

The “Object” in Buddhism

From Wikipedia;

Mental factors (**Sanskrit**: चैतसिक, **romanized**: *caitasika* or *chitta samskara* चित्त संस्कार;^[1] **Pali**: cetasika; **Tibetan**: རེས་པ་བྱུང་ *sems byung*), in **Buddhism**, are identified within the teachings of the **Abhidhamma** (Buddhist psychology). They are defined as aspects of the mind that apprehend the quality of an object, and that have the ability to color the mind. Within the Abhidhamma, the mental factors are categorized as formations (**Sanskrit**: *samskara*) concurrent with mind (**Sanskrit**: *citta*).^{[2][3][4]} Alternate translations for mental factors include "mental states", "mental events", and "concomitants of consciousness".

Introduction

Mental factors are aspects of the mind that apprehend the quality of an object and have the ability to color the mind. Geshe Tashi Tsering explains:

The Tibetan for mental factors, *semlay jungwa chö* (Skt. *chaitasika dharma*), means phenomena arising from the mind, suggesting that the mental factors are not primary to the mind but arise within a larger framework. A mental factor, again, is defined as the aspect of the mind that apprehends a particular quality of an object. Because it is characterized by the qualities of activity and non-neutrality, it has the ability to color the mind in dependence on the way it manifests. Hence, a feeling of desire from seeing what is conceived as a beautiful object affects the other mental factors that are present at that time, and this colors the whole mind.^[5]

The relationship between the main mind (**Sanskrit**: *citta*) and the mental factors can be described by the following metaphors:

- The main mind is like screen in a cinema, and the mental factors are like the images projected on the screen. In this analogy, we typically do not notice the screen because we are so caught up on the images.
- The main mind is like a king who sits passively on a throne, and the mental factors are like the king's busy ministers.^[4]

Traleg Rinpoche states that the main distinction between the mind and mental factors is that the mind apprehends an object as a whole, whereas mental factors apprehend an object in its particulars.^{[6][a]}

Lists of mental factors

Within Buddhism, there are many different systems of **abhidharma** (commonly referred to as Buddhist psychology), and each system contains its own list of the most significant mental factors.^{[b][c]} These lists vary from system to system both in the

number of mental factors listed, and in the definitions that are given for each mental factor. These lists are not considered to be exhaustive; rather they present significant categories and mental factors that are useful to study in order to understand how the mind functions.[\[d\]](#)

Some of the main commentaries on the Abhidharma systems that are studied today include:[\[7\]](#)

- [Abhidhammattha-sangaha](#) by Acariya Anuruddha – a [Theravada](#) commentary that lists fifty-two mental factors.
- [Atthasālinī](#) by [Buddhaghosa](#) – a Theravada commentary that provides explanations for fifty-two mental factors.
- [Abhidharmakośa](#) by [Vasubandhu](#) – a [Sarvastivada](#) commentary (studied by the Mahayana schools) that lists forty-two mental factors.[\[10\]](#)
- [Abhidharma-samuccaya](#) by [Asanga](#) – a [Yogachara](#) commentary (studied by the Mahayana schools) that lists fifty-one mental factors.
- *Innermost Core of Topics of Knowledge (mDzod-phug)* by [Shenrab Miwo](#) – a Tibetan [Bon](#) commentary that lists fifty-one factors.

Sthaviravāda Sarvastivada tradition

The number of mental factors varies in different Sarvastivada works. The [Abhidharmakośa](#) lists 42 mental factors which include:[\[11\]](#)

Ten factors arising with every mind (mahābhūmika)

- [Vedanā](#) – feeling
- [Samjñā](#) – perception
- [Cetanā](#) – volition
- [Sparsā](#) – contact
- [Chanda](#) – desire (to act)
- [Prajñā](#) – wisdom
- [Smṛti](#) – mindfulness
- [Manasikāra](#) – attention
- [Adhimokṣa](#) – decision
- [Samādhi](#) – mental concentration. it also called [Ekaggata](#), one-pointedness

Ten factors arising with every good mind (kuśalamahābhūmikā)

- [Śraddhā](#) – Conviction
- [Vīrya](#) – energy
- [Hri](#) – shame at doing evil
- [Apatrāpya](#) – decorum, regard for consequence
- [Alobha](#) – non-attachment
- [Advēsa](#) – non-aggression
- [Praśrabdhi](#) – calmness

- [Upeksā](#) – equanimity
- [Appamāda](#) – conscientiousness
- [Ahimsā](#) – non-injuriousness

Six factors arising with every defiled mind (kleśamahābhūmika)

- [Moha](#) – delusion
- [Pramāda](#) – heedlessness, carelessness, unconcern
- [Kauśīdya](#) – laziness, slothfulness
- [Āsraddhya](#) – lack of conviction, lack of trust
- [Styāna](#) – lethargy, gloominess
- [Auddhatya](#) – excitement, ebullience

Two factors arising with every bad mind (akusalamahābhūmika)

- [Āhrīkya](#) - shamelessness
- [Anapatrapya](#) - disregard

Ten factors arising with defiled mind to a limited extent (parittaklesabhūmika)

- [Krodha](#) - anger
- [Mrakṣā](#) - hypocrisy
- [Mātsarya](#) - selfishness
- [Īrsyā](#) - envy
- [Pradāśa](#) - spite
- [Vihimsā](#) - violence
- [Upanāha](#) - vengefulness
- [Śāthya](#) - craftiness
- [Māyā](#) - deceit
- [Mada](#) - pride

Four indeterminate factors (aniyatabhūmika)

These factors can be associated with good, bad or neutral mind.

- [kaukritya](#) - regret
- [Middha](#) - sleepiness
- [Vitarka](#) - initial thought
- [Vicāra](#) - sustained thought

Theravāda Abhidhamma tradition

Within the [Theravāda Abhidhamma](#) tradition, the [Abhidhammattha-sangaha](#) enumerates the fifty-two mental factors listed below:[\[e\]](#)

Note that this list is not exhaustive; there are other mental factors mentioned in the Theravada teachings. This list identifies fifty-two important factors that help to understand how the mind functions.

Seven universal mental factors

The seven universal mental factors (*sabbacittasādhāraṇa cetasikas*) are common (*sādhāraṇa*) to all consciousness (*sabbacitta*). [Bhikkhu Bodhi](#) states: "These factors perform the most rudimentary and essential cognitive functions, without which consciousness of an object would be utterly impossible."[\[13\]](#)

These seven factors are:

- [Phassa](#) – contact
- [Vedanā](#) – feeling
- [Saññā](#) – perception
- [Cetanā](#) – volition
- [Ekaggata](#) – one-pointedness
- [Jīvitindriya](#) – life faculty
- [Manasikāra](#) – attention

Six occasional mental factors

The six occasional or particular mental factors (*pakiṇṇaka cetasikas*) are ethically variable mental factors found only in certain consciousnesses.[\[14\]](#) They are:

- [Vitakka](#) – Application of thought
- [Vicāra](#) – Examining
- [Adhimokkha](#) – Decision
- [Viriya](#) – Energy
- [Pīti](#) – Rapture
- [Chanda](#) – Desire (to act)

Fourteen unwholesome mental factors

The unwholesome mental factors (*akusala cetasikas*) accompany the unwholesome consciousnesses (*akusala citta*).

The fourteen unwholesome mental factors are:

- Four universal unwholesome mental factors (*akusalasādhāraṇa*):
 - [Moha](#) – delusion
 - [Ahirika](#) – lack of shame
 - [Anottappa](#) – disregard for consequence
 - [Uddhacca](#) – restlessness
- Three mental factors of the greed-group (*lobha*):
 - [Lobha](#) – greed
 - [Ditthi](#) – wrong view
 - [Māna](#) – conceit
- Four mental factors of the hatred-group (*dosa*):
 - [Dosa](#) – hatred
 - [Issā](#) – envy

- [Macchhariya](#) – miserliness
- [Kukkucca](#) – regret
- Other unwholesome mental factors
 - [Thīna](#) – sloth
 - [Middha](#) – torpor
 - [Vicikicchā](#) – doubt

Bhikkhu Bodhi states:[15]

Unwholesome consciousness (*akusalacitta*) is consciousness accompanied by one or another of the three unwholesome roots—greed, hatred, and delusion. Such consciousness is called unwholesome because it is mentally unhealthy, morally blameworthy, and productive of painful results.

Twenty-five beautiful mental factors

The beautiful mental factors (*sobhana cetasikas*) accompany the wholesome consciousnesses (*kusala citta*).

The twenty-five beautiful mental factors (*sobhana cetasikas*) are:

- Nineteen universal beautiful mental factors (*sobhanasādhāraṇa*):
 - [Saddhā](#) – conviction
 - [Sati](#) – mindfulness
 - [Hiri](#) – shame at doing evil
 - [Ottappa](#) – regard for consequence
 - [Alobha](#) – lack of greed
 - [Adosa](#) – lack of hatred
 - [Tatramajjhataṭṭā](#) – balance, neutrality of mind
 - [Kāyapassaddhi](#) – tranquility of mental body
 - [Cittapassaddhi](#) – tranquility of consciousness
 - [Kāyalahutā](#) – lightness of mental body
 - [Cittalahutā](#) – lightness of consciousness
 - [Kāyamudutā](#) – malleability/softness of mental body
 - [Cittamudutā](#) – malleability/softness of consciousness
 - [Kāyakammaññatā](#) – wieldiness of mental body
 - [Cittakammaññatā](#) – wieldiness of consciousness
 - [Kāyapāguññatā](#) – proficiency of mental body
 - [Cittapāguññatā](#) – proficiency of consciousness
 - [Kāyujukatā](#) – straightness/rectitude of mental body
 - [Cittujukatā](#) – straightness/rectitude of consciousness
- Three Abstinenances (*viratī*):
 - [Sammāvācā](#) – right speech
 - [Sammākammanta](#) – right action
 - [Sammā-ājīva](#) – right livelihood
- Two Immeasurables (*appamañña*):
 - [Karunā](#) – compassion

- [Mudita](#) – sympathetic joy
- One Faculty of wisdom (*paññindriya*):
 - [Paññā](#) – wisdom

Bhikkhu Bodhi states:[\[15\]](#)

Wholesome consciousness (*kusalacitta*) is consciousness accompanied by the wholesome roots—non-greed or generosity, non-hatred or loving-kindness, and non-delusion or wisdom. Such consciousness is mentally healthy, morally blameless, and productive of pleasant results.

Abhidharma tradition according to the Mahayana taken from Hiniyana system

Abhidharma studies in the Mahayana tradition are based on the Sanskrit Sarvāstivāda abhidharma system. Within this system, the [Abhidharma-samuccaya](#) identifies fifty-one mental factors:

Five universal mental factors

The five universal mental factors (*sarvatraga*) are:

1. [Sparśa](#) – contact, contacting awareness, sense impression, touch
2. [Vedanā](#) – feeling, sensation
3. [Samjñā](#) – perception
4. [Cetanā](#) – volition, intention
5. [Manasikāra](#) – attention

These five mental factors are referred to as *universal* or *omnipresent* because they operate in the wake of every mind situation. If any one of these factors is missing, then the experience of the object is incomplete. For example:

- If there is no *sparśa* (contact), then there would be no basis for perception.
- If there is no *vedana* (feeling, sensation), there is no relishing of the object.
- If there is no *saṃjñā* (perception), then the specific characteristic of the object is not perceived.
- If there is no *cetanā* (volition), then there is no movement towards and settling on the object.
- If there is no *manasikāra* (attention), then there is not holding onto the object.

[\[16\]](#)

Five object-determining mental factors

The five object-determining mental factors (*viśayaniyata*) are:

1. [Chanda](#) – desire (to act), intention, interest
2. [Adhimoksa](#) – decision, interest, firm conviction
3. [Smṛti](#) – mindfulness
4. [Prajñā](#) – wisdom

5. [Samādhi](#) – concentration

The five factors are referred to as *object-determining* is because these factors each grasp the specification of the object. When they are steady, there is certainty concerning each object.[\[17\]](#)

Eleven virtuous mental factors

The eleven virtuous (*kuśala*) mental factors are:

1. [Sraddhā](#) – conviction
2. [Hri](#) – self-respect, conscientiousness, sense of shame
3. [Apatrāpya](#) – decorum, regard for consequence
4. [Alobha](#) – non-attachment
5. [Adveṣa](#) – non-aggression, equanimity, lack of hatred
6. [Amoha](#) – non-bewilderment
7. [Vīrya](#) – diligence, effort
8. [Praśrabdhi](#) – pliancy, mental-flexibility
9. [Apramāda](#) – conscientiousness
10. [Upekṣa](#) – equanimity
11. [Ahimsā](#) – nonharmfulness

Six root unwholesome factors

The six root unwholesome factors (*mūlakleśa*) are:

1. [Rāga](#) – attachment
2. [Pratigha](#) – anger
3. [Avidya](#) – ignorance
4. [Māna](#) – pride, conceit
5. [Vicikitsa](#) – doubt
6. [Drsti](#) – wrong view

Twenty secondary unwholesome factors

The twenty secondary unwholesome factors (*upakleśa*) are:

1. [Krodha](#) – rage, fury
2. [Upanāha](#) – resentment
3. [Mrakṣa](#) – concealment, slyness-concealment
4. [Pradāśa](#) – spitefulness
5. [Īrsyā](#) – envy, jealousy
6. [Mātsarya](#) – stinginess, avarice, miserliness
7. [Māyā](#) – pretense, deceit
8. [Śāthya](#) – hypocrisy, dishonesty
9. [Mada](#) – self-inflation, mental inflation, self-satisfaction
10. [Vihimsā](#) – malice, hostility, cruelty, intention to harm
11. [Āhrīkyā](#) – lack of shame, lack of conscience, shamelessness

12. [Anapatrāpya](#) – lack of propriety, disregard, shamelessness
13. [Styāna](#) – lethargy, gloominess
14. [Auddhatya](#) – excitement, ebullience
15. [Āsraddhya](#) – lack of conviction, lack of trust
16. [Kauśīdya](#) – laziness, slothfulness
17. [Pramāda](#) – heedlessness, carelessness, unconcern
18. [Musitasmṛtitā](#) – forgetfulness
19. [Asamprajanya](#) – non-alertness, inattentiveness
20. [Vikṣepa](#) – distraction, desultoriness

Four changeable mental factors

The four changeable mental factors (*aniyata*) are:

1. [Kaukritya](#) – regret, worry,
2. [Middha](#) – sleep, drowsiness
3. [Vitarka](#) – conception, selectiveness, examination
4. [Vicāra](#) – discernment, discursiveness, analysis

Alternate translations

Alternate translations for the term *mental factors* (Sanskrit: *caitasika*) include:

- Mental factors (Geshe Tashi Tsering, Jeffrey Hopkins, Bhikkhu Bodhi, N.K.G. Mendis)
- Mental events (Herbert Guenther)
- Mental states (Erik Pema Kunzang, Nārada Thera)
- Concomitants (N.K.G. Mendis)
- Concomitants of consciousness (Bhikkhu Bodhi)
- Subsidiary awareness (Alexander Berzin)

In Modern Buddhism

From Tien-Tai to Nichiren, the definition of the “object” in Buddhist practice takes the form of the ultimate realization in the potential of the sentient mind. Since the objective of Shakyamuni’s lifetime of teachings was the universal truth attainable by any sentient mind to awaken, the central mission of enlightenment was the object-’tive’ or goal or aim of all Buddhist practice. To identify this objective as a distinctly unique understanding of Shakyamuni’s teachings of the Lotus Sutra, later Mahayana teachings focus solely on the self-realization of innate enlightened mind. This focused understanding of the aim of Buddhist practice is named by Nichiren as the sole and unique endeavor of the culminating teachings of the “One Vehicle” teaching of the Lotus Sutra. Using the prefix of “Go”, Nichiren uses the language of honor, respect, and dedication toward the ultimate aim of practice, which, Nichiren personifies as the “Honzon”. Honzon in Japanese has several nuances of meaning, from ‘Master’ and ‘Master of the House’ to ‘image of dedication’. Reading this way is to understand the corpus of teachings and language around the concepts of the mind, thoughts, and the processes of the minds attitudes, intentions, and directives. Therefore, the use and discussions regarding the “Go-Honzon” is to dedicate one’s efforts in practice to the ultimate master of reality, Buddha-ness. This is distinctly different from the Mandala of Nichiren’s

Samsaric ‘mirror’ for the sentient mind’s awakening. The GoHonzon awakening of the Buddha-mind, the profound essence of the mind’s ability to witness the true nature of all phenomena. This ‘witnessing’, this sentient awakening is itself the ‘GoHonzon’. This is the “Object” (aim, determined focus) of Buddhist practice.

On the other hand, the “Great Mandala” is named such due to its sole purpose of mirroring and facilitating the highest goal of the Buddhist practice. Nichiren’s mandala is a truly magnificent tool for our focused practice, but it is not the GoHonzon. As we have seen in the history provided in this document alone, the consistent understanding and dissections of Buddhism lie within the functions of the mind, the ‘cittas’, the Śraddhā – Conviction, Vīrya – energy, Hrī – shame at doing evil, Apatrāpya – decorum, regard for consequence, Alobha – non-attachment, Adveṣa – non-aggression, Praśrabdhi – calmness, and so on, completely separate from the physical realities and vicissitudes of Samsara and its contents. Knowing this, it is not only completely reasonable to understand that the mandala is NOT the aim of Buddhist practice, but rather, it represents the synthesis of Nichiren’s insight of the Lotus teachings. The mandala embodies Nichiren’s profound insight of Shakyamuni’s elucidated method for self-realization of the three-thousand-realms of each thought moment of life, the GoHonzon-mind of Buddhahness.