

Exploring the Mind

Draft Syllabus

Purpose: By studying different ways to distinguish and classify various kinds of consciousness and the definitions of each one, we learn how to reduce destructive mental/emotional states and generate constructive ones all the way up to the realizations of the paths and their final result, full enlightenment. To do this, 1) we look at what the mind is and how it works, 2) the difference between destructive and constructive emotions, 3) the various types of objects of mind, 4) the different types of awareness that apprehend them, and 5) how initially faulty minds can be transformed into valid minds on the path to enlightenment. This module is presented in six parts:

Part 1. What the Mind Is and How It Works - To look at the definition and main features of mind in both classical Buddhist and modern scientific perspectives. To examine the relationship between the mind and the brain, the possibility of the mind existing separate from the body, the continuity of the mind after death, and some of the challenges facing scientific materialism. It is necessary to address questions around these issues in order to establish a rational basis for the existence of liberation from samsara and full enlightenment.

Part 2. Destructive and Constructive Emotions - By focusing more specifically on destructive and positive emotions, it becomes clearer how to reduce the one and increase the other, which makes it immensely easier to actually practice transforming our minds on a daily basis in very tangible ways.

Part 3. Objects and Object-Possessors - In order to understand the world we live in, we need to understand the objects of consciousness and the consciousnesses that possess these objects.

Part 4. Seven Types of Awareness - To show how we can transform from having distorted ways of apprehending things, which do not accord with reality and cause us to suffer, to having accurate ways of knowing, which accord with reality and cause us to have lasting happiness.

Part 5. Conceptual and Non-Conceptual Consciousnesses - To understand that conceptual and non-conceptual consciousnesses are fundamentally different ways in which our minds engage objects and that they provide both unique limitations and unique advantages and opportunities. To understand how they play different roles in giving rise to the afflictive emotions that cause suffering, and how they can be used to generate not only the antidotes to afflictive emotions, but also positive states of mind that lead up to and eventually abide in liberation and enlightenment.

Part 6. Minds and Mental Factors - The division of consciousness into main minds and mental factors shows in more detail how different aspects of the mind function to fully experience and engage objects in harmful, helpful, and neutral ways.