understanding of the functioning of mind and the world as a whole and thus develops “wisdom”, the sixth paramita. This capacity of understanding can be applied in wholesome as well as in unwholesome pursuits. On the buddhist path it is particularly used to differentiate between what is to be given up or abandoned and what is to be adopted or practised.

The mental factor “understanding” in this list of 51 factors is not identical with the paramita “wisdom”, although it is the same word. “Wisdom” as a transcendent quality (paramita) leads to liberation or is the expression of liberation, while “understanding” is only the simple application of the discriminative faculty of mind – often accompanied by ignorance – which is the underlying, preceding mental factor that, if used repeatedly in a wholesome way, will lead to more and more true wisdom. If not used in a wholesome way, the result will only be “worldly wisdom” which can be completely unwholesome, like the ‘wisdom’ of a clever criminal!

► These three paramitas of joyful perseverance, mental stability and wisdom are talked about here on the level of the moment to moment functioning of the mind as the five object-ascertaining factors. It depends on them whether and how an action is accomplished. If someone acts, for example, with little mindfulness and little understanding/intelligence, then the outcome of this act will certainly be different compared to someone who acts with more mindfulness and wisdom. If there is only little mental stability, the mind will fluctuate and a straight path of action cannot be followed. If there are no aspiration and appreciation leading to perseverance, an action will not be performed up to its end over a sufficiently long period of time, and its fruits will not be obtained. For this reason these factors are called the ascertaining mental factors which assure a proper grasp of the situation and a correct understanding of whatever object the mind is focused upon.

From the point of view of wanting to help others with their psychological problems one can see that some of these ten factors are greatly lacking in people who come with demands for help. For example, there can be quite a lack of aspiration (volition), the wish to direct the mind anywhere, leading to lethargy. Or someone might not be able to concentrate, to focus his mind on anything, which will render any attempt to help him quite futile. Or the ability to discriminate and understand might be found lacking which leads to great confusion in one’s life. Everyone needs to develop these basic mental functions, and they definitely also need to be trained in dharma practice. They determine how we use our minds, how we use our life, how we put into action our choices.

C. The eleven wholesome factors (*dge-ba bchu gchig; kushala*) (factors 11-22)

They are called wholesome, because they are directed towards virtue and are needed to reach enlightenment, the entirely wholesome state. Through their cultivation their corresponding unwholesome counterparts are naturally overcome and we discover greater and greater peace and well-being. They are the elements responsible for all forms of spiritual development. Wholesome factors can never occur at the same time with any of

the mental afflictions, primary (root) or secondary and they cause the ever-present, object-ascertaining and variable mental factors to likewise take on a wholesome aspect.

1. Faith (*dad-pa; shraddha*) is trust, belief, or confidence. It is an entire, firm conviction which produces a joyous, serene, open state of mind free from emotional turmoil when thinking of the law of cause and effect, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha etc. It generates and increases an aspiration for wholesome qualities and is thus the doorway through which they manifest. Faith is the basis of motivation. A mind devoid of faith is unable to cultivate anything wholesome. If we have firm confidence in something, we will automatically be motivated to adjust our behaviour accordingly. Having confidence in the reliability of a person we will have no hesitation to believe him and follow his advice. Trust is not blind faith but a factor that opens our mind to the wholesome and widens our perspective. For the three types of faith – believing, inspired and longing – see ch. 2 in Gampopa's Precious Ornament of Liberation.

2. Self-respect (*ngo tsha shes pa; hri*) is scruple or shame to do something unwholesome when considering oneself. Its function is to avoid unwholesome acts for reasons of personal conscience, e.g. (a) for the sake of oneself and (b) for the sake of one's dharma. It restrains harmful conduct on considering that we would dislike such harm to befall us or that such an act is not fitting for a dharma practitioner. Self-respect prevents our conduct to become chaotic and unrestrained.

3. Respect for others (*khrel yod-pa; apatrapya*) is a sense of embarrassment or shame to do something unwholesome when considering others. For (1) the sake of other beings or (2) for the sake of the dharma practice of others it (a) restrains harmful conduct, (b) maintains the purity of one's moral discipline, (c) prevents others to lose faith and (d) acts as a cause for joy to arise in their minds. It avoids disappointment or suffering for others.

► Self-respect and consideration for others the basis of the second paramita discipline or proper conduct (*tshul-khrims, śīla*). They are the determining factors whereby people in this world are regarded as being noble or not.

4. Non-attachment (*ma chags-pa; alobha*) is absence of desire or detachment concerning existence or its attributes. It increases the remedy for attachment and withdraws us from a compulsive involvement with the object through an understanding of its true nature and thereby eliminates the grasping and clinging to possess which could otherwise induce harmful acts. Detachment enables us to see more clearly and objectively and to focus our attention and energy on the accomplishment of truly worthwhile aims. It is the basis for generosity, discipline, love etc.

5. Non-hatred or non-aversion (*zhe-sdang med-pa, advesa*) is the absence of ill will towards living beings, suffering and the conditions of suffering. It has the characteristics of loving kindness which directly overcomes hatred. It prevents hatred and strengthens love, patient acceptance, discipline etc. Instead of blindly reacting with agitation, tension and anger when confronted with (a) someone inflicting harm upon us, (b) the harm itself, and (c) the cause or instrument of harm, non-hatred maintains a clarity of mind characterized by love, kindness and patient acceptance. When cultivated, it helps to stop harmful acts and eradicates anger and hatred.

6. Non-bewilderment or non-delusion (*gti-mug med-pa, amoha*) is a clarity and sharpness of mind that – like a lamp in a dark room – dispels bewilderment about a particular object. In particular it is knowing and understanding the results of actions, the dharma and liberation. It arises either from an inborn disposition or from the three trainings learning, contemplation and meditation. It is the remedy for ignorance and accompanies the firm intelligence that thoroughly analyses the true nature of objects. It (a) prevents bewilderment, (b) increases the four types of wisdom (see ch. 17 in Gampopa's Precious Ornament of Liberation), and is (c) an empowering factor for all wholesome qualities pertaining to purification. It helps to stop harmful acts and is the basis of discipline and all the other qualities. It is not wisdom itself but the lucid quality that accompanies wisdom.

► These three are the foundations of everything virtuous that put an end to all unwholesome actions; they are not only the absence of the three main kleśas of attachment, hatred and ignorance but their active, wholesome remedial counterparts.

7. Joyful perseverance, energy or enthusiasm (*brtson-'drus; virya*) is a firm mental effort, an awake, diligent state of mind, based on self-confidence that joyously engages in the preparation and practice of any

wholesome activity. It is characterised by absence of weakness, not turning back on the task and never being self-satisfied. The three kinds of joyful perseverance are the remedy for the three kinds of laziness: sloth, self-pity and attraction to evil (see ch. 15 in Gampopa's Precious Ornament of Liberation). It is the dynamic quality or active force which like a "fuel" enhances all paramitas, all wholesome qualities. It realises the plenitude and accomplishment of the wholesome.

8. Suppleness, pliancy or flexibility (*shin-sbjangs*; *prashrabdhi*) enables mind and body through relaxation to be applied to a wholesome object in whatever manner is wished, for example to solve an intellectual problem or to accomplish a contemplation or meditation. It overcomes mental and thus also physical rigidity and heaviness, purifies it and makes the mind flexible and quick. Suppleness is the workability of our mind, the capacity to let go of one thing in order to take up and stay with something more beneficial. In this way suppleness is the basis of mental calm and insight meditation. Rigidity is a state where one is unable to do what one wishes and gives rise to all kinds of afflictions. It helps to overcome all obstacles.

9. Conscientiousness (*bag yod-pa*; *apramada*) or diligence cherishes the accumulation of what is wholesome. It develops favourable conditions and guards the mind against that which gives rise to afflictions. Accompanied by enthusiasm one is very careful and conscientious about not committing unwholesome actions and bringing to fulfilment and forever maintaining all that is wholesome within and beyond the world. Conscientiousness protects from reacting in a negative way towards external conditions and thus protects from being overwhelmed by attachment, hatred and confusion. It thus protects from impure conditions and realises the fullness and accomplishment of worldly and other-worldly happiness.

In guarding the mind it is similar to the factors self respect and respect for others, except that is not based on a particular reason, rather it is a more fundamental protective quality. If we are unconscientious we automatically squander any opportunity for cultivating virtue. Conscientiousness applies itself to (a) accumulating merit, (b) attaining liberation, (c) developing renunciation, and (d) cultivating uncontaminated virtue (actions accompanied by true insight).

10. Equanimity (*btang-snyoms*; *upersa*) keeps the mind balanced and calm without letting it become either carelessly distracted or unclear and dull. It the equality and stability of a mind not interested in clinging. It is "passive" in the sense of not reacting emotionally to stimuli. It prevents from excitement and dullness without having to exert a great effort. It settles the mind and leaves it in rest upon a wholesome object. It is the basis of the understanding of ultimate reality. It prevents the arising of emotional bewilderment. On a practical level it makes us not get upset by appearances, situations and whatever, due to the fact one has meditated a lot and has cultivated one's mind. Here we are not referring to equanimity as one of the four limitless qualities, but rather as a formative element. There are three kinds: (1) the equanimity of a balanced mind is one that with some exertion is able to maintain an equipoise; (2) the equanimity of a mind at rest is able to concentrate with little effort and without remedies; (3) the equanimity of a spontaneous mind needs no effort whatsoever and occurs when mind is equipoised in meditative absorption.

11. Non-violence (*rnam-par mi 'tshe-ba*; *avihimsa*) lacks any intention to do harm. It is the compassion, the strong urge not to disrespect others by killing and hurting them or by putting them down as well as the aspiration that all beings may be separated from suffering. It motivates us to dispel the suffering of others and to benefit and bring happiness to the weak. But it is not a mere absence of being harmful; it is benevolence. There are three kinds of compassion (cf. ch. 7 in Gampopa's Precious Ornament of Liberation).

► These eleven wholesome factors should not be taken for granted, as often they are actually quite weak in our stream of being. They are a potential of our mindstream and it depends on us to strengthen them through the practice of dharma. They arise according to former deeds (karma), tendencies and circumstances. One actually has to train in them. They can be strong or weak in us, depending on our practice.

These eleven wholesome factors will never all arise simultaneously, but combinations of them do occur: (1) At times of having belief, faith occurs. (2) At times of turning away from evil, self-respect and consideration for others occur. (3) At times of engaging in the wholesome, non-attachment, non-hatred, non-bewilderment and joyful perseverance occur. (4) At times of freeing oneself from attachment by worldly means, suppleness occurs. (5) At times of freeing oneself from attachment by non-worldly means, conscientiousness and equanimity occur. (6) At times of benefitting others, non-violence occurs.

There are many further positive qualities, which are implied but not mentioned explicitly listed among these eleven. These are for example love, compassion, joy, a sense of responsibility, contentment, simplicity (letting go of complications), honesty, renunciation (being a mixture of wisdom and non-attachment), devotion (faith, wisdom and openness), self-esteem and so on. These basic qualities which are often talked about in the dharma teachings are usually the combination of several wholesome mental factors and that is why they are not listed here but only mentioned in the explanations.

D. The six root factors of emotional obscuration (*rtsa nyon-mongs drug; mulakleśa*) (factors 23-28)

The root afflictions bind us to the cycle of discontented existence, thereby acting as the primary cause for all our suffering and frustration. They put the mind into a state of turmoil and unrest that results in mental or physical activity which is harmful to both oneself and others. They are the real challenge in the practice of dharma. Doubt and erroneous views are mentioned separately, but they could be classified under ignorance, because they arise mainly out of it. Jealousy is not included in this list, it comes later.

1. Desire (*'dod chags; raga*)

Definition: Desire is clinging to the three realms of existence and it inevitably leads to suffering. It is classified as two: (1) attachment to the world of desire (the objects of the 5 senses plus the 6th sense, the mental faculty) and (2) attachment to the world of existence which corresponds to attachment to the samadhis of the form- and formless realms. The desire of the form realm is becoming attached to enjoyable, peaceful states of minds. In one's meditation it is a wanting to reproduce these, which develops into longing, clinging and even dependence to recreate such happy samadhis. But these are of no true value because they do not lead as such to any further insights. The desire of the formless realm is becoming attached to the formless samadhi-experiences called limitless space, limitless consciousness, nothing whatsoever, neither differentiation nor non-differentiation.

Additional remarks from the oral teaching: Based on sensations first arises an inclination towards an object, an initial impulse to go toward it, whereas in aversion the impulse is to go backwards. Fascination arises, more and more longing arises, and as you experience the object more you do not want to separate from it anymore. Thus the attachment gets stronger and solidifies into clinging. You really hold on to the object, ready to defend it in order to be able to hold it longer. This is called clinging due to grasping, and all of this is called desire. If this desire is very strong one is dependent, addicted, because one needs that specific object in order to feel happy. This is the opposite of freedom.

If our emotions due to attachment are very strong we develop strong dependencies. We can neither live without our dependencies, nor can we live without our aversions, since both have become our main reference points. Most people think they do not need their aversions, that they are just a nuisance. But if you actually try to take away the object of their anger or attachment from someone who is addicted to it, it is close to impossible! People do not want to let go of their favourite attachments and aversions, since it is a part of their feeling alive, they are identified with it. We either need desire-attachment or anger-aversion to feel alive, to identify as human beings. Due to this everything is pushed to the maximum, either aversion or desire, a maximum state of heavy samsara.

To practise means to cut through early in the process, before a chain reaction starts. We do not have to wait until we have big emotions. When desire or aversion arise, if we are aware, we cut right then and let go of them exactly at the time when they arise. By letting go and cutting through these emotions will be flattened, but this does not mean at all that we are less alive or become like vegetables.

Because these negative states were taking all the space, the positive mental factors did not have much space in our minds. As these negative emotional states are less often present in the mind, the inherent positive mental factors will show themselves. From the Abidharma point of view the meditator's work simply consists of changing priorities: eliminating negative states of mind and cultivating positive ones. So, as negativities become less the positive factors become present more and more often. Treating the 51 mental factors (samskaras) in this way is still a dualistic approach, but it is definitely of benefit. It brings happiness which however is still experienced in a dualistic way.

2. Anger (aversion, irritation, *khong-khro; pratigha*)

Definition: Anger is ill will in regard to living beings, suffering and the conditions of suffering. It leads to unhappiness and unwholesome actions.

Additional remarks from the oral teaching: It all starts with the experience of a mental object which is judged as being disagreeable, not the way we like it; we would like something else. We begin to experience this mental representation of an object or person as an enemy in our mind and wish to get rid of this experience. We project this dislike outwards and identify it with the object. The object itself becomes the enemy – whatever person, object, or situation it may be. The mind begins to be agitated, and suffering is present, becoming stronger and stronger the longer this object judged as unpleasant is present. The longer it is present, the more our wish increases to get rid of it, to destroy it, to drive it out of our field of experience, leading to malevolence and anger, hostility, hatred, rage, wishing to go into action, to destroy, to beat. and to kill...

Many people react immediately to their anger by withdrawing inwardly, and might get stuck with it, never allowing themselves to express this anger. They keep it inside, might not show any anger at all, and are completely locked in. Somebody like this might appear very peaceful from the outside, very nice and smiling, but actually he has so much anger inside. He is locked in the feeling of being aggressed from the outside, he feels constantly aggressed. He experiences situations constantly as a danger for his own existence, and the way he defends himself is to go like a snail into his protection shell. But defence is a state of anger. This defence can take the form of depression and also autism (autistic children for example). It can also simply be the attitude of a person going around smiling, looking very open and happy all the time, but never making any real contact with situations and other people.

The feeling of being aggressed by the world is one's own aggression and anger projected out. It is our own irritation to be irritated by the way the world and people are. And the world is like this because it is judged by ourselves as being like this. Due to experiences of past lives and of this life we came to the conclusion that the world is a kind of enemy. This resulted in a basic attitude of not wanting to get involved, of keeping to ourselves, always being on defence.

Then there are others who are stuck in the opposite way, always on the destructive or aggressive side. Immediately when they perceive something disagreeable happening, they use whatever they found out to be most effective to defend themselves: crushing down, jumping on, ready to destroy the opponent. Their action is very sharp, very precise, the immediate impulse to destroy the object like a hammer. They also experience the world as an aggression, only the reaction is a bit different.

Of course there can be mixtures of these two basic mechanisms of anger. Experiencing the world as being aggressive you might combine your defence with some intelligent way of manipulating the world, building in a lot of safety mechanisms like lies to protect and hide yourself, influencing others by your powers of speech, trickery, and so on.

All these are basically expressions of being irritated by life, and we all know through our practice how we try to get rid of all these different kinds of irritations. First, if someone or something irritates us, we try to change him or it, before we like to change something in ourselves. We try all kinds of manipulations or we look just away, trying to ignore the unpleasant experience as just another way to deal with anger. It is like in scenes of aggression and violence in busy cities – people just turn away, ignoring to see anything because it would arouse too much of their own anger.

These irritations are due to aversion against something, but actually this is a kind of clinging, of wanting a different state. We desire something else, pleasant, and we insist on the way we would like to have it!

3. Pride (*nga rgyal; mana*)

Definition: Pride is an exalted state of mind based on clinging to the idea of self. It gives rise to contempt, arrogance and the like and leads to an experience of suffering.

Additional remarks from the oral teaching: Pride is a very descriptive word in Tibetan — *nga rgyal* — “the Ego-King”, *nga* means “I”, and *rgyal* means “king” or “victorious”. It refers to the sense of self, the basic

ignorance of the clinging to a self, and augmenting the sense of self through self-contentment — a feeling of being very important. This feeling of importance, this high ideal of oneself, colours one's vision of everyone and everything around. It is a negative mental factor because it leads to a lack of respect and therefore not being able to understand and to learn from others. It becomes a source of suffering. Because of falsely elevating oneself the suffering of falling down will surely come.

There are traditionally seven kinds of pride. They can be summarised as three kinds of pride related to people (1) lower than oneself, (2) on the same level as oneself, and (3) higher than oneself.

1. First is **condescension** (*nga rgyal*). This is where one *is* superior to the other person in the sense of faculties, or the ability to deal with the world, or wealth etc., and on top of this outer difference one assumes a real superior attitude and treats the other with disrespect. This is condescension, the attitude of exaggerating the slight or big difference that might indeed exist.
2. Then there is **arrogance** (*lhag pa'i nga rgyal*) related to people on the same, equal level. Here one estimates oneself as being superior even though one is actually equal to others, having the same understanding, capacities etc. You can see how some people have some of these aspects of pride much more predominant. They might be okay in relation with lower ones, and they might have respect towards their spiritual teacher and higher ones, but among people of the same level — they are unbearable. This is this typical form of pride called arrogance which is directed towards one's peers.
3. **Presumptuousness** (*nga rgyal las kyang nga*) is estimating oneself as much superior to someone who *is* actually superior. This is thinking to be greater than the Buddha or one's teacher. One presumes to have qualities which one has not in comparison to those who are actually superior. This of course is complete blindness. It is a pride which is unable to see or understand anything.

Q.: That would also be called jealousy?

A.: Jealousy is being envious of what others have reached. It is the opposite of this attitude. One does not feel any lack or inferiority. A proud person with this attitude can be so proud that he doesn't even get angry with anyone. Normally pride is the origin of anger, so if you "stab" a proud person a little bit he will immediately get angry. "How can you do this to me? You have no respect or what? Don't you see who you have in front of you?"

But there is a type of pride which is so enormous which just says "What is this person talking about? What's he saying to me? What's the lama saying?" The pride is so big that you do not even get angry when someone is insulting you. Nothing can penetrate this immense layer of pride. This is the complete *nga rgyal*, the complete king, occupying all the territory, nobody can approach him. This is called presumptuousness, an enormously big balloon, difficult to pierce.

4. Then there is very basic, **ordinary pride** (*nga-bo snyam-pa'i nga-rgyal*), which is called **presumption**. The definition of this is to identify oneself with the aggregates, with the skandhas of one's body and mind as being "me". This is called presumption because one presumes an entity to be there — "myself" with these thoughts and this body etc., which actually is not there. It is a false idea due to the ignorance of clinging to a self, and on this one builds the ego-identity. It means presuming an identity to be present where there are only the skandhas operating in moments of mind. It is actually the basis of pride but it can develop into an overt self satisfaction with the aggregates; for example with the aggregate of body: "Oh, I have such a beautiful face, am I not beautiful?" etc. This is **vanity** arising due to the identification with the aggregates. This is another form of pride.
5. **Pretention** (*chung zad snyam pa'i nga rgyal*) is not as obvious as the previously mentioned form. It is thinking oneself to be *scarcely inferior* to beings who are greatly superior. One might say, "The lama is really great, but there's not so much missing for me to become just like him." This is the pretension of someone who does not see his own faults and who is projecting his image to almost approach the image of his idol. The idol is still one that one follows but one is *almost* there; and if someone else comes and tries to tell you where your actual place is you will say, "No, no, no, I'm just next to him!" If the idol is in the centre of a crowd, then the person who thinks he is almost like him will try to be in the immediate vicinity of the idol, placing himself just behind, or left, or right, or in front of this person to show that, "I'm the next one. He's the best, but I'm next."

This kind of pride is very difficult to discern because it has different degrees. It is not the obvious kind of thinking oneself as superior to the lama, but one misplaces oneself in relation to where one really is in order to look and act as if very close to him. You are so ignorant of your own faults that you think you have almost reached the state of purity. There is a little “almost” which leaves you enough space in case someone challenges you. You always say “almost” and because you’re “almost” there, but your efforts to work further on your own defects are almost non-existent. Pride is basically the incapacity to see one’s defects.

6. Then we find *over-estimation of oneself, fancy* or **proud imagination** which refers to imagining oneself to possess greater qualities than actually present. This does not refer to anyone else in a form of comparison, but is simply a view of oneself. One thinks to be strong while one is weak, believes to be intelligent while dumb, a good swimmer while inexperienced etc. As long as my imagined qualities are not put to the test I will firmly continue to believe in them.
7. As a further form we find **completely erroneous pride** where one believes to have qualities where one actually has none or even has great shortcomings or defects. For example: I believe or pretend that I am generous but show actually no generosity whatsoever and my life is governed by stinginess. Or one is proud of something which is actually unwholesome like for example having killed many people.

Q.: What difference would you make between what you’ve just defined as pride and the basic desire for recognition?

A.: This is one part of pride. It is desire mixed with the presumption of being really existent and wanting to be recognised for one’s qualities.

The basic desire of existence is linked to fear, the fear to not exist. The basic desire to exist linked with seeing the world as aggressing oneself – having to defend your place in the world. The basic desire to exist is not more than the natural wish to take the next breath. That’s basically it! If you think about not taking your next breath, then you will see what this desire is. It is the fear of encountering the non-self, the non-existence, the death. You can perceive your world as not allowing you to breathe. To take it in the opposite way: when you are with a proud person you have no space to breathe. He is filling up all space so that the others who also have the wish to be recognised find almost no space in this kind of situation. When you talk to people about how they experience others, especially their contact with proud people, they often express this — because of their own pride they have no space to breathe.

Q.: Is pride related to the skandhas? I don’t see a difference between the feeling of I, basic ignorance and pride.

A.: Yes, this you can say. Just like when there is ignorance there is always clinging and desire, in the same way you can say that where there is ignorance there is always pride. The pride starts the moment you are attached to an I. As soon as you begin to give yourself some self-importance, that’s the beginning of pride.

So even the people who give themselves no importance at all with attitudes like: “Everybody can just walk all over me” or “Nobody takes care of me” or “I don’t care that people take care of me” etc — this very important humbleness or very important depression is another form of pride. Depressed people very often suffer from anger and pride. They are so proud that they are the centre of the universe. There’s only *my* depression, only what’s going on in *my* mind, how *I’m* suffering, *my* story, *my* ..., what the others have done to *me*, how *I’m* incapable, how *I’m* not beautiful, how *I’m* not able to talk and communicate with others — all this is pride.

Q.: So all the stories and chains of thought we follow in our mind, when it is not emotional, can we say this is just a kind of pride?

A.: Yes.

Q.: The teachings say that the practitioner should enter into action and put himself into situations where he sees his own attachment and pride. I wonder if there could be a subtle pride in this practice to want to test your attachment etc.

A.: Yes, pride takes no matter what to feel proud. Pride takes dharma practice, qualities and even defects to be proud. Pride even takes the defects of others to be proud. For example a father can be proud of how good a thief his son is. The identification of pride extends outwards to family and friends and you identify your-

self not only with the qualities but also with the defects of the persons concerned. In this way one can identify oneself with the national pride of one's nation and say, "Look how we Germans kept the whole of Europe going, we kept the whole world busy!" Pride will take something as stupid and terrible as killing millions of people, and will turn this defect into something to be proud of.

So if you find yourself becoming proud of doing whatever aspect of your practice, this is completely normal — it is the way pride functions. Pride takes no matter what as its object. It takes the cheer fact of going to the toilet as a source of pride: "Yeah, I really had a good shit!" Pride is wherever we look — it's everywhere!

For example, a lama might come out of retreat and start out as an honest lama wanting to serve others. He might feel he has not learned much but the little that he knows he will want to give to others. When he starts teaching like this, people will come to him because he is honest and they start listening to his words. As more people come to listen he starts to think that there must be something good in what he is saying and he becomes proud. Then as he continues teaching and more people start coming he starts to think, "Oh, the number of people coming to me exceeds those going to see my own lama, so I must be greater than him." Like this the teaching might become more and more an ego-teaching. It is not motivated by really serving others but by having more students, becoming greater and more important, having more influence and more power. Like this you pass on ego-transmission.

That is how pride takes qualities which were there in the beginning and transforms them into the opposite. An old saying says "You are not aware of the true qualities you may have." As soon as you become aware of them you become proud and they cease to be untainted qualities.

Q.: We've been told, just like with any other emotion, to increase the pride, to make it bigger and bigger. Does this mean to make it bigger so we can see what a joke it is or until something else appears?

A.: Yes, you make it bigger until you are so ridiculously proud that you just have to laugh about yourself.

Q.: What about looking at the suffering? Could looking at the suffering of pride be another way because by just laughing about it you might not really want to do anything about it.

A.: To see the suffering, the tension in our own mind is very important. When pride is present we feel a tension with others who are a challenge to our pride because they might be superior and better. Pride just like jealousy is connected to comparing oneself with others. There is the suffering of pride of not really being able to communicate with others. The proud person, because of the clinging to self, is not really relaxed and feels very much alone. Solitude is one of the most common forms of suffering of a proud person. Because he is so proud, no real communication happens. He has many friends, admirers, but no one, even his own spouse, can come really close. In order to get out of his pride, a proud person has to learn to communicate, to open up, to see and show his faults, to let himself be hurt. Pride is also just a protection against being hurt.

There is a lot of work to do and it is a very painful work where all the suffering comes up to the surface. As long as one is in the pride there is very little conscious suffering — there is some, but not so much. When the pride is shattered, then there is great suffering.

A proud person whose pride is shattered by circumstances, for example millionaires who lose all their possessions over night, like during the Wall Street crash, might kill themselves as they did. There was no way out. All their identifications were gone and the suffering was so great.

This can happen any time. Whenever the pride over some achievement is shattered by losing (like in sports or in any other form of competition), the wounded pride of having lost can be so unbearable that one prefers to die; or one prefers to leave the circle of friends, one prefers to change countries. One does anything to evade having to confront the defeat. Someone who had lost in the Olympic games did not appear for the silver medal because silver was not good enough, he wanted the gold.

Q.: The whole thing seems like a vicious circle. There is pride, it is hurt, then there is the desire to escape this. Then I do not get that, then there is anger etc. It's just one emotion followed by pain followed by another emotion etc. ... I've often tried to find out which one is *my* family, my principal emotion, but it seems to be impossible to see.

A.: Yes, it is impossible. Don't worry about it, we all have all the emotions. The only way out is to relax from this whole game. The only way is to not care so much about ourselves, to sit and develop some patience, not to react so much, let the thing run out by itself, and do not try to change the outside.

4. Ignorance (*ma-rig-pa*; *avidya*)

Definition: Ignorance is the absence of understanding concerning the three realms of existence. It leads to the appearance of emotional bewilderment, erroneous decisions and doubt concerning the dharma.

First there is the **simple ignorance**, which is not knowing, not understanding things, basic ignorance as all beings have it (*rmongs tsam gyi ma-rig-pa*). Secondly there is the ignorance of **erroneous clinging** to what one thinks to be true, like misinterpreting what is existent to be nonexistent and what is non-existent to be existent (*phyin sta log tu 'dsin-pa'i ma-rig-pa*).

Both are further subdivided according to ignorance concerning the relative and the absolute truth. On the relative level it manifests as the *ignorance related to actions and their effects* (the law of karma), which is the ordinary way of thinking that there are no consequences of one's actions beyond the actual situation (*las 'bras la rmongs-pa'i ma-rig-pa*). On the absolute level it is the ignorance of thinking that we ourselves as well as the world around us really exist, whilst there can be found no real existence as such. This is *ignorance related to suchness* (*de-kho-na-nyid la rmongs-pa'i ma-rig-pa*). Due to these arise desire-attachment, aversion etc., the whole of samsara. It arises because of the basic misunderstanding of reality, from which many other factors arise. Ignorance is the root of all of them.

Ignorance is linked with mental dullness (*rmogs-pa*), with lack of confidence and trust (*ma dad-pa*), with laziness (*le-lo*), with carelessness (*bag med-pa*), with an a-moral memory (*brjed nges*), with lack of discernment (*shes-bzhin ma-yin-pa*), with distractions (*rnam-par gyeng-ba*). They are enumerated later, but all arise from basic, fundamental ignorance. It is the root of all attachment, because it gives rise to the notion of self and others. It is the basic attachment due to the presumption of real existence. You can say that ignorance is the same as attachment, there is basically no difference. When there is attachment there is ignorance, and vice versa.

5. Doubt (*the-tshom*)

Definition: Doubt or scepticism is uncertainty concerning the four truths. It provides the basis to the non functioning of all wholesome aspects.

Doubt is considered as one of the six basic *kleśas*, it is closely linked to ignorance. It is emotionally tangible as fear, hesitations, many secondary thoughts, complexity, lack of straightforward actions, always thinking "if", "if not", "yes" and "no", forth and back, thus being unable to take clear decisions. It is a lack of clarity and insight. Doubts can concern the four noble truths, the law of karma, etc. They are hesitations which make one stay in indecision and uncertainty and which obstruct one's engagement to virtuous activity and to abstaining from non-virtue. It clouds one's perception of what is to be done and what not. Doubts destroy even what you have experienced already in your practice, making you questioning it again and again.

Additional remarks from the oral teaching: Doubts are secondary thoughts and are the source of all complications in one's mind. Simplicity of mind in this context is to look directly and to do things as they are decided and not always to come back on one's decisions, to hesitate, and to doubt one's actions. But simplicity is not a stupid mind, which simply reacts to the first thing arising in mind. It is to do what needs to be done with wisdom, discerning what is the best thing to do, and then to perform it without further hesitations. All this indecision and uncertainty arises due to ignorance. Doubt leads to instability of mind, putting into question what one already had found out to be true, and is thus the cause of a lot of suffering. One hand one knows what would be good, but on the other hand there are always secondary thoughts creeping in which destroy the already gained understanding or knowledge.

Q: How do you know, if that what you understand is correct or not, without falling into an extreme?

A: One should check properly one's experiences and build one's whole dharma path on experience. There is no outer reference point as such. If in the past something proved to be true, you can build on it. But speculations like "would be", "should be", "can be" etc. about this and that all generate clouds of thoughts in the mind. If you just build very clearly on what you have already experienced and know, then you see what comes next. You see what you wish to check out more, and you just move towards it. This is a simple, direct approach.

You should compare your experiences of the practice with the teachings which you received. Do they fit together or not? Are there any contradictions? If they do not fit together, something needs to be changed. To find out what needs to be changed needs of course some clarity. Either the dharma teaching is not true to experience, or its presentation, or something in our application of the practice is wrong and needs to be changed. You can also wait and just continue to see whether more experience will reveal a new understanding and give more certainty. But do not doubt.

For example, if remembering of impermanence helps you to be more present in situations and to take good decisions, you gain conviction that remembering impermanence is a valuable guide in taking decisions. So do not doubt it. If you know this and that practice has given you this and that result then it is clear and you build on this, you use it as the basis for your trust and continue your journey. Trust is the opposite of doubts and hesitations, it is reliable. So build your practice on what you know rather on what you do not know.

Doubts arise also due to trying to reach out into the future, trying to find out and pre-arrange things so that nothing will happen to us. They are an expression of fear. There are all these hesitations because of projecting oneself into the future and trying to manipulate what should happen. It is the complicated approach of sending out one's messengers, i.e. projections, to see "how is this path", "how is that one", etc. From the outside this may look very intelligent but it makes life very complicated, because you rely only on other people's experiences and on intellectual speculations. The more simple the approach is, the better it is. Go step by step, grounded on your own experiences, one foot after the other, like the steady walk of an elephant.

Q: If you rely on your experience, and the lama comes and brakes that into pieces, saying you have to change, to take another direction, how to deal with that?

A: If the lama is authentic it is fine simply to believe him and to keep up your faith. But you should also look into yourself, try to see the fault within you, try to come to an understanding of what he says. Blind faith will not go very far, you really need to understand your experience, otherwise doubts will creep in. So if the lama points out that you are going into the wrong direction, you should investigate and try to understand why it is the wrong direction. With this deeper understanding you will establish a broader basis for your practice, and it will give rise to deeper faith in the lama. Then faith becomes the basis of your practice, and that exactly cuts through doubts.

Faith connected with wisdom or insight is more stable than faith connected with ignorance. The faith of a well believing person can be very stable until he or she meets another person who is very skilful in asking questions and creating doubts. Then suddenly one's faith becomes shaky, because one has not really integrated what the lama has pointed out. The lama's instructions need to be deeply considered and integrated so that faith gives birth to unshakeable wisdom based on experience within us.

For example, Rinpoche points out a mistake and shows another direction, something we are not at all aware of. Then we look within us and discover something new which was previously hidden, and we can understand that it needed to be pointed out. Thus one's faith in Rinpoche and in the dharma increases.

6. Erroneous views (*lta-ba nyon-mongs can*)

Definition: Erroneous or "emotional" views are confusion in relation to absolute and relative truth. In our classification this factor includes five aspects which – like for example in Asanga's presentation of mental factors – can be listed separately:

- "Clinging to the notion of a personal self" (*bdag 'dzin*) or "the wrong view of what is perishable" (*'jig lta*) is considering the aggregates (skandhas) as "mine" and "me". It is thus a wrong semblance of wisdom which is the basis for all wrong views.

- “Extreme views” (*mthar lta*) are basically the belief in the existence or non-existence of the five skandhas (the views of eternalism and nihilism, or a combination of the two). They obstruct the possibility to be liberated by the “middle path”.
- “Overestimation of one's views” (*ltha-ba mchog 'dzin*) is being attached to opinions. It can also be called dogmatism or idealism. These are views based on the assumption that the five skandhas exist which are held to be the best, the highest, the supreme. Strong attachment to views is a very destructive factor in regard to the dharma path: if one clings to something strongly, overestimating its value, one has no space to discover anything new. Thus progress on the path of dharma becomes difficult or impossible. It blocks new insights and new experiences.
- “Overestimating discipline and rites” (*tshül-khrims dang brtul-zhugs mchog 'dzin gyi lta-ba*) is a view or opinion that considers discipline and rites based on the assumption that the five skandhas exist to be pure, true and leading to liberation. It leads to efforts without obtaining the desired fruit.
- “Wrong views” (*log lta*) are the view points, opinions, ideas of someone who denies what exists (e.g. the law of karma – cause, result and action), who affirms the existence of what does not exist (e.g. self and objects) and who rejects the truth of what is (the ultimate) or who imagines it wrongly. It leads to a complete inversion of what is to be abandoned and what is to be practised, and thus cuts the roots of virtue, leading to misdirected commitments and actions. It consolidates the roots of the unwholesome and leads to persevering in harmful acts.

E. The 20 secondary afflictions (*nye ba'i nyon mongs pa*) (factors 28-47)

There are twenty more mental factors which are not conducive to enlightenment (*kleśas*). They all originate from combinations of the basic kleshas ignorance, attachment and aversion. They are called secondary or proximate afflictions because they naturally arise in proximity with the root afflictions.

1. Rage (*khro-ba; krodha*)

Rage or fury is a malevolent state of mind based on a prejudice with the wish to strike etc. Something is judged as disagreeable, non-desirable – a pre-judice is thus installed – and aversion is the result. This leads to resentment and being irritated which results in malevolence and the usual chain reaction of verbal and physical violence. First there is **irritation** or **anger** (*khong-khro*), the subject is angry. Then this takes its object, and as the fixation gets stronger it turns into real **hatred** (*zhe-sdang*), like a burning fire. The inwardly arising emotion is projected outwards and thus turns into real hatred.

2. Rancour (*khon-'dzin; upanaha*)

Rancour or resentment is not to abandon the intention of revenge. It is an offspring of rage and leads to impatience. Aversion and hatred can continue for some time, and if the object arises again and again, it's memory is stored, what we call “rancour” or “resentment”. This is a very destabilising mental factor, because its continuous presence acts like poison in the mind. It is not just rage arising once with the wish to destroy the object, because here mind cannot free itself since the aversion is present in again and again.

If we look in our mind, probably we can apprehend many different kinds of old angers stored within us. We need to practise upon these until they dissolve by working on these accumulations of past experiences. That is the reason why the practice of Dorje Sempa is so important, it helps to purify all these negativities.

3. Concealment (*'chab pa; mraksa*)

Concealment or dissimulation is to hide one's own faults when one is rightly accused. It is an offspring of confusion and leads to regrets and uneasiness.

4. Animosity (*'tshig pa; pradasa*)

Animosity is a malevolent mind, offspring of rage, which is preceded by anger and rancour that leads to violent, harsh, insulting words, an accumulation of non-merit and uneasiness.

5. Jealousy (*phrag-dog; irsya*)

Jealousy is an angry thought directed of someone who desires possessions and honour. It is part of hatred produced through intolerance of the well being of others. It produces emotional affliction and uneasiness.

Additional remarks from the oral teaching: Jealousy is considered a secondary emotional factor, because it is due to anger and attachment. It is due to anger because one is irritated by the fact that someone else is happy or that someone else has a quality. The fact of someone else having this quality or being happy is unbearable to our mind. It is due to attachment and clinging because we want to have this, we want to have more of this than the other. This is the clinging to this quality or this positive state of mind or possession or respect, whatever the other one is enjoying.

Basically, jealousy is based on comparison and all our ambitions to achieve something are based on jealousy. The whole world nowadays, this ambitious society — this is jealousy.

You can say there are two ways to be jealous. One way is to be jealous and to try and take the other one down, to make him worse, and the other way is to try and climb the ladder to become better than the other, to get what he has, to get more than he has. One is the lazy form and the other one is ambitious one – but both are jealousy due to comparing.

The lazy form is easier. You just have to make bad remarks about the other or make him angry so he loses his patience and happiness, or to try and make deals that his business falls down. But the “more honest and straight way” on which our society is built is to pull up your sleeves and to pretend that you are working for the benefit of beings but actually it is just for your own benefit. This is for example the case with scientists who are doing research just in order to one day receive the Nobel Prize. Then if somebody else makes the discovery just a few months ahead of them, they might try to steal it or destroy it.

6. Avarice (*ser-sna; matsarya*)

Avarice is a strong mental attachment of someone who desires possessions and honours. It is desire in respect to the material necessities of existence. It creates complications that obstruct a simple life.

The Tibetan word literally means “yellow-nosed”. It is never being content, the fear of losing something, of having never enough and wishing to have more. Desire generally tends to increase - not only for objects but also for immaterial things like love, recognition, whatever you can wish for and identify with as your own personal qualities. Avarice is the hoarding tendency, not wishing to share, basically a poverty attitude.

7. Duplicity (*gyo-ba; sathya*)

Duplicity or dissimulation is the attempt of someone interested in gain and honours to hide his true defects. It is linked to desire and ignorance and obstructs accepting good advice. When desire for social status, recognition, possessions and so on is strong, this leads to falseness or double-mindedness in order to obtain the desired objects. One uses lies, tricks etc. to get what one desires for. It is a tricky double-sidedness of mind.

8. Deceit (*sgyu; maya*)

Deceit is a demonstration of false virtues by someone interested in gain and honours. It is linked to desire and ignorance and leads to a treacherous life. If our predominant desire is the desire to be recognised, this leads to hypocrisy, pretending to be someone good in order to receive this so-desired respect, love etc.

9. Self-satisfaction (*rgyags pa; mada*)

Self-satisfaction is a joyous self-contentment arising due to good health, youth, longevity or any other intoxicating advantage. It is linked to desire and gives rise to all major and minor kleshas. There is a sense of haughty complacency, a vainglorious attitude. The object or personal attribute one clings to is regarded as one's own quality. One becomes completely self-satisfied with one's own objects, advantages, yesterday's good deal in business, or whatever personal advantages to which one attributes importance. It is called a negative factor because it leads to carelessness, unawareness, lack of mindfulness in relation to others and to the dharma.

A person filled with desire does not see right and left but only the desired object and "off" he goes. Having fulfilled one's desire one is still completely entangled in the world of desire, not at all aware of the needs of others, of the dharma, and how to use this experience or acquisition for practising the dharma path. This self-satisfaction has a euphoric quality.

10. Maliciousness (*rnam par 'tshe ba; vihimsa*)

Maliciousness is more than being unkind. It is a cruel, violent state of mind linked to hatred which is intend to doing harm.

11. Lack of self-respect (*ngo-tsha med-pa; ahrikyā*)

Lack of self-respect means not to be ashamed in front of oneself to do something harmful. It is a combination of desire, hatred and confusion that gives rise to all major and minor kleshas.

12. Lack of respect for others (*khrel med-pa; anapatrapya*)

Lack of respect for others means not to be ashamed to do harm when considering others. It is a combination of desire, hatred and confusion that gives rise to all major and minor kleshas.

13. Dullness (*rmugs pa; styana*)

Dullness or inertia is the absence of flexibility of mind. It is an offspring of confusion that entrails all major and minor kleshas.

14. Wildness (*rgyod pa; auddhatya*)

Wildness or agitation is the mental restlessness of someone pursuing an agreeable object. It is linked to desire and obstructs mental calm. Desire makes the mind going again and again to the objects of one's fascination, and in meditation the dispersed, excited mind is full of desire. When one does not swing between the poles of desire and aversion it is easy to find a calm mind. But if the mind is always attracted by this thought and that thought, this and that object, then one will never find mental calm and stability. Desire means agitation, clinging to the objects arising in mind.

15. Lack of confidence (*ma dad pa; asraddhya*)

Lack of confidence is the absence of a firm and complete conviction due to confusion. Mind is not serene and does not aspire to the wholesome. It leads to laziness.

16. Laziness (*le lo; kausidya*)

Laziness is the absence of mental effort caused by clinging to the pleasures of sleep and rest due to confusion. It obstructs beneficial activity.

17. Carelessness (*bag med pa; pramada*)

Carelessness or indolence is not developing the wholesome due to desire, hatred and confusion associated with laziness. Mind is not protected against impure states. It leads to an increase of what is harmful and a decrease of what is beneficial.

18. Confused memory (*brjed nges; musitasmrtita*)

Confused or "a-moral memory" is a memory full of emotional confusion that leads to distraction and further the inclination towards the harmful. It is a form of forgetfulness in the sense that due to one's veils one cannot remember what really happened.

19. Lack of discernment (*shes bzhin ma yin pa; asamprajnya*)

Lack of discernment, inattention or negligence is a state where our intelligence is clouded by emotional bewilderment which leads to involuntary acts of body, speech and mind such as transgression of vows etc.

20. Distraction (*rnam par gyeng ba; viksepa*)

Distraction is a dispersed mind as an expression of desire, hatred and confusion. One differentiates the "natural" distraction of the five senses, the "outer" of a mind following the five sense pleasures and the "inner" distraction of torpor, excitation and enjoyment of someone who is engaged in the wholesome. "Distraction concerning the goal" is to engage in the wholesome in order to be praised. "Turbulent distraction" is the clinging, dispersion and objectification in relation to whatever feeling arises as "I am", "me" or "mine" due to the turbulence of clinging to a self, self love and pride. "Reflective distraction" is a dispersion of mind that due to doubt obstructs the letting go in a person who is about to enter meditative absorptions or other vehicles.

F. The four variable factors (*gchan du 'gyar ba*) (factors 48-51)

They are variable because their character varies according to whether they are under the influence of wholesome or unwholesome factors. They can go either way – virtuous or non-virtuous. Although only these four are specifically mentioned in this category, in fact both the ever-present and the object-ascertaining factors share this quality of moral variability.

1. Regret (*'gyod-pa; kaukrtya*)

Regret is a repenting mind as part of confusion due to various reasons, intentional or not, timely and untimely, beneficial, harmful or neutral, convenient or non-convenient. It destabilizes the mind.

Regret can be very positive if we regret negative acts, but it can also be negative if one regrets positive acts. Basically regret can be a function to put oneself back on the good path which is positive, but regret about something which does not need to be regretted can just be mental agitation, a source of never being able to be content, of never finding inner peace. So it depends on how it is used.

2. Sleep (*gnyid; middha*)

Sleep or languor is a contracted mind as part of confusion; a state where outer sensory perceptions lose their power and all exterior activity ceases. Sleep can be timely (needed) and untimely (superfluous). Also it can be due to beneficial, harmful or neutral causes. Generally it leads to negligence in what one is supposed to do.

Sleep will be virtuous, if we fall asleep with a positive motivation, practise the clear light in deep sleep and engage in wholesome activity in the dream state. It will be non-virtuous, if one is just indulging in one's desires, and it can be neutral when nothing big happens, if one is just "spaced out".

3. Reasoning (*rtog-pa; vitarka*)

Reasoning is a mental discussion which searches depending on volition or the intellect. It is the gross aspect of mental analysis based on volition, the wish to identify an object. It leads to the point where one knows what this object is, independent of whether one is satisfied or dissatisfied with this object.

4. Investigation (*dpyod pa; vicara*)

Investigation is a mental discussion which reflects depending on volition or the intellect. It is the subtle aspect of mental analysis. It is a more detailed examination of the already identified object, going further into its different aspects.

Whether these two, analysis and investigation, are virtuous or non-virtuous depends on their object, whether one engages in something leading to enlightenment or something leading into samsara. Thus they can lead to states of well-being or uneasiness.

SUMMARY

We can see that the positive mental factors describe the capacities that should be present in what we would call such a well integrated personality able to deal with the world. The more the destabilising, negative factors are present, the more the person will need help in order to deal with the world. If on the other hand more of the wisdom and stability aspects are there, then the person is autonomous and can deal with the world alone. If more of the destabilising emotional factors are present then the person will sometimes lose control over his world, will be unable to make decisions, will remain locked into one emotion, unable to get out — depression, vanity etc. — it can take many forms.

Basically, what is to be encouraged in the dharma (and also in psychotherapy), are the positive mental factors which include all of the six paramitas. What needs to be avoided are the disturbing mental factors, the emotions. The difference between therapy and dharma is that therapy is only directed towards a temporary well-being in this life and dharma is for all lives up to and beyond enlightenment. The motivation with which one undertakes this kind of process is different and that is why the methods which are used are also different. The methods that undercut all ego clinging are not so interesting and often scaring for a person who just wants to be happy in this life, but if one wants to develop the capacity to help all sentient beings one will be interested in developing beyond a personal, relative well-being in this world. One will not stop with one's development just because one is happy.

Q.: Could you say something about the differences and similarities between what is meant by prajña (wisdom), intuition and 'inner voice'. Are they the same?

A.: No, they are not the same but they are closely linked. Intuition is the combination of knowledge with experience plus one's perception of the situation — and this in a quite spontaneous way.

Prajña is a clear perception of the situation and knowing what leads to enlightenment and what doesn't. The inner voice that one is occasionally talking about is a way of saying, "Tune in to your deeper knowing." It's very often mixed with ego clinging, one's own preferences and one's past experiences. The more prajña develops, the more one becomes free of one's own past experiences and you just "see" the situation as it is with larger, more panoramic knowledge. Also, if intuition, which in the beginning is rather ego-coloured, develops in this way it eventually becomes pure. At this point intuition is a factor of prajña and there is no longer a need to talk of anything else than just wisdom. Wisdom is *knowing* what is right and what is wrong.

Intuition is often misunderstood as some mystic knowledge of what is right to do in a situation, but it is basically just a combination of the three factors knowledge, experience and perception of a situation. If your knowledge is vast, if your experience of the past is purified and you take your memories only as an impersonal help, and if your perception of the situation is pure without clinging to a self, then your intuition will be pure. But then there's no need to talk of intuition, then it's really just wisdom. Talking of the inner voice is a way to tell people to look inside and to listen a little more to what they really feel but it is not a way of pointing to the dimension beyond ego, since the inner voice can be a demon.

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