

## **KNOW YOUR MIND – Part 3**

Mental Factors

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### **A. The Six Root Afflictions**

#### **A general explanation of afflictions**

Afflictions are distinct mental factors that, when they arise in our minds, cause our minds to be unpeaceful and unsubdued. Afflictions may be emotions, attitudes, or views, and they usually arise without our choice. There are two groups of afflictions: the six root afflictions and the twenty auxiliary afflictions.

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

#### **Are afflictions nonvirtuous?**

First, let's look at the meaning of *nonvirtue*. In general, nonvirtue is the cause of suffering. Parallel to the five types of virtue (explained in "Know Your Mind - Part 2"), there are five types of nonvirtue:

(1) *Natural nonvirtues* are mental factors such as anger, jealousy, and resentment that are nonvirtuous by nature.

(2) *Related nonvirtues* are the main mind and mental factors that accompany a naturally nonvirtuous mental factor.

(3) *Subsequently related nonvirtues* are latencies left on the mind by nonvirtuous minds and mental factors. They are not actual nonvirtues but are ethically neutral [this is because they are abstract composites, and most Buddhist schools assert that only consciousnesses are virtuous and nonvirtuous].

(4) *Nonvirtues* due to motivation are physical and verbal actions (karma) done with a nonvirtuous motivation.

(5) *Nonvirtues by way of ultimacy* are [phenomena] included within samsara. Since these are the sources from which arya generate despondency, they are called "non-virtues by way of ultimacy." Nonetheless, it is not definite that everything included in samsara is an actual non-virtue.

**Not all afflictions are nonvirtuous.** By themselves, ignorance, view of a personal identity, and view of extremes are neutral. They are not nonvirtuous because by themselves they lack the capacity to produce pain. In addition, these three do not always give rise to nonvirtuous mental states.

All afflictions of the desire realm are nonvirtuous, except unmixed ignorance (ignorance that does not accompany another affliction such as anger or attachment), view of a personal identity, and view of extremes. All afflictions of the upper realms—the form and formless realms—are neutral. A degree of intensity is needed for an affliction to be nonvirtuous, and the afflictions of beings in the upper realms are very refined and lack the intensity required to create nonvirtuous karma that ripens into painful experiences.

## **1. Attachment**

Attachment is a mental factor that, based on distorted attention that exaggerates the attractiveness of a polluted object (an object under the influence of ignorance or its latencies), wishes for and takes a strong interest in it. The object could be something material, a person or a place, or it could be praise or an idea. Attachment functions to produce discontent and to perpetuate the cycle of existence.

This is a general description of attachment; there are many degrees and variations of attachment. Some instances of attachment that arise in daily life are greed that wants more than our fair share; attachment to our ideas that leads to the stubborn insistence on being right; attachment to reputation, praise, pleasing sensory experiences, and so on. We also become attached to people, which leads to having unrealistic expectations of them or of our relationships with them. This in turn leads to disappointment and friction in those relationships, and feelings of bitterness or betrayal when the relationships don't continue as expected.

Covetousness is a coarse form of attachment. As one of the ten nonvirtues, covetousness easily leads to actions that directly harm others, such as stealing or unwise sexual relationships. Other afflictions derived from attachment are miserliness that doesn't want to share our possessions, haughtiness that is attached to our good fortune, and agitation that distracts the mind to desirable objects during meditation.

Some antidotes to attachment:

- Contemplate the faults of attachment and the benefits of nonattachment
- Remember impermanence and death
- Reflect on the unpleasant or faulty aspects of the object

## **2. Anger**

Anger is a mental factor that, referring to one of three objects [sentient beings, sufferings, and sources of harm] agitates the mind by being unable to bear or through wanting to harm the object or person. Anger is based on distorted attention that exaggerates or projects defects on people and things. Attachment causes us to see people and things as artificially appealing/attractive, while anger causes us to see them as artificially displeasing/ugly. Our minds create many "reasons" to validate our anger, and it can give us a false sense of power in situations where we feel afraid or hurt. Anger has many forms, and several other afflictions are derived from it, including irritation, annoyance, frustration, hatred, rebelliousness, belligerence, resentment, vengeance, spite, cruelty, violence, and jealousy.

In dividing anger, we can speak of lesser, middling, and great degrees of anger. There is also a nine-fold classification of anger: (1-3) he harmed me in the past, he is harming me now, he will harm me in the future; (4-6) she harmed my dear friend or relative, is harming them, will harm them; (7-9) he helped my enemies, is helping them now, will help them in the future. Here *enemy* includes people we don't like or disagree with as well as those who harm us or interfere with our happiness.

Anger functions to disturb our minds. As the basis for harming ourselves and others, it involves us in destructive actions and increases suffering in the world.

Some antidotes to anger:

- Contemplate the faults of anger and the benefits of patience
- Remember karma
- Cultivate loving-kindness
- Try to understand the other's point of view and generate compassion

### **3. Arrogance (*pride, self-importance*)**

Arrogance is a mental factor that, based on the view of a personal identity that misapprehends how the I or mine exists, strongly grasps an inflated image of ourselves. It functions to prevent us from learning and increasing our virtue and causes us to disrespect or denigrate others. Vasubandhu mentions seven types of arrogance:

1. Arrogance thinking "I am superior" in relation to someone who is inferior. In this and the next two forms of arrogance, we compare ourselves with others in terms of wealth, looks, knowledge, social standing, athletic ability, fame, etc.
2. Arrogance thinking, "I am superior" in relation to someone who is our equal.
3. Arrogance thinking, "I am superior" in relation to someone who is better than us.
4. Arrogance that regards our aggregates and thinks, "I." This is also called the *conceit of I am*. Based on self-grasping, we believe ourselves to be inherently existent and very important.
5. Arrogance that thinks we have good qualities that we don't have.
6. Arrogance thinking we are just a little bit inferior to someone who is really wonderful.
7. Arrogance thinking our faults are virtues; for example, an ethically degenerate person thinking he is upstanding and righteous.

Arrogance blocks us from gaining new qualities; when we believe we are already top notch, we are not receptive to learning, instead remaining complacent without endeavoring to cultivate virtuous qualities. Arrogance due to our Dharma knowledge or accomplishments does not plague beginners; at that time we are aware of how little we know and how much we need to practice. But after we have studied and practiced for a while, arrogance can easily set in and arrest our spiritual growth.

It is important to discriminate between arrogance and self-confidence. Arrogance is often a cover for insecurity, whereas self-confidence acknowledges our abilities without inflating them. Self-confident people have no need to boast of their achievements. An essential factor on the spiritual path, self-confidence should be nurtured. Thinking, "As I progressively practice the path, I'll be able to accomplish all the bodhisattva activities" is not arrogance. This is in fact true and awareness of our potential boosts our enthusiasm to engage in Dharma study and practice. Similarly, rejoicing at our virtue with a sense of satisfaction thinking, "I feel good because I kept my precepts in a challenging situation" is not arrogance; it's a way of reinforcing our virtue.

Some antidotes to arrogance:

- Contemplate the faults of arrogance and the benefits of humility

- Contemplate how you are dependent on others for your body, possessions, knowledge, skills, etc.
- Contemplate what you *don't* know, the skills you *don't* have, etc.

#### **4. Ignorance**

Ignorance is an afflictive state of unknowing brought about by the mind's lack of clarity regarding the nature of things such as the four truths, Three Jewels, and karma and its effects. It functions as the basis and root of all other afflictions and the afflictive actions and rebirths they produce. This is a general definition of ignorance accepted by all Buddhist tenet systems. However, each system has its own unique definition as well. Furthermore, the meaning of ignorance differs according to the context; some of these meanings are mentioned below.

1. *Ignorance of the ultimate truth* does not know the mode of existence of all persons and phenomena. This meaning is accepted by the Cittamatra and Madhyamaka schools. When this ignorance gives rise to afflictions that produce karma, which in turn projects rebirths in saṃsarā, it is also ignorance that is the first link of dependent origination (#3 below).
2. *Ignorance of karma and its effects* underlies all destructive actions, especially those that lead to unfortunate rebirths. It is not simply not knowing about karma and its effects, but either strong disbelief in it or temporary disregard for it. This ignorance is also the *ignorance that is one of the three poisons* [greed, hatred, and ignorance].
3. *Ignorance that is the first link of dependent origination* starts a new set of twelve links that leads to rebirth in saṃsarā. Tenets systems have different assertions about this ignorance. According to the Prasangikas, it grasps our own I and mine as inherently existent, which is based on grasping our aggregates as inherently existent.

Some antidotes to ignorance are:

- Learn the Dharma, think about what you learn, and meditate on it
- Have good ethical conduct, cultivate kindness and concentration, and do practices to purify nonvirtue and accumulate virtue/merit

#### **5. Deluded Doubt**

Deluded doubt is a mental factor that is indecisive and wavers toward an incorrect conclusion concerning important spiritual topics such as the ultimate nature of phenomena, the four truths, Three Jewels, and karma and its effects. Keeping us in a constant state of uncertainty about what we believe, which path to follow, and what to practice, deluded doubt immobilizes and prevents us going forward spiritually. Doubting ourselves, the path, and the result, we spin in circles and spend days, months, and years stuck in indecision.

Deluded doubt differs from doubt inclined toward the correct conclusion or doubt wavering in the middle. It differs from curiosity, which propels us to ask questions and learn more until we come to a sound conclusion.

Some antidotes to deluded doubt are:

- Investigate your doubts to understand their history and the thoughts and feelings behind them
- Do more research into the topic you have doubt about, discuss your doubts with teachers and more experienced students
- Remember that doubt is transitory: it comes and goes in the mind, and is not who you are

## **6. Afflictive Views**

The above five root afflictions are non-views, whereas the sixth, afflictive views, includes five erroneous views. These five erroneous views are forms of corrupt intelligence that either grasp the I to exist inherently or, based on that, develop further mistaken conceptions. They act as the basis for all problems caused by afflictions and all other mistaken outlooks and create turmoil in our lives. Their antidote is wisdom.

These five are “corrupt intelligence”: incorrect speculations or conclusions reached by incorrect analysis. They are unreliable minds that lack a realistic foundation. They are called “intelligence” because they distinguish their object and know its qualities; they are corrupt because they misapprehend their object.

Although afflictive views are numerous, these five are prominent: view of a personal identity, view of extremes, view holding (erroneous) views as supreme, view of bad rules and practices, and wrong views.

- a. The view of a personal identity is an afflictive intelligence that, when referring to the conventional I or “mine,” grasps it to be either inherently I or mine. It is called “intelligence” in the sense that it analyzes something.
- b. The view of extremes is an afflictive intelligence that, when referring to the I or mine grasped by the view of a personal identity, regards them in an absolutist or nihilistic fashion.
- c. The view holding wrong views as supreme is an afflictive intelligence that regards other afflictive views as the best views.
- d. The view of rules and practices is an afflictive intelligence that believes purification of mental defilements occurs by engaging in ascetic practices and inferior codes of ethical conduct that are inspired by wrong views.
- e. Wrong views is an afflictive intelligence that denies the existence of something that in fact exists—for example, karma and its effects, past and future lives, and the Three Jewels—or that believes a divine creator or primal substance to be the cause of sentient beings. (The difference between wrong views here and the wrong views among the ten nonvirtues is that the latter includes only denying things that exist, and does not include believing in things that do not exist.)

## **B. The Twenty Auxiliary Afflictions**

The twenty auxiliary afflictions are branches of the root afflictions and similarly disturb the mind. They are called *auxiliary* because they are close to or related to the root afflictions and are classified according to the root afflictions with which they are associated.

*Afflictions derived from anger:*

1. **Wrath** (belligerence) is a mental factor that, due to an increase of anger, is a thoroughly malicious state of mind wishing to cause immediate harm.
2. **Resentment** (grudge holding, vengeance) is a mental factor that firmly holds on to the fact that in the past one was harmed by a particular person and wishes to retaliate.
3. **Spite** is a mental factor that is preceded by wrath or resentment, is an outcome of malice, and motivates us to speak harsh words in response to unpleasant words said by others.
4. **Jealousy** (envy) is a mental factor that, out of attachment to respect and material gain, is unable to bear the good qualities, possessions, opportunities or virtue of others.
5. **Cruelty** (harmfulness) is a mental factor that, with a malicious intention that lacks any compassion or kindness, desires to harm, belittle, or disregard others. It is usually directed toward those we consider inferior to ourselves.

*Afflictions derived from attachment:*

6. **Miserliness** (stinginess, avarice) is a mental factor that, out of attachment to respect and material gain, firmly holds onto our possessions with no wish to give them away.
7. **Haughtiness** (self-satisfaction) is a mental factor that, being attentive to the good fortune we possess, produces a false sense of confidence or security that leads to complacency.
8. **Agitation** (excitement, restlessness) is a mental factor that, through the force of attachment, does not allow the mind to rest solely on a virtuous object but scatters it here and there to many other objects.

*Afflictions derived from ignorance*

9. **Concealment** (dissimulation) is a mental factor that wishes to hide our faults whenever another person with a benevolent intention free of attachment, confusion, hatred, or fear talks about such faults.
10. **Lethargy** (dullness) is a mental factor that, having caused the mind to become dull and thereby insensitive, does not comprehend its object clearly.
11. **Laziness** is a mental factor that, having firmly grasped an object offering temporary happiness, either does not wish to do anything constructive, or although wishing to, is weak-minded. Laziness leads to excessive sleep, involvement with meaningless activities, and discouragement.
12. **Lack of faith** (lack of confidence or trust) is a mental factor that, causing us to have no belief in or respect for that which is worthy of confidence—such as karma and its results and the Three Jewels—is the complete opposite of faith. It acts as the basis for laziness and disrespect.
13. **Forgetfulness** is a mental factor that, having caused the apprehension of a virtuous object to be lost, induces memory of and distraction to an object of affliction.

14. **Non-introspective awareness** (non-clear comprehension) is a mental factor that, being an afflictive intelligence, has made no, or only a rough, analysis and is not fully alert to the conduct of our body, speech, and mind, and thus causes us to become carelessly indifferent.

*Afflictions derived from both attachment and ignorance*

15. **Pretension** is a mental factor that, being overtly attached to respect or material gain, fabricates a particularly excellent quality about ourselves and wishes to make it known to others with the thought to deceive them.
16. **Deceit** (dishonesty) is a mental factor that, being overtly attached to respect or material gain, wishes to deceive others by hiding our faults or preventing them from knowing our faults.

*Afflictions derived from ignorance, anger, and attachment*

17. **Lack of integrity** is a mental factor that does not avoid negativity for reasons of personal conscience, self-respect, or for the sake of our Dharma practice. It is a supportive condition for all afflictions and the basis for not protecting our precepts.
18. **Inconsideration for others** is a mental factor that, without taking others or their spiritual traditions into account, does not restrain from harmful actions. It causes others to lose faith in us.
19. **Heedlessness** (non-conscientiousness, negligence) is a mental factor that, when we are affected by laziness, wishes to act in an unrestrained manner without cultivating virtue or guarding the mind from objects or people that spark afflictions.
20. **Distraction** is a mental factor that, arising from any of the three poisons, is unable to direct the mind toward a constructive object and disperses it to a variety of other objects.

### **C. The Four Variable Mental Factors**

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

1. **Sleep** makes the mind unclear, gathers the sense consciousnesses inward, and renders the mind incapable of apprehending the body. Sleeping out of attachment and laziness is destructive, sleeping because the body is tired is neutral, sleeping with the intention to resume our compassionate activities after resting is virtuous.
2. **Regret** regards an appropriate or inappropriate action that we have performed of our own accord or under pressure as something we do not wish to repeat. Regretting negativities is virtuous, but regretting our constructive actions is nonvirtuous.
3. **Investigation** (coarse engagement) arises depending on intention or wisdom and examines an object in general. Investigating the meaning of impermanence is virtuous, whereas investigating someone's faults with the intention to criticize is nonvirtuous.

4. **Analysis** (subtle engagement) arises in dependence on intention or wisdom and analyzes the object in detail. Analyzing the nature of reality with the motivation of bodhicitta is virtuous, but analyzing how to make more efficient weapons with the intention to kill is destructive.

**Colophon:** These notes were compiled by Sangye Khadro from various sources, including

- *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* by The Dalai Lama and Thubten Chodron (Wisdom Publications)
- *Samsara, Nirvana, and Buddha Nature* by The Dalai Lama and Thubten Chodron (Wisdom Publications)
- *Mind and its Functions* by Geshe Rabten (Editions Rabten Choeling, Switzerland)
- *A Necklace for Those of Clear Awareness Clearly Revealing the Modes of Minds and Mental Factors* by Ye-she Gyel-tsen (an FPMT Masters Program translation).