

APPENDIX 4

The Five Aggregates

Form is defined as something breakable. Feeling is vivid experience. Perception is cognizance of phenomenal characteristics. Conditioning Factors are the causal and conditioning elements not accounted for in the other four aggregates. Finally, Consciousness is defined as the awareness of outer objects and inner mental states.

1. **Form** (*gzugs*). Form in its causal aspect corresponds to the four elements: earth, water, fire, and air. Form in its resultant aspect corresponds to the five sense organs and their five objects, to which is added so-called imperceptible form (*rig byed ma yin pa*). The first ten are easy enough to understand. The last item, which is asserted only by the Vaibhashika school, is described in the *Abhidharmakosha* as follows: “There are three kinds of imperceptible form: vows, nonvows, and others.” In this context, “vows” means the binding of oneself to virtuous actions, “nonvows” means a commitment to evil actions, while “others” refers to positive or negative activities performed without conscious intention. This third kind of imperceptible form is termed “intermediate.” All such forms originate from the four major elements of the body and speech; even in states of unconsciousness and inattention, they are always present. The Sautrantikas, Chittamatrins, and Madhyamikas, however, make no

mention of imperceptible forms.

2. **Feeling** (*tshor ba*) is threefold: pleasant, painful, and neutral.

3. **Perception** (*'du shes*) is differentiated as small, intermediate, and great.^a

4. **Conditioning Factors** (*'du byed*). There are “associated conditioning factors” (in other words, associated with the mind) and “nonassociated conditioning factors” (not associated with the mind and which are therefore neither mind nor form). The associated conditioning factors comprise forty-nine mental factors to which may be added feeling and perception as just mentioned, thus making a total of fifty-one.

These fifty-one associated mental factors are subdivided into six groups:

1. Five omnipresent factors (*kun 'gro lnga*).
2. Five object-ascertaining factors (*yul so sor nges pa lnga*).
3. **Eleven wholesome factors** (*dge ba'i sa mang bcu gcig*).
4. **Six root defilements** (*rtsa ba'i nyon mongs drug*).
5. **Twenty lesser defilements** (*nye ba'i nyon mongs nyi shu*).
6. Four variable factors (*gzhan 'gyur bzhi*).

• The five omnipresent factors are so called because they are present in every mental process and are necessary for every act of cognition. They are:

1. Feeling (*tshor ba*): the experience of pleasure, pain, and neutrality. Feeling is thus the basis of desire and aversion.

2. Perception (*'du shes*): the apprehension of a specific object, as circumscribed and distinct from something else. On the conceptual level, this is the recognition of identities or names, and on the sensory level the discernment of the five objects of sense.²⁶⁶ (These are *subjective* experiences and are thus the basis of disagreement and controversy.)

3. Intention (*sems pa*): the moving of the mind to a specific object and the clear apprehension of it. This is the basis of all subsequent action and involvement.

4. Contact (*reg pa*): the coming together of object, sense organ, and consciousness. This is the basis of feelings.

5. Attention or mental engagement (*yid la byed pa*): the steady focusing of the mind on its object. This is the basis of concentration.

- The five object-ascertaining factors, which deal with specific aspects of the object, are:

1. Keenness (*'dun pa*), whereby the mind takes a strong interest in an object appearing in one of the six sense fields. It is a nostalgia for past experience, a fascination with present experience, and a desire to experience again in the future. It is the basis for joyful diligence.

2. Appreciation (*mos pa*), whereby the mind savors the qualities of an object, likes that object, and fixes the thought of it in the memory.

3. Recollection (*dran pa*), the factor that prevents the mind from losing or forgetting its object. It is the

antithesis of distraction.

4. Concentration (*ting nge 'dzin*), the one-pointed mental stability that focuses on a given object and acts as the basis for accurate knowledge.

5. Intelligence (*shes rab*), the capacity to discern and elucidate phenomena beyond doubt and hesitation.

- **The eleven wholesome factors** cause the five omnipresent, the five object-ascertaining, and the four variable factors to take on a positive aspect and thus to create happiness in oneself and others. They are:

1. Faith (*dad pa*): in this context, a mental state free from the pollution of the major and minor defilements. It is an attitude of confidence with regard to what is truly pure and authentic, for example, the karmic law of cause and effect and the qualities of the Three Jewels. It is the basis of keenness.

2. Sense of shame (*ngo tsha*): an inner, private sense of right and wrong. This is the impulse to avoid evil on account of Dharma or personal conscience; it is the foundation of self-discipline.

3. Sense of decency (*khrel yod*): a sensitivity to the opinions and feelings of others leading to the restraint from negativity for others' sake. This also is the foundation of pure discipline.

4. Conscientiousness (*bag yod*): a carefulness with regard to virtuous conduct and the avoidance of defilement. It fosters goodness, both relative and ultimate.

5. Flexibility (*shin sbyangs*): an alert aptitude of mind and body that precludes rigidity and opens the way to good and beneficial objectives.

6. Evenness (*btang snyoms*): a calm, clear mental state free from torpor or agitation, which protects against the emotional disturbances of desire, anger, and ignorance.

7. Nonattachment (*ma chags*): the opposite of, and remedy for, craving for existence and worldly possessions.

8. Nonaggression (*mi sdang*): the opposite of, and remedy for, hatred. It is love itself and overwhelms hostility toward sentient beings and painful situations.

9. Nonperplexity (*gti mug med*): the opposite of, and remedy for, ignorance. It is a lucidity and sharpness of mind that removes confusion about objects of knowledge.

10. Nonviolence (*rnam par mi 'tshe ba*): an inability to accept that others should suffer, an attitude of kindness and compassion toward the sorrows of others.

11. Joyful diligence (*brtson 'grus*): an appreciation and joy in relation to positive actions. It should be distinguished sharply from an enthusiasm for nonvirtuous things or things that have nothing to do with the Dharma. Its function is to bring about the achievement of wholesome qualities.

The twenty-six unwholesome factors engender mental turmoil or disturbance. In the case of certain of these factors, such as anger, this is obvious, while anyone who has tried to meditate will have discovered the problems that laziness and dullness can cause. These unwholesome factors, or *kleshas*, are divided into **six root** defilements and twenty lesser defilements. The root defilements are the cause of all emotional conflicts and mental distortion, and it is because of them that negative actions are performed. These in turn give rise to the sufferings of

samsara. The lesser defilements are aspects of the root defilements and accompany them as dependent factors.

- The **six root defilements** are:

1. Attachment (*'dod chags*): a state of longing for something and the will to possess it. It is a state of delusion in that it arises in relation to objects that only seem to be a source of satisfaction and enjoyment. It is the basis of discontent and, in contrast with love and compassion, which are concerned exclusively with the welfare of others, it is self-centered and geared to the subject's own satisfaction. Technically speaking, attachment also includes the mind's clinging to the five impure aggregates as these occur in the three realms of existence.

2. Anger (*khong khro*): a deluded state arising in relation to objects that appear unpleasant. It is a state of resentment, of being unable to tolerate something or someone, and the wish to remove or damage the source of irritation in some way. It has a coarsening effect on the mind and is the cause of negative actions.

3. Pride (*nga rgyal*): a strong sense of superiority and infatuation with one's self-image. It is a delusion based on the mistaken concept of "I" and "mine" and gives rise to feelings of self-importance and prominence. It promotes a disrespect for others and renders impossible the attainment of sublime qualities.

4. Ignorance (*ma rig pa*): a state of not knowing, which arises when the mind lacks clarity with regard to the nature of things, such as the law of karma, the four truths, the Three Jewels, and so forth. It is the environment in

which all other afflictions arise.

5. Defiled views (*lta ba nyon mongs can*): false opinions entertained in ignorance—for example, of the true status of the ego—and the foundation of all negative mental states. There are five principal defiled views:

a. The view of the transitory composite (*'jig tshogs la lta ba*), whereby the five aggregates (which are transitory and composite) are regarded as a permanent and unitary “I” and “mine.” It is the basis of all other wrong views.

b. The view of extremes (*mthar 'dzin pa'i lta ba*). These extremes are: eternalism (the belief in an unchanging personal or phenomenal self) and nihilism (the belief that there is no survival after death).

c. The view of doctrinal superiority (*lta ba mchog 'dzin*), the belief that one's (false) opinion is supreme and universally valid.

d. The view of ethical superiority (*tshul khrims dang brtul zhugs mchog 'dzin*), the belief in the superiority of invalid systems of discipline or ethics that do not in fact produce the effects hoped for (liberation). This includes the practice of extreme and useless asceticism, the sacrificing of animals, and even a proud attachment to Buddhist disciplines, which effectively obstructs spiritual progress.

e. Wrong views (*log lta*), the holding of opinions that are contrary to the facts, for example, to deny the existence of what exists, as in saying that there is no

such thing as the karmic law of cause and effect; or to ascribe existence to what does not exist, as in the case of a belief in a divine Creator.

6. Doubt (*the tshom*): A state of vacillation that tends to wrong view and hinders the cultivation of wholesome states.

- The **twenty lesser defilements** derive from the **six root defilements** and are often present in the mind without the subject's being aware of them. They are, however, distinct functions and behave in specific ways.

1. Carelessness (*bag med pa*): the opposite of conscientiousness. This is a negligent, unrestrained impulse, indulged in irrespective of the need to do good and refrain from evil. It is the occasion more of nonvirtue than of virtue and is a factor that dissipates positive qualities.

2. Laziness (*le lo*): the opposite of endeavor, the grasping at the comforts of the moment and the failure to strive in virtuous ways.

3. Lack of faith (*ma dad pa*): the absence of belief in or respect toward a worthy object. It is the occasion of laziness.

4. Dullness (*rmugs pa*): a lapse of the mind into a state of insensitivity so that its object is not clearly apprehended. It leads to a condition of mental and physical heaviness and sleepiness.

5. Excitement (*rgod pa*): a state of agitation or scattering, due to attachment, in which the mind strays from its point of concentration and is distracted to other

objects.

6. **Shamelessness** (*ngo tsha med pa*): the suspension of an inner sense of morality. It is the support and precursor of all root and lesser defilements.

7. Disregard (*khrel med*): the absence of self-restraint through neglect, and a contemptuous disregard for the opinions and feelings of others.

8. Aggressive anger (*khro ba*): the desire to inflict harm and retaliate for injuries received.

9. Rancor (*'khon 'dzin*): the harboring of grudges on account of past injuries, the memory of which lingers in the mind—a constant occasion of anger and resentment.

10. Dishonesty (*g.yo*): an attitude of dissimulation and cheating in the interests of personal wealth or advantage.

11. Spitefulness (*'tshig pa*): a mental state that prompts malevolent verbal outbursts. It is caused by anger and rancor and is a precursor of harsh speech. It destroys one's own and others' happiness.

12. Envy (*phrag dog*): the inability to tolerate the good fortune of others, a state motivated by attachment to one's own reputation and material gain. Envy partakes of both anger and resentment.

13. Dissimulation (*'chab pa*): an attitude of refusing to admit one's faults and a refusal to deal with them when they are pointed out or spoken of by another.

14. Miserliness (*ser sna*): possessiveness, the attitude of holding on to things and refusing to let them go. This can refer not only to material things but even to the Teachings.

15. Pretension (*sgyu*): the imagination and flaunting of qualities that one does not possess, motivated by a desire

for possessions and reputation. It leads to wrong livelihood and hypocrisy.

16. Self-satisfaction (*rgyags pa*): an arrogance or complacency with regard to one's good fortune, good looks, and so forth. It produces a hollow sense of confidence and is the gateway to the major and minor defilements.

17. Cruelty (*rnam par 'tshe ba*): a malevolent attitude that intentionally inflicts suffering on another.

18. Forgetfulness (*brjes nges*): not just a lapse of memory, but also the losing from sight of virtuous objects and the careless allowing of the mind to drift into unwholesome directions. Forgetfulness is the basis of distraction.

19. Distraction (*rnam par g.yeng*): the scattering of the mind to objects other than the positive point of focus.

20. Inattention (*shes bzhin ma yin*): a negligent lack of awareness of one's physical, verbal, and mental conduct.

- The four variable factors (*gzhan 'gyur bzhi*) are so called because their character changes under the influence of other wholesome or unwholesome factors. Although only four factors are mentioned here, this feature of variability is shared also by the omnipresent and object-ascertaining factors.

1. Sleep (*gnyid*): this is a state in which the sense consciousnesses are withdrawn inward and the mind no longer apprehends the body. Sleep is affected by the waking activities of mind and body and will be wholesome or restless, agitated or defiled, accordingly.

2. Regret (*'gyod pa*): an attitude of sorrow or anxiety

with regard to past actions. If the action was negative, regret is a wholesome quality. The reverse is true if the act was positive.

3. Gross discursiveness (*rtog pa*): the mental factor by virtue of which the mind gains an overall impression of objects.

4. Subtle discursiveness (*dpyod pa*): the intense examination of objects with a view to gaining a clear idea of them. Gross discursiveness and subtle discursiveness are wholesome or unwholesome according to their objects.

All these fifty-one mental factors (*sems byung*) are distinct from the main mind (*gtso sems*), but they approximate it in five ways and for this reason are said to be concomitant (*mtshungs ldan*) with it. The main mind and the mental factors thus possess:

1. common basis (*rten*), since they both come into existence in dependence on the same sense organ.
2. common referent (*dmigs pa*), since they always refer to the same object.
3. common aspect (*rnam pa*), since they both perceive the same aspect of an object.
4. common duration (*dus*), since they both occur in the same moment.
5. singularity of occurrence (*rdzes re re bar mnyam*), since in any one moment there is only one main mind and one mental factor.

The relationship between the main mind and the mental factors is subtle. Generally speaking, the main

mind is the consciousness that apprehends the fundamental presence of the object, while the mental factors apprehend and react to particular aspects or qualities of that object. In this respect, the relationship of the main mind and the mental factors is similar to that existing between an overseer and the laborers on a building site. The overseer is aware of what each worker is doing without, however, participating in the latter's specific activity. In general, there are innumerable mental factors; in the *Abhidharmasamucchaya*, Asanga (the authority followed here) lists fifty-one of the most important.^b

There are countless nonassociated conditioning factors, of which the twenty-four most important are as follows: acquisition, nonacquisition, similarity of state, absorption without perception (i.e., in the celestial realms), absorption of cessation, nonperception, vital energy, birth, duration, aging, impermanence, names, phrases, syllables, the state of an ordinary being (i.e., devoid of the noble qualities of someone on the path), continuity, diversity, rapidity, relatedness, order, temporality, spatiality, countability, and collection.

5. Consciousness (*rnam par shes pa*): The Shravakas and most Madhyamikas assert six types of consciousness (the five nonconceptual sense consciousnesses—visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile—and the mental consciousness that identifies specific objects as such and such. The Chittamatrins, the rest of the Madhyamikas, and practitioners of the Secret Mantra teachings assert eight types of consciousness. To the six consciousnesses

just mentioned, they add the defiled emotional mind, which, turning inward toward the alaya, constantly conceives of “I,” the ego. This emotional mind is absent in the meditation of the Aryas but never ceases in the mindstreams of ordinary beings. Finally, there is the consciousness of the alaya (alayavijnana or *kun gzhi rnam shes*). This is mere knowing, an unspecified apprehension, the object of which is general and uncircumscribed.

Since they are the source of future suffering, the five aggregates illustrate the truth of origin. Insofar as they are the product of past karma, they illustrate the truth of suffering. Because they are the polluted cause, they are origins; because they are the polluted result, they are sufferings. However, while all “origins” are necessarily “sufferings,” not all “sufferings” are “origins.” The inanimate universe [is the result of polluted karma but] is not the origin [of future suffering].

[Taken from the commentary of Khenpo Yönten Gyamtso, YG I, 355–358. Khenpo Yönten Gamtso, however, simply lists the fifty-one mental factors without comment. The definitions have therefore been added, based on Vasubandhu’s Abhidharmakosha and Mipham Rinpoche’s Introduction to Scholarship (mkhas ’jug).]

This refers to perceptions in the desire, form, and formless realms.

In his *Abhidharmakosha*, Vasubandhu lists forty-seven mental factors.