**Transcript of the teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on *The Eight Categories and Seventy Topics***

**Root Text:** *The Eight Categories and Seventy Topics* by Jetsün Chökyi Gyaltsen, translated by Jampa Gendun. Final draft October 2002, updated May 2011. © Jampa Gendun & FPMT, Inc.

**Lesson 22 25 August 2016**

Close placement of mindfulness on bodies. Impermanence of the body. Our body is true suffering. Our body is selfless. Close placement of mindfulness on feelings. Impermanence of feelings. The antidote to discursive thoughts.

**CLOSE PLACEMENT OF MINDFULNESS ON BODIES**

Recently, we have seen that there are many ways to meditate on the close placement of mindfulness on the body. There are so many ways to approach this topic. One can reflect on how the body is impermanent, impure, empty and selfless. Indeed, there are many important reasons why the meditation on the close placement of mindfulness of body is done.

We regard our body as permanent. We innately and very naturally misconceive our body to be permanent and unchanging. We also misconceive the body as the self.

As we have many misconceptions with regard to our body, this leads to clinging and attachment to the body. Due to our attachment to the body of this life, many people concentrate all their effort and spend all their time in this life just taking care of and maintaining their body. Due to putting all their effort and time every day to just taking care of the body of this life, many people say they are not able to put aside time for Dharma practice and spiritual development. This is what happens. This is also mentioned in the teachings. But we have to analyze and see for ourselves whether this is true.

*Impermanence of the body*

For example, focus on the impermanent nature of the body by bringing to mind that this body is disintegrating. There will come a time when it will cease to exist. Recollect that we are going to die and definitely, there will come a time when we will have to leave this body behind. Not only remember this but generate mindfulness and vigilance with regard to this fact throughout the day as we go about our daily activities.

If we were to maintain such mindfulness and vigilance with regard to our impending death, it will make a huge difference in reducing or stopping us from accumulating negativities. We will not have strong attachment to wealth, power and possessions or relatives, loved ones, friends and so forth. With this mindfulness of our death and impermanence, such things will not cause us great mental disturbance as there will not be strong attachment to them. They no longer cause pain in our heart. So it really makes a big difference if we have that kind of recollection as opposed to not having that recollection in our mind in our daily lives.

**CLOSE PLACEMENT OF MINDFULNESS ON FEELINGS**

*Impermanence of feelings*

When we have strong mindfulness of the impermanence and momentary nature of our body, when we apply that understanding and mindfulness to our feelings—even when we experience pleasant bodily feelings—we will also recollect that such feelings are also momentary. They are not going to last. They have a reason for arising and manifesting but they are not going to last. With that understanding, this will help us not to be so attached and cling so strongly to those feelings. In the absence of strong attachment and clinging to pleasant bodily feelings, we will not accumulate so many of the negative karma that are usually accumulated in our search for those pleasant bodily feelings.

Since our body is impermanent, therefore, the bodily feelings that arise in dependence on our body are also impermanent and momentary. They are not static and not permanent. Although this is the case, most of us are not aware that our pleasant bodily feelings are impermanent. Not only are we not aware of this, we misconceive that the pleasant bodily feelings that we experience are permanent. We feel they are natural, cling to them as permanent, wishing that they will never change and will always be there and think that they are stable.

But our pleasant bodily feelings are impermanent and won’t last forever. When the high of those pleasant bodily feelings are gone, we feel low again. And in the absence of feeling high, the mind that is feeling low again fills that void by craving and grasping at a new experience of pleasant feelings. We do whatever we can to look for that next experience of pleasant bodily feelings.

I think this is how most people lead their lives, day in and day out, running after pleasant feelings out of their attachment for them. If you think about this, you can see how easy it is for people who give in to strong attachment to accumulate not only negative karma but *very strong* negative karma.

All of you here know the lam-rim. In the lam-rim literature in the section on karma, it explains how from one instance of a non-virtue, we experience four results. This is something that we need to meditate on. When we meditate on how from just one non-virtue, there are four results, then the mind will think, “I better not engage in non-virtue. Otherwise, I will suffer greatly.”

We have to think deeply about the general characteristics of karma—how karma increases, how karma is never wasted, i.e., once the karma is done, the result will definitely follow and so forth.

On the basis of the meditation on the impermanent nature of our body, we can also think about the impermanent nature of the pleasant bodily feelings that we experience in our life. We will definitely experience pleasant feelings, in this case, pleasant bodily feelings. The point is not being attached and clinging to them. They will arise. We will experience them but we have to do so without clinging or attachment. We have to see for ourselves the fault of attachment to pleasant feelings. If we get attached or cling to pleasant feelings, what will be the problem? Is there any harm? That is something we have to see for ourselves.

*Our body is true suffering*

Back to the body again. The body is impermanent and it is in the nature of suffering. The reason we experience the suffering of birth, aging, sickness, and death is because we have a body. Without the body, there is no way to have these four sufferings. Whatever unpleasant feelings or suffering, in particular bodily suffering, that we experience now and the physical pains that we will suffer in the future can only happen because we have a body. Our body is a cause of our physical suffering. We are the owners of this vessel of suffering, the contaminated appropriated aggregates.

The next thing that we have to understand and be aware of all the time is that we possess the vessel for suffering, the body, and that is why we suffer. We have to have this constant awareness that we possess this contaminated body and, therefore, we possess true suffering. This body is true suffering.

You have to see for yourself the benefits of remembering these points all the time. “Yes, I know all this. Now, you are telling me that I have to remember them all the time. What is the point of doing that?” You have to figure this out for yourself and see the reasons for doing so.

We don’t experience physical bliss all the time. In fact, more often than not, we experience unpleasant and painful bodily feelings. If we don’t know how to think when we experience physical discomfort or unpleasant bodily feelings, we will get upset. Our mind will be disturbed and unhappy. Sometimes, we even get angry. “Why am I suffering and in such much pain?”

Some people, out of their frustration due to their physical disability or physical pain, may even take it out on others by inflicting physical harm or saying unpleasant things to others, i.e., behaving physically and verbally in a negative way.

When we experience physical discomfort or bodily pain, we should also place our attention on the impermanent nature of those unpleasant bodily feelings. Just as we meditate on the impermanent nature of our pleasant bodily feelings, we should do likewise for our unpleasant bodily feelings by recognizing that they are there but they are not going to last forever because they are not permanent.

When we experience a painful sensation, we exaggerate it, making it seem worse than it really is. One of the reasons why it becomes difficult to handle is because when we look at our unpleasant experience, naturally, we think that it is going to last forever, “I’m not going to get well. This is going to continue forever.” We make our suffering greater than it is.

But if at the back of our mind, we remember that it is impermanent and is disintegrating momentarily, then when we go through that painful experience, there will not be so much additional suffering.

It is a fact that our body is in the nature of suffering. It is very helpful to be aware of that constantly. Even though at a particular moment in time, we don’t feel anything in particular—not happy, sad or painful—the body is conditioned for pain and to experience suffering. Even though we are not suffering now, we are bound to experience suffering in the future as our body is conditioned to suffer at any time. All we need is just a condition. For example, all we need to do is just press the body. Instantly, we will feel some discomfort.

Since the nature of the body is that it is born to suffer, it shouldn’t be surprising that when conditions come together, we will experience difficulties or pain. Even the conditions are there but without the body, there is no way to suffer. We shouldn’t find this so surprising.

It is important to see that we have the cause of suffering with us all the time. Because we have the body, therefore, we can be disturbed by other conditions. This is the reality. If we don’t remind ourselves about this, we will be disturbed very easily. When our health goes wrong, there is pain. There is so much worry and the mind is so disturbed, thinking: “it must be my diet” or “it must be spirit harm or naga harm.”

Actually, there is no need to be surprised because the cause of suffering is already there. We possess this body all the time. We must acknowledge why we have suffering in our life. This is because we, ourselves, are the source of suffering. So it shouldn’t be any surprise. Instead, we should acknowledge and accept it. If we are able to do that, then I think life will be so much easier.

There are some people who live with this idea, “Nothing bad must befall me. I must not experience suffering. It is not correct for there to be suffering in my life.” If we were to live life with this kind of attitude, it won’t take much to rile up this person. Even if it is just a small little problem and discomfort comes, there is so much unhappiness.

As explained in the previous class, if we don’t want to experience bodily pain in life, what is the solution? The solution is to achieve the mental body! There are two ways to achieve the mental body. One way is to become a foe destroyer. Another is to achieve the Mahayana path of seeing. When the Mahayana path of seeing is achieved, one’s mind generation becomes the mind generation of pure resolve. As there is this special mind generation on the path of seeing, life will be great. There are only these two types of sentient beings that don’t have pain like us.

Even people who enter the paths—be it the Hinayana or Mahayana path—also experience suffering. Other than the two types of beings we mentioned earlier, we all have to suffer. Whether we like it or not, since we have to suffer, there will be problems and suffering in our life.

It is a different matter if you have already achieved the mental body and are still experiencing pain. Then you have the right to protest. Otherwise, there is no need to ask questions such as, “Why is there suffering in my life? Why am I having this pain?” We should not be asking such questions.

We will have problems in life. We will experience suffering and pain. We just have to deal with them. We are not saying that you just meditate on them and do nothing. Of course, you have to do something but life is like that. At times, we will have problems, then there will be no problems and then another problem comes again. We will have pain one after another.

Depending on the problem, we have to see the doctor. We are not saying that you just meditate and not see a doctor. We have to see the doctor and take whatever measures that are appropriate according to the illness or pain. The point is that we should do something about it. We have to be practical but we should also be constantly aware that our body is impermanent and is in the nature of suffering. Remembering that is very helpful. Then when we experience problems or pain, our mind is more stable and is not so disturbed.

There is real practical benefit when we pay attention to this reality. Our life and our body are impermanent and are in the nature of suffering. It is so helpful to be constantly aware and mindful of this, that there is this active thought in the back of our mind as we go about our daily life. This is what we need to do—practise this mindfulness all the time.

Otherwise, we will be no different from somebody who doesn’t know anything about impermanence, a person who doesn’t know that the body is in the nature of suffering. We may know how to explain impermanence but if we don’t remember it constantly, then at the end of the day, we are no different from somebody who doesn’t know anything about impermanence. There is no practical benefit.

But if we remember this actively as we go about our daily life, we will see the difference and the positive effect on our life and mind. Only then will we start to taste the Dharma. Then we can really say, “There is something about the Dharma. It is really useful and helpful.” This is how we truly taste the Dharma and enter into real practice. Otherwise, while thinking about other things and hoping to taste the Dharma—I think that will be difficult.

*Our body is selfless*

On top of that, if we can remember and place our mindfulness on how our body is selfless, we will experience even more benefit than what has been explained earlier. The word ‘selfless’ literally means no self, an absence or lack of a self. Here, the explanation is according to the majority of the Buddhist tenets, i.e., we are not looking at the ultimate view. In the highest school, the presentation of the selflessness of persons is considered a coarse presentation. Nevertheless, the presentation is accepted by most of the Buddhist tenets.

‘Self’ here refers to a self-sufficient, substantial existence. When applied to a person here, selflessness of persons means the absence of a self-sufficient, substantially existent person.

What is this self-sufficient, substantially existent person like? If it exists, how does it exist? We certainly grasp on to such a person. We have this innate feeling that there is an ‘I’ who is an experiencer of joy and pain, an ‘I’ that exists separately from the body and is independent of it, i.e., it does not depend on the body. We have this very natural and innate kind of grasping.

There is a natural feeling that there is a ‘me’ somewhere within the confined boundaries of the body that is a controller of the body but is separate from the body, i.e., it doesn’t depend on the body. It views the body as its possession. Therefore, based on this apprehension of a self-sufficient, substantially existent person, there is an apprehension of ‘mine’, ‘my’ body. When mixed with grasping, it comes to regard ‘my’ things, ‘my’ side, ‘my’ friends, ‘my’ loved ones and so forth. This attitude induces attachment, aversion, anger and so forth.

The apprehension of a self-sufficient, substantially existent person, independent of the body, yet the controller and owner of the body is a very strong and natural feeling. When this is established, naturally, there is also the feeling or concept of ‘others’. So this innate grasping at such a self-sufficient, substantially existent person is the basis for afflictions like anger and attachment to arise.

Think about how your own attachment and anger arises. You will see that it is inevitably linked with a natural feeling of the ‘I’. If you think about it, this is very clear. For example, we may be attached to an object. Why are we attached to that object? Because the object is very pleasant and attractive to us, not someone else. Basically, it comes back to the ‘I’, the ‘me’. Because it is attractive to ‘me’, attachment arises. The stronger the sense of the ‘I’, the stronger will be the mind of attachment or anger.

The psychology is so clear if we think about it. Why are we attached? Why are we upset? It is not because that object appears to be very nice to another person or because there is another person out there who thinks that the object is bad. “I am attached because he appears attractive to somebody else; I am angry because he appears annoying to somebody else.” It never happens like that! It is always what the ‘I’ thinks. “That object appears pleasant to me.” Then attachment comes in. “That person or object appears unattractive to me.” That becomes the reason to be upset or angry. When you think about it, it is clear that whatever afflictions it may be, anger or attachment, it always comes back to the ‘I’, ‘me’ or oneself.

Selflessness of persons means the absence of such a self-sufficient, substantially existent person. So it is saying that the self-sufficient, substantially existent person that we naturally think exists all the time—that is a controller and owner of the body although it is separate from the body—does *not* exist although we think it does. This is the very root from which afflictions such as anger and attachment arise.

When this mind is harmed, i.e., this wrong concept of the apprehension of a self-sufficient, substantially existent person is cut, there is no way for attachment and anger to arise as their root has been cut. This is how the selflessness of persons is explained, particular in the Hinayana tenets.

You will recall that in the Hinayana tenets, only the selflessness of persons is taught. There is no presentation of the selflessness of phenomena in the Hinayana tenets. It is only in the Mahayana tenets of the Mind Only School, the Autonomy Middle Way School and the Consequence Middle Way School that the selflessness of phenomena is presented.

You may be asked, “Why do you have to talk so much about the selflessness of phenomena? You have already told me about the selflessness of persons. When the root of the afflictions is already cut, what else is there to do? Why is there the need to look at the selflessness of phenomena?” What are you going to say?

In the Mahayana tenets, there is an explanation and presentation of the selflessness of phenomena. According to the Mind Only School, the selflessness of phenomena is the emptiness of the subject and object as different entities.

In the Mind Only School, they refute external objects existing as different entities from the mind. When we add this presentation on top of the presentation of the selflessness of persons, which they also accept, it is said that the impact on taming the mind will be even stronger.

Although the person appears to exist in a self-sufficient, substantially existent way, it is empty of existing in the way it appears, i.e., the person does not exist in the way it appears. Likewise, although phenomena appear to exist as a different entity from the perceiving consciousness, nevertheless, they are empty of existing in that way.

The Autonomy Middle Way School also has its own explanation of what the selflessness of phenomena is.

According to the Consequence Middle Way School, the ultimate explanation is this: Whether we are talking about persons or phenomena other than persons, when we look for the imputed object, whether amongst its basis of designation or outside of its basis of designation, we will not find the imputed object. When sought, the imputed object cannot be found. Whether it is the person or a phenomenon, they do not exist in the way they appear. This is the most powerful tool that eliminates the arising of afflictions. When we have some understanding of this, then we have some understanding of or feeling for what nirvana is. “We have talked about the pacification of afflictions on attaining nirvana or liberation. Maybe, it really does exist.”

In short, when we meditate on the close placement of mindfulness of the body, by seeing how it is selfless, its effect in terms of pacifying our anger and attachment is even greater than the positive effects we get from meditating on the impermanence and suffering nature of the body.

Why is this so? Because when we see that the person that we always thought existed as self-sufficient, substantially existent in fact has never existed in that way—that there is no such controller or an ‘I’ that exists without depending on the body— that takes away one of the reasons for being upset or attached when we experience pain, bliss or joy. This is why it is very powerful.

When we meditate on the close placement of mindfulness on the body, these couple of points are the main things to think about: First, to understand, realize and then not forget them. To be constantly aware of what we have understood with regard to how the body is impermanent, how it is in the nature of suffering and how it is selfless.

As I have mentioned in one of the earlier classes, we can use different antidotes to counteract the attachment that we have for either our own body or the bodies of others. We may be attached to the shape, colour or touch of the body, be it our body or somebody else’s body. We may also be attached to our body or the body of others being served, honoured and respected. As there are so many different aspects of the body that we may be attached to, there are these different antidotes that we have talked about recently.

These antidotes are suggested in the *Abhidharmakosa,* the *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge* and in the vinaya. As I have mentioned already, there is one antidote that counteracts attachment to all the different aspects of the body. This is the meditation on the skeleton. The meditation on skeleton is a visualization. It is something that our mind imputes on to our body or the body of others. Although in reality, our body or the body of someone else may not be skeletons yet, it is only a matter of time that these bodies will become skeletons. So this meditation is not pure imagination. Rather, we are imagining something that definitely will be happening in the future and bringing it to mind now. This meditation is taught to counteract strong desire and attachment. When strong desire and attachment arises, if we want to do something about them, this is what can be done—the skeleton meditation.

*The antidote to discursive thoughts*

I thought to mention also the antidote to discursive thoughts. The minds of some people have a lot of conceptualizations. The suggested antidote is mindfulness of the inhalation and exhalation of the breath. In the *Abhidharmakosa* and its auto-commentary, six points are taught in relation to this meditation.

First, there is the practice called counting. In the lam-rim, we talked about the nine-round meditation on the breath. Here, the *Abhidharmakosa* talks about counting up to ten cycles of inhalation and exhalation.

As we inhale, we put our mindfulness on the inhalation, “I am inhaling.” Then as we exhale, “I am exhaling.” This is counted as one cycle. We have to count up to ten cycles without letting the mind be distracted by something else. If the mind is distracted by something else, then we have to start and count all over again.

This is the initial level of practice where we have to be able to count up to ten cycles of inhalation and exhalation without any distraction. Whether we are inhaling or exhaling, during that whole process, the mind cannot be distracted by anything else. So, at least, we have to be able to do that for ten cycles.

When we have some experience of this and are able to count up to ten cycles of inhalation and exhalation without any distractions, then we go to the second level, which is called pursuing. As we inhale, we imagine the breath going down our throat, to the heart, the waist, the navel, then into the thighs, our calves, the soles of our feet and exiting from there into the ground.

Depending on our breathing capacity, it says that when we inhale, it goes up to your body through the soles of our feet. As it leaves the soles of our feet, it goes into the earth. However, if our breathing is not so strong, i.e., we cannot really take it through the length of one’s body, then it can travel for a distance of about one arm span or one metre.

It is said that when we inhale, our breath goes all the way down to our throat 🡪 heart 🡪 navel 🡪 waist 🡪 thighs 🡪 calves 🡪 soles of the feet. Then depending on our breathing capacity, it spreads out into the earth for the distance of a hand span or a arm span.

When we pull up the winds again, we imagine the winds entering the soles of our feet🡪 calves 🡪 thighs 🡪 waist 🡪 navel 🡪 heart 🡪 throat 🡪 out through our nostrils. Again, it is for a hand span or an arm span.

The point is that during the whole process, the mind cannot be distracted and must always be placed on the breath itself whether we are inhaling through the nostril, all the way down to the soles of the feet and when we exhale, it comes back up again.

When we breath in, when our breath enters our nostrils and descends, does it really go beyond our stomach? Does it go into our thighs, calves and soles of our feet? When we inhale or exhale, do our energy channels vibrate? When we breathe in and out, if there is no movement of breath in the channels, then that is no different from being a corpse.

Is anyone here a scientist? When you breathe in, does only your stomach move or your whole body? Is there something that is vibrating or moving inside?

(Student’s response is inaudible).

The third meditation is called setting. Here, we imagine the breath to be a string of jewels running down from our nostril to our heels. Then, it comes out again. The cycle is repeated. It goes round and round and round. We are to place our mind on that without any distraction.

On top of that, there is the mental factor of investigation. There are two mental factors: investigation and analysis. The mental factor of investigation examines an object in a rough way without going into the fine details. With that mental factor, we investigate whether the breath is benefitting or harming the body and whether it is cold or warm.

The mental factor of investigation is one of the four changeable mental factors—regret, sleep, investigation and analysis—among the 51 mental factors. These four mental factors are called changeable mental factors because we cannot say definitely that they are virtuous or non-virtuous. There could be instances of the mental factors of investigation or analysis that are virtuous but there can also be instances of them being non-virtuous. So, it can change.

This is an example. With the motivation to be free of this suffering body, to achieve freedom and liberation from samsara, if we were then to engage in either the coarse investigation or subtle analysis of the impermanence, suffering nature or selflessness of the body, these two mental factors become virtuous because of that motivation. On the other hand, if someone is motivated by strong attachment to the body and with that motivation, proceeds to investigate or analyse the body—be it our body or somebody else’s body—such investigation or analysis becomes non-virtuous.

It is same with sleep and regret. If we fall asleep with a virtuous frame of mind and a virtuous motivation, the entire sleep becomes virtuous. But if we were to fall asleep while the mind is in a state of attachment, anger and so forth, then the entire sleep becomes non-virtuous.

Likewise, if we regret doing virtue, that regret becomes non-virtuous. If we regret having engaged in non-virtue, that is virtuous regret.

There are three more points with regard to the mindfulness of the inhalation and exhalation. Perhaps, if there is time in the future and the opportunity arises, we will talk about that.

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