

The Mental Factors Involved in the Practice of Mindfulness

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The state of mindfulness of the present moment that we try to develop is actually a blend of several mental factors specified in the Buddhist analysis of the mind. The main ones employed are **mindfulness (*dran-pa*, Skt. *smṛti*) itself, alertness (*shes-bzhin*, Skt. *samprajanya*) and caring concern (*bag-yod*, Skt. *apramada*, caring attitude)**. In order to practice mindfulness more effectively, it is helpful to identify each of these factors so that if any are deficient in strength, we can adjust them.

Mindfulness: Mindfulness itself, the so-called “mental glue,” needs to be accompanied by two further mental factors: distinguishing (*‘du-shes*, Skt *samjna*, recognition) and consideration (*yid-la byed-pa*, Skt. *manasikara*, taking to mind). “Distinguishing” focuses on the characteristic features of the various components that make up each moment of our experience. It singles these out from everything else. Correct consideration takes the object accurately for what it is – pain is simply a physical sensation, nothing more and nothing less. With mindfulness accompanied by distinguishing and correct consideration, we try to remain focused on the contents of the ever-changing present moment. We try to do that without losing the contents of the present moment as our object of focus by becoming distracted. In this way, mindfulness functions as the mental glue to hold our attention on the ever-changing present moment of our experience.

Sthiramati explains that as an aid for maintaining mindfulness, we need to remind ourselves from time to time of our object of focus. This means mentally saying a keyword so that we keep the hold of our mindfulness strong. This is in accord with Vasubandhu’s assertion that mindfulness entails making note of its object. Tsongkhapa elaborates on this point: “If you refute this, saying that this is discursive thinking and so don’t verbally remind yourself, it will be very difficult to develop strong mindfulness and alertness.”

Alertness: Alertness is the mental factor that monitors and checks the condition of mindfulness’s mental hold on the object of focus. It functions within the context of maintaining mindfulness on our object of focus – the contents of our present moment of experience. In a sense, then, alertness is a part of strong mindfulness. Alertness does not merely note deviations in our mindfulness, but, it also, in a sense, triggers an internal “alarm system,” so that with restoring attention (*chad-cing ‘jug-pa’i yid-byed*), we correct our focus and re-establish mindfulness.

Caring Concern: Caring concern is the mental factor that takes care and is careful about our state of mind. It safeguards our mind from leaning toward the destructive side and keeps it on the constructive, positive side. Thus, with caring concern, we take seriously our state of mind; we “care about” it. ...because of our caring concern, we are moved to use restoring attention to correct the mental hold of our mindfulness when alertness detects that it has become faulty. Without caring concern, we wouldn’t care that we have forgotten about our object of focus, the present moment, even if we notice that we have become distracted. Caring concern, then, is the basis for ethical self-discipline (*tshul-khrims*, Skt. *shila*), with which we refrain from destructive behavior.

The Tibetan term for caring concern, *bag-yod*, literally means to “have caution.” Its opposite is *bag-med*, to lack caution, to be careless. The original Sanskrit, however, that was translated into Tibetan as *bag-yod* is *apramada*, which means “not-pramada.” *Pramada* means drunk or mentally unstable, such that we neither care about what we say or do, nor take care about either of them. With caring concern, then, we are not like a drunk person. We are sober, reserved and responsible, and thus take care about our state of mind.

SATTIPATHANA: THE DIRECT PATH TO REALIZATION

By Analayo

According to the "definition", the practice of satipatthana requires the establishment of four particular mental qualities, which can be taken to represent the mental faculties of **energy, wisdom, mindfulness, and concentration.**

The second of the four mental qualities mentioned in the "definition" is sampajana, a present participle of the verb sampajanati. Sampajanati can be divided into pajanati (he or she knows) and the prefix sam (together), which often serves an intensifying function in Pali compounds. Thus sam-pajanati stands for an intensified form of knowing, for "clearly knowing". ...the combination of mindfulness with clear knowledge is often used in a general manner to refer to awareness and knowledge, without being restricted to its specific use as clearly knowing bodily activities in the gradual path scheme or in the satipatthana context of body contemplation. ... Such cooperation of mindfulness with clear knowledge, which according to the "definition" is required for all satipatthana contemplations, points to the need to combine mindful observation of phenomena with an intelligent processing of the observed data. Thus "to clearly know" can be taken to represent the "illuminating" or "awakening" aspect of contemplation. Understood in this way, clear knowledge has the task of processing the input gathered by mindful observation, and thereby leads to the arising of wisdom.

THE HEART OF BUDDHIST MEDITATION

By Nyanaponika Thera

The Four Kinds of Clear Comprehension

Buddhist tradition as embodied in the commentaries to the Buddha's Discourses, distinguishes four kinds of Clear Comprehension: (1) the Clear Comprehension of Purpose (*sāttḥaka-sampajañña*), (2) the Clear Comprehension of Suitability (*sappāya-sampajañña*), (3) the Clear Comprehension of the Domain (of Meditation; *gocara-sampajañña*), (4) the Clear Comprehension of Reality (lit. of Non-delusion; *asammoha-sampajañña*).

WAY OF THE BODHISATTVA

By Shantideva

Chapter 5. Vigilant Introspection

1. Those who wish to keep the trainings
Must with perfect self-possession guard their minds.
Without this guard upon the mind,
The trainings cannot be preserved.
2. Wandering where it will, the elephant of mind,
Will bring us down to torment in the hell of Unrelenting Pain.
No worldly beast, however wild and crazed,
Could bring upon us such calamities.
3. If, with mindfulness' rope,
The elephant of mind is tethered all around,
Our fears will come to nothing,
Every virtue drop into our hands.