

Transcript of teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi

Lesson No: 4

Date: 26th June 2012

All page references in the lesson refer to Handout No. 2 dated 26th June 2012: *The Study of Mind and its Functions* unless otherwise stated.

You may feel sometimes that the lam-rim, i.e., the stages of the path to enlightenment, is easier to understand compared to the study of Buddhist philosophy such as this particular subject here, the study of mind and its functions. Some people may think that it is a much more difficult subject than the lam-rim.

Actually it is not so. In order to have a good understanding of the lam-rim, it is essential to gain a good understanding of these philosophical treatises because the subject matter of the lam-rim is the essence of all these great philosophical treatises. Therefore in order to know the lam-rim well, you need to know all these philosophical subjects. One of the purposes of studying *Lorig* (the study of mind and its functions) is to help us gain a better understanding of the lam-rim teachings.

To illustrate this, you may recall that at the beginning of the lam-rim, there is the section on the activities that one should engage in during post-meditation sessions. It talks about the causes and conditions we need to gather together in order for us to develop calm-abiding and special insight. The lam-rim refers to the four pre-requisites for developing calm-abiding and special insight, the first of which is restraining one's sense faculties.

2B4A-2A2B-1 Controlling the sense doors

In this regard: When the six consciousnesses arise in dependence upon objects and sense powers, after that attachment and aversion arise toward the six pleasant and the six unpleasant objects of mental consciousness. Controlling the sense doors guards against their arising (Page 33, *Middle Length Lam-Rim*).

In order to understand the above statement, you have to study the presentation of the mind and its functions, without which it is not possible for you to understand this statement fully.

It says here that in order for any of the six consciousnesses to arise, it must depend on its respective sensory objects and the sense powers. Without understanding what are the sensory objects and the sense powers, how can one understand this particular statement: "... in dependence upon objects and the sense powers, after that attachment and aversion arise toward the six pleasant and the six unpleasant objects of mental consciousness"?

The mental consciousness produces attachment or aversion depending on the object involved. The advice in the lam-rim for developing a concentrated mind says that we have to guard our sense powers. That means protecting our mind against the arising of such attachment or aversion. Therefore in order to develop calm-abiding and special insight, we have to guard our sense powers. In order to do that, you first have to understand what are the sensory objects and the sense powers.

I brought up this illustration to show how important it is to study this presentation on the mind. Without studying this topic, it is not possible to fully understand the import of the abovementioned statement.

The mind is so important in Buddhism because everything is created by the mind. There are different varieties of the mind. There are positive virtuous states of mind and there are negative states of mind. Different kinds of mind work differently. The way they engage their objects are also different. It is therefore very important to understand the workings of the mind and, in particular, it is important to know the minds that are considered correct or valid and the minds that are invalid or incorrect.

You will achieve your goals by understanding and following virtuous and valid states of mind. You also have to understand that by following incorrect states of mind, you will not achieve your goals. Therefore it is crucial that you gain an understanding of the workings of the mind.

We also talked about karma in the lam-rim. In order to fully understand what karma is, you have to understand the differences between the mind and mental factors because karma is a mental factor.

In a similar way, in the section on the path that is shared with the person of medium capacity, there is an extensive discussion of the different afflictions. In order to thoroughly understand these afflictions, again you have to depend on the topic we are studying now.

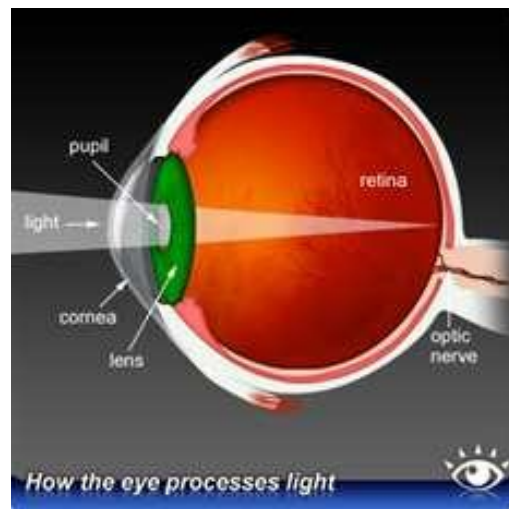
In this module we will be studying the seven-fold divisions of the consciousness. We will go through that briefly and then continue with the 51 mental factors for which there is a translated text that we will upload on the website.

Studying this subject can be challenging and difficult. General speaking, it is difficult to talk about the mind because it is difficult to have an idea of what the mind is. It is also difficult to try to understand the nature or entity of the mind. It is even more challenging for you due to the many new terms that most of you are encountering for the first time. You have to learn those terms. It all depends on whether you see the purpose of learning these terms and of studying this subject.

In the previous class, a student gave us a scientific presentation on the formation of visual images. According to his understanding, light has to strike the object that one is looking at and this light is then reflected back into the eye through the pupil on to the retina. An image is then formed in the brain. The retina is asserted to be clear form. This is what the scientists say.

I am not sure whether this is the eye sense power that we have been talking about. According to this scientific presentation, the retina is made up of many minute particles. We can call them cells. This is form. There is an optic nerve that connects the retina to the brain where the message is sent. The brain then processes the information of the perceived object to be yellow, blue, or red.

When we photograph an object with a camera, the image of the object is imprinted on to the film. Similarly, when light is reflected from an object, it goes into the eyeball and falls on to the retina. The retina is a clear form made up of many cells. Modern science also explains that the different cells recognise different colours. Some cells identify colours such as red, yellow, and so forth. Due to the deficiency of certain cells, they are not able to recognise certain colours. This causes colour blindness.



With regard to the eye sense power that we are discussing here, I am not sure whether the eye sense power is the entire retina or it is only some of the cells that made up the retina.

There was a question in the previous class as to why the eye sense power is clear form. The scientific position on the nature of the retina is that it is clear form. That accords with our position here as it is also mentioned in the text that the eye sense power is clear form.

Question: What is the difference between a phenomenon form source that is impermanent, e.g., a dream elephant and the imputed factor that is a meaning generality that is permanent, e.g., a visualised elephant; besides one being impermanent and the other permanent?

Khen Rinpoche: I will go through this later.

Object and object possessor

Generally speaking, if it is a phenomenon or an existent, it is necessarily an object. Established base, existent, and object are mutually inclusive.

But in the two-fold division of an object and an object possessor, i.e., when we divide whatever that exists in this way:

1. All consciousnesses (or minds) are **object possessors**.
2. All other phenomena that are not consciousnesses (i.e., that are not minds) are **objects**.

Divisions of objects

The definition of an object is that which is known by an awareness.¹

When we refer to the object of a consciousness, there are:

1. the appearing object
2. the determined object
3. the object of engagement

Appearing object (Page 1)

The appearing object and apprehended object refers to the object which is appearing to the consciousness (non-conceptual and conceptual) and not necessarily to what it is comprehending (Page 1).

The appearing object and apprehended object of an awareness are synonymous (or mutually inclusive).

For a **direct perceiver**, the following three objects are mutually inclusive:

1. an appearing object of a direct perceiver
2. an apprehended object of a direct perceiver
3. a functioning thing

For a **conceptual (or thought) consciousness**, the following three objects are mutually inclusive:

1. an appearing object of a conceptual consciousness
2. an apprehended object of a conceptual consciousness
3. a permanent phenomenon

Object of engagement (Page 3)

For a **direct perceiver**, the following two objects are mutually inclusive:

1. an object of engagement of a direct perceiver
2. an object of the mode of apprehension of a direct perceiver

Determined object (Page 3)

For a **conceptual (or thought) consciousness**, the following three objects are mutually inclusive:

1. a determined object of a conceptual consciousness
2. an object of engagement of a conceptual consciousness

¹ Awareness, knower and consciousness are mutually inclusive or synonymous with each other. Ven. Gyurme also uses “mind” interchangeably with these terms.

3. an object of the mode of apprehension of a conceptual consciousness

Based on the chart on page 5:

Subject	Object of engagement	Object of the mode of apprehension	Appearing/ apprehended object	Determined object	Object of observation
Eye consciousness apprehending blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	None	Blue
Conception of an iPhone	iPhone	iPhone	Mental image of iPhone	iPhone	iPhone
Thought ² remembering a movie	the movie	the movie	Mental image of the movie	the movie	the movie

Direct perceiver

An eye consciousness apprehending blue is an example of a direct perceiver:

- What is the **object of engagement** of an eye consciousness apprehending blue? It is blue.
- What is the **object of the mode of apprehension** of this eye consciousness? It is blue.
- What is the **appearing object** of this consciousness? It is blue.
- What is the **apprehended object** of this consciousness? It is blue.

You will have noticed that the eye consciousness apprehending blue **does not** have a determined object because a determined object exists only for conceptual consciousnesses. Only conceptual consciousnesses conceive a determined object. A direct perceiver does not have a determined object. Non-conceptual consciousnesses do not have determined objects.

Conceptual (or thought) consciousness

The conception or thought thinking of an iPhone is an example of a conceptual consciousness.

- What is the **object of engagement** of this consciousness? It is the iPhone
- What is the **object of the mode of apprehension** of this consciousness? It is the iPhone.

Why is the iPhone the object of engagement and the object of the mode of apprehension of a conceptual consciousness thinking of an iPhone? As explained earlier, for a conceptual (or thought) consciousness, the following three objects are mutually inclusive:

² Thought and thought consciousness means the same thing.

1. a determined object of a conceptual consciousness.
2. an object of engagement of a conceptual consciousness
3. an object of the mode of apprehension of a conceptual consciousness

The conception of an iPhone is a conceptual consciousness but the difference here is that the appearing object is not the iPhone itself but a mental image of an iPhone.

The thought remembering a movie is another example of a conceptual consciousness. Only the subject is different from the previous example.

- As before, the object of engagement and the object of the mode of apprehension is the same. It is the movie.
- Because it is a conceptual consciousness, the appearing object and the apprehended object are *necessarily* the same. They are mutually inclusive. Therefore the appearing object and apprehended object of this thought remembering a movie is the mental image of the movie, not the movie itself.

Conceptual consciousness and non-conceptual consciousness

One can also look at consciousness in terms of:

1. conceptual consciousnesses
2. non-conceptual consciousnesses

The difference lies in the way they engage their objects.

Conventional mind

In many of the treatises dealing with valid cognition, the conceptual consciousness is also called:

1. a conventional mind or a conventional awareness or
2. a mistaken consciousness or
3. an obscuring consciousness or
4. a false consciousness

A conceptual consciousness is a conventional mind. It is a mistaken consciousness and an obscuring consciousness but it is *not* a conventional (or obscurational) truth. Why? This is because a conventional truth is mutually inclusive with a permanent phenomenon.

A conceptual consciousness is called a conventional mind because it is obscured in the sense that it cannot directly perceive or see the actual object without a mental image unlike a direct perceiver that directly perceives the actual object. What is it that obscures the conceptual consciousness from seeing the actual object directly? It is the meaning generality (or mental image). To the conceptual consciousness, the mental image of the object is mixed with the actual object. This mental image of the object *appears to be* the actual object but it is *not* the actual object. This obscures the conceptual consciousness from directly perceiving its object.

The conceptual consciousness is therefore a false mind, i.e., it is *not* the opposite of a conventional mind, because it does not perceive the object in the way it exists. Therefore a conceptual consciousness is a false mind and it is a mistaken mind because it cannot directly perceive the actual object without a mental image.

Ultimate mind

A direct perceiver (or a direct valid cogniser) is called an ultimate mind because it is non-mistaken. It is a mind that sees phenomena as they are; the way they appear accords with the way they exist.

Specifically characterised phenomenon vs. generally characterised phenomenon

You may recall that a specifically characterised phenomenon is mutually inclusive with a functioning thing. A functioning thing is a specifically characterised phenomenon because it can appear to the direct perceiver directly without depending on the need for a mental image as the medium. The object appears as it is to the direct perceiver perceiving it.

On the other hand, generally characterised phenomena are those objects or phenomena that *cannot* appear to the consciousness *without* depending on a mental image.

You have to know and understand the meanings of the following terms:

- functioning thing
- permanent phenomenon
- specifically characterised phenomenon
- generally characterised phenomenon

A direct perceiver is a collective engager

A conceptual consciousness is an eliminative engager

A direct perceiver is also referred to as a **collective engager**. How does a direct perceiver engage its object? A direct perceiver engages its object completely and fully. It engages *all* the characteristics of the object without leaving anything behind.

As mentioned earlier, a functioning thing and a specifically characterised phenomenon are mutually inclusive:

- When a specifically characterised phenomenon appears to the mind, *everything* about that object appears to the mind.
- The functioning thing that is mutually inclusive with a specifically characterised phenomenon appears to a direct perceiver. The way the functioning thing appears to the direct perceiver is that *everything* about the object, i.e., all its characteristics, appears to the direct perceiver apprehending it.

When a direct perceiver engages its object that is a functioning thing, it engages the entire object with all its characteristics *without* a mental image.

However the way a conceptual consciousness engages its object is in a different way from a direct perceiver. The conceptual consciousness is called an **eliminative engager** because it engages its object in an eliminative way. It eliminates whatever is *not* the object in order to arrive at the object itself.

The conceptual consciousness does not engage its object as a whole with all its characteristics and is perceiving the actual object through a mental image. The object does *not* appear with all its characteristics to the conceptual consciousness. Only certain characteristics of the object appear to the conceptual consciousness apprehending it. The conceptual consciousness can only apprehend the object via a mental image of the object.

When a conceptual consciousness realises its object, it has to realise its object via a mental image whereas a direct perceiver directly realises its object. For a direct perceiver, everything is coming from the side of the object appearing to the direct perceiver perceiving it.

An eye consciousness apprehending blue is a collective engager. What appears to an eye consciousness apprehending blue? It is blue. Not only does blue appear to the eye consciousness apprehending it, all its characteristics that are included in blue also appear, such as its impermanence and so forth. But we are *not* saying that the eye consciousness apprehending blue realises everything about the blue that is appearing to it.

A conceptual consciousness apprehending blue is an eliminative engager. How does the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue apprehend blue? It can only realise blue through the mental image of blue. What appears to the conceptual thought apprehending blue? Only a likeness of blue appears but not the characteristics that come along with blue, such as the impermanence of blue and so forth.

What does the word or term, “blue,” refer to? It is referring to blue. It does not refer to the characteristics that come with blue, e.g., the impermanence of blue or blue being a product although these are characteristics of blue. The term “blue” can only refer to blue and nothing else. If the term “blue” can refer to blue and all its characteristics, then there will be no need to use terms such as, “the impermanence of blue,” “blue is a product,” “blue is a functioning thing,” and so forth.

Just as the term “blue” can only refer to blue and not all its characteristics, likewise the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue that is induced following the sound of the term “blue” can only engage with and realise blue but not with all the characteristics that accompany blue. Therefore when you realise blue, it does *not* necessarily mean that you realise blue is an impermanent phenomenon and so forth.

When we think of blue, we can only realise blue via the mental image of blue. When we think of the impermanence of blue, in order to realise conceptually that blue is an impermanent phenomenon, we can only realise its impermanence via a mental image of the impermanence of blue. Depending on whichever characteristic of blue you are trying to realise, you have to depend on its respective mental image. Therefore a conceptual consciousness engages its object not in a collective manner but only in parts.

Question: With regard to this discussion, when I see the floor now, I am unable to realise its impermanence. If that is the case, does that mean that whatever I lay my eyes on are only conceptual images?

Answer: Let us use the example of a direct perceiver, say, an eye consciousness apprehending the floor. Everything about the floor appears to that eye consciousness apprehending it. Not only the floor itself but also the impermanence of the floor, the floor being a product, the floor being a functioning thing, and so forth.

These characteristics of the floor *appear* to the eye consciousness apprehending it but it is said that it does *not necessarily* mean that the eye consciousness apprehends all these characteristics. The impermanence of the floor appears but your eye consciousness does not necessarily realise it. Not everything that appears to the eye consciousness is ascertained because, in the seven-fold division of consciousnesses, there is a consciousness that is called an awareness to which an object appears but is not ascertained. This will be discussed in the future.

Question: There are many phenomena that are mutually inclusive with established base and there are many phenomena that are mutually inclusive with permanent or impermanent phenomena. They all have different names but they refer to the same thing. Why are there so many different terms referring to the same thing? For example, under established base, there are eight different terms referring to something that is an established base. Is it because these terms are used in different contexts?

Answer: There are many phenomena that are mutually inclusive with an established base, e.g., an object of knowledge and an existent. Although they ultimately mean the same thing, when these different words are used, your understanding of them is also different because you are approaching the topic from a different angle.

For example, let us compare an impermanent phenomenon and a specifically characterised phenomenon. They are mutually inclusive. An impermanent phenomenon refers to a momentary phenomenon that undergoes momentary change. Although a specifically characterised phenomenon has the same meaning but I explained earlier what a

specifically characterised phenomenon is. So the way you understand the object is different when you are looking at it from a different angle. Although you arrive at the same understanding and the same meaning but when different words are used, your way of approaching the meaning is different.

Question: It is said that a conceptual consciousness realises its object by eliminating everything else that is *not* the object and is therefore termed an eliminative engager. But in practice this does not seem to be the case. When I close my eyes and think of my favourite person, to me, it seems that I am only thinking of that person and not eliminating everyone else who is not that person. Can you explain this further?

Khen Rinpoche: It takes too long to explain this now. Next time.

One way of looking at the difference between a direct perception and a conceptual consciousness lies in how these minds engage and understand their objects.

This is a very important topic but it is challenging and difficult even for me. But I try to think about it and work at gaining a better and clearer understanding of this topic. Therefore you should also try to do this because what we are studying here now will become the foundation for you to be able to understand the teachings of the lamas in the future. It will become the seed for you to understand those teachings and the books and texts that you will come across in the future.

I think the vast majority of you are hearing such teachings for the first time so of course it will be difficult. But the point is not to lose heart. You have to develop the courage and determination to carry on and try your best. You should remember this.

I said earlier that a conceptual consciousness is a conventional mind whereas a direct perceiver is an ultimate mind. Keeping this in mind, try to understand why this is so and what it means when we say that a conceptual consciousness is a conventional mind.

Direct perceivers are also known as non-mistaken consciousnesses whereas conceptual consciousnesses are referred to as mistaken consciousnesses. Think about why this is so? You must understand what it means when we say that all conceptual consciousnesses are mistaken. This will come later. Otherwise you may think that since they are all mistaken, that means they are useless. So there is no need to think. Obviously that is not the case. You have to continue with these studies in order to understand what a mistaken consciousness means.

For those of you who studied the previous module on the lam-rim you may recall a qualm that was brought up in the section on the path of the person of great capacity when we discussed wisdom and compassion. The

qualm referred to the widespread belief that all thoughts are obstacles to the attainment of enlightenment because if it is a conceptual thought, it is necessarily a mind apprehending signs or apprehending inherent existence.

From here you can see that when we do not fully understand what a thought is, what a conceptual consciousness is, we run into the danger of joining this group of people who believe that if it is a thought it is useless and that there is no point to thinking. This is another example of how the understanding of Buddhist philosophy enhances the understanding of the lam-rim. It makes one's understanding of the lam-rim perfect.

Keep this in mind. This is the goal and the purpose for studying this subject. You then have to work hard and try your best.

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