

Transcript of teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on the Modes of Mind and Mental Factors

Lesson No: 18

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Root text: *A Necklace for Those of Clear Awareness Clearly Revealing the Modes of Minds and Mental Factors* by Ye-she Gyeltsen, translated by Toh Sze Gee; January 2006 edition. Copyright: Toh Sze Gee & FPMT, Inc. September 2003.

All page references refer to the root text, unless otherwise stated.

In the last lesson, we saw how it is mentioned in the text that all the qualities of buddhahood and full enlightenment are inconceivable and indescribable. These inconceivable and indescribable qualities of full enlightenment arise from the mind. Likewise, the environment, its inhabitants, and all the experiences of happiness and suffering are also the creations of the mind. They all arise from the mind. In the text, many scriptural quotations by various great Indian masters were cited to highlight this fact.

From our earlier discussions, we saw how everything arises from the mind. What determines whether something is an existent or a non-existent? It has to be posited from the perspective of the mind. If it is observed or verified by a valid cogniser, it is said to be an existent. If it is not observed or verified by a valid cogniser, it is said to not exist. Whether something exists or not is dependent on the mind. Whether a particular phenomenon is something or is not something is also determined by the mind. So ultimately everything is the creation of or determined by the mind. Whether something exists or not or whether something is or is not is decided by the mind.

- This does not mean that whatever is conceived by the mind necessarily exists in the way it is conceived.
- A phenomenon that is not conceived by a mind or is thought not to exist by a mind does not mean that it is non-existent.

To highlight this fact, there is the division of consciousness into valid consciousnesses and non-valid consciousnesses. This is the reason why there is a presentation of valid minds and non-valid minds.

We have to understand the import of what we have just discussed. The purpose is not to better understand phenomena that are external to us, that this is this and that is that. The main import is to apply this to our own experience of happiness and suffering, i.e., all our happiness and all our suffering are the creations of our own mind.

What causes suffering? It is our afflictions that lead on to actions or karma. So it is our afflictions and karma. The main thing that we must understand is that our happiness and suffering are the creations of and arise from our own mind. In particular, we have to understand the role of our afflictions and actions. By gaining a good understanding of and developing conviction in this, we apply mindfulness and vigilance to guard and protect our mind in our daily life.

I mentioned in the last lesson that all our experiences of happiness and suffering come from believing that all the things that appear to our mind are real. We apprehend and believe that those appearances exist in the way they appear to us. We react to those appearances and from that, the feelings of pain and pleasure arise. These different mental appearances do not exist from the side of the objects. They are the projections of our mind. We have to understand and we should be able to explain how everything arises from the mind.

Since all phenomena arise in dependence on the mind, therefore it is important to gain a good understanding of the mind itself and how it works. That is why there is this presentation of *Lorig*, the study of mind and its functions.

When our mind is not disciplined, everything – the world, the environment, the people around us – appears problematic, as suffering. But for those individuals who have trained their minds, whose minds are subdued and disciplined, they perceive the environment as a pure land or a celestial mansion and sentient beings as deities. Such appearances depend on whether the mind is disciplined and subdued. That is why it is always pointed out in the teachings that happiness comes from a subdued mind and that suffering comes from a mind that is not subdued.

Whether the environment is ordinary, whether it is fraught with suffering, or whether it is a pure land, this depends on our mental perspective, i.e., how it appears to our mind. When the mind is subdued and disciplined, everything appears as if it is a pure land. When the mind is not subdued, everything appears to be filled with suffering. All these appearances come from the mind. Therefore it is all right to say that the pure land is in the mind and that the ordinary suffering world is also in the mind. The pure land is not that far away and is not something that is separate from our mind.

Differentiating a main mind from a mental factor

What is the difference between a main mind and a mental factor?

- A main mind engages the entity of the object by its own power.
- A mental factor engages the features or characteristics of the object by its own power.

For example, an eye consciousness apprehending blue:

- The main mind, the eye primary consciousness, apprehends the mere entity of blue. From the perspective of the mind apprehending the mere entity of blue, it is called a main mind
- The mental factor of mindfulness induces a memory holding on to this blue. Mindfulness is the mind that enables the consciousness to hold on to the object without forgetting it. It engages the object by way of its attributes and therefore is a mental factor. From the perspective of the mind that functions not to forget the object, blue, it is called mindfulness.

One entity but two isolates

Are the eye primary consciousness apprehending blue and the mental factor of mindfulness in its retinue one or different? These two minds are different but they are one entity, i.e., they are one entity with different isolates.

Let's look at the meaning of "one entity." What does that mean? For example, (1) a vase and (2) the impermanence of the vase: these two are one entity but different isolates. The impermanence of the vase is of one entity with the vase, but this does not mean that the impermanence of the vase is the vase.

The impermanence of the vase can *only* be found on the vase. It cannot be posited on a non-vase nor can you talk about an impermanence of the vase that is separate from or of a different entity from the entity of the vase.

The self, the person, and the "I" are mutually inclusive. The self and the aggregates are said to be of one entity. You will not be able to posit a self or a person that is of a separate entity from the aggregates.

QUALM: Are a mind and its mental factors one entity or different entities?

RESPONSE: The *Treasury of Knowledge* (stanza 2.23) says:

A mind and its mental factors are definitely simultaneous (Pages 11 – 12).

The *Abhidharmakosha* says, "A mind and its mental factors are definitely simultaneous." So the main mind and its mental factors are one entity. One will not be able to posit a mental factor that is of a separate entity from the main mind just as one cannot posit a main mind that is of a separate entity from its mental factor.

This is a bit tricky but when we say that the main mind and its mental factors are one entity, it seems that we are referring to one thing but calling them different names. In fact there are some scholars who assert that the main mind and its mental factor are the same, that we are just calling one phenomenon by different names.

In our system however, we posit that the main mind and its mental factors are one entity but different isolates. The main mind and the mental factor are posited to be different due to their different functions. They are not the same.

The text says that the mind and its mental factors are *one* entity. They are not different entities. The mind and the mental factor are not like a pillar and a vase. A pillar and a vase are different entities because there is a vase that is separate from the entity of a pillar and vice versa. Therefore a vase and a pillar are separate entities but a mind and its mental factors are not like that.

Five similarities

These modes have been set forth in accordance with how it has been taught in [Gyel-tsab's] *Essence of the Ocean of Knowledge: An Explanation of the Compendium of Knowledge*. [Ge-dun Drub's] *Ornament of Reasoning, the Great Treatise on Valid Cognition* explains that:

- the definition of a **main mind** is that which is concomitant by way of the five similarities with the mental factors in its retinue, and
- the definition of a **mental factor** is that which is concomitant by way of the five similarities with its main mind (Page 12).

In the *Ornament of Reasoning, the Great Treatise on Valid Cognition* by Ge-dun Drub, the first Dalai Lama, he states precisely the definition of a main mind and the definition of a mental factor for the purpose of debate.

For example, an eye consciousness apprehending blue and the mental factor of feeling in its retinue are concomitant by way of the five similarities.

Regarding the modes of these five similarities, there are two explanations – one from the *Treasury of Knowledge* and one from [Asanga's] *Compendium of Knowledge (Abhidharmasamuchchaya)* (Page 12).

Depending on the text you are referring to, there are slightly different presentations on the concomitance of the five similarities between the main mind and its mental factors.

We will look at these five similarities by using the illustration of an eye consciousness apprehending blue and the mental factor of feeling in its retinue.

The five similarities according to the *Treasury of Knowledge* (stanza 2.35a) are as follows:

- 1) similar support (similar basis)
- 2) similar object of observation
- 3) similar [subjective] aspect
- 4) similar time
- 5) similar substance

Their individual meanings are as follows:

- 1) Since a mental factor is also supported by that sense power upon which the mind is supported, their **supports** are similar.
- 2) Since a mental factor also observes that object which the mind observes, their **objects of observation** are similar.

- 3) Since, when a mind is generated having an aspect, for instance, blue, its mental factor is also generated in that aspect, blue, their **[subjective] aspects** are similar.
- 4) Since a mind and its mental factor are simultaneous in regard to the three –production, abiding and cessation – their **times** are similar.
- 5) Just as minds of a similar type are distinct substances, likewise, mental factors, such as feelings, of a similar type are also distinct substances, therefore their **substances** are similar (Page 12).

1. Similar support

Why is an eye primary consciousness apprehending blue and the mental factor of feeling in its retinue said to have a similar support? Just as an eye primary consciousness apprehending blue is generated in dependence upon the eye sense power, similarly the mental factor of feeling in the retinue of this eye primary consciousness apprehending blue is also generated in dependence upon the eye sense power. In that sense, these two minds share a similar support.

In the retinue of an eye primary consciousness apprehending blue, there are many other mental factors. We are using the mental factor of feeling only as an illustration.

2. Similar object of observation

The object of observation of an eye primary consciousness apprehending blue is blue. The eye consciousness apprehending blue is generated in dependence on the object of observation, blue. Similarly the object of observation of the mental factor of feeling in the retinue of this eye primary consciousness apprehending blue is also blue.

A similar object of observation means that just as the eye primary consciousness apprehending blue is observing blue; similarly the mental factor of feeling in the retinue of this eye primary consciousness apprehending blue is also observing blue.

3. Similar Aspect

An eye primary consciousness apprehending blue is in the aspect of blue. Similarly the mental factor of feeling in the retinue of this eye primary consciousness apprehending blue is also in the aspect of blue.

4. Similar time

A main mind and its mental factors are also similar in terms of time, i.e., a mind and its mental factors are simultaneous with respect to their production, abiding, and cessation. These two – the eye primary consciousness apprehending blue and the mental factor of feeling in its retinue – abides at the same time and when they disintegrate, they also disintegrate at the same time.

5. Similar substance

These two – the eye primary consciousness apprehending blue and the mental factor of feeling in its retinue – have similar objects of observation and are generated into the same aspect. In the retinue of this main mind, there can only be *one* mental factor of feeling that has a similar object of observation, and there can only be *one* mental factor of feeling in the retinue of this main mind having the same aspect. You cannot have two mental factors of feeling accompanying the eye primary consciousness apprehending blue.

This is what is meant by similar substance. Just as there is only one substance, the main mind, there can only be one substance, the mental factor of feeling accompanying the main mind.

There is only one eye primary consciousness apprehending blue at any one time. In the retinue of this eye primary consciousness, there are many mental factors. Taking the mental factor of feeling as an example, there cannot be two mental factors of feeling accompanying that eye consciousness. Just as there is only one main mind, there can only be one mental factor of feeling. That is the meaning of similar substance.

In the retinue of this eye primary consciousness apprehending blue, there are the five omnipresent mental factors of feeling, discrimination, intention, contact, and attention. There is only one of each of these omnipresent mental factors accompanying the main mind. As long as you understand this, that is enough.

Question: On page 13 of the root text, it says, “Just as minds of a similar type are distinct substances, likewise, mental factors, such as feelings, of a similar type are also distinct substances, therefore their substances are similar,” what do “their substances” refer to?

Answer: The eye primary consciousness is a substance. It is a composed phenomenon. It is a substantial phenomenon. Just as there is one substance that is the main mind, similarly there is only one mental factor of feeling accompanying it that is a substance. As long as you understand that point, it is sufficient.

When we say they are “distinct substances,” that means that they are one. The main mind is substantially established as one. Similarly, the mental factor of feeling accompanying the main mind is also substantially established as one. These two are similar in being distinct substances, i.e., “distinct” meaning that there is one of each.

Question: On page 11, it reads, “That which sees an object is a primary consciousness. That which sees its attribute is a mental factor.” In the

footnote, it states that, "Consciousness" (*shes pa*) would encompass both main minds as well as mental factors." Should I understand "primary consciousness" as a term that is mutually inclusive with mind, sentience, and so forth, or should I understand that to refer to a primary mind and mental factors?

Ven Gyurme: The quotation is referring to the primary consciousness, a main mind. A primary consciousness and consciousness are different.

Question: The main mind is also a perceiver. Is it a direct perceiver?

Ven Gyurme: "Perceiver" and "primary consciousness" are translations for *nam par shes pa*, the main mind.

Question: The mind and the mental factor seem to be the same thing. Could the term, "concomitant," be translated as complementary or co-existent?

Answer: The mind and its mental factors are different. E.g., a product and an impermanent phenomenon are mutually inclusive but they are different. Likewise the mind and its mental factors are different.

Why is a product and an impermanent phenomenon different? We have discussed earlier the concepts of one and different. It is important to understand this. What does it mean when we say something is one and when we say the two things are different? We first need to know what is one, what is different, and their definitions.

In the case of a product and an impermanent phenomenon, they are mutually inclusive but, nevertheless, they are different. These two have the same meaning, but from the perspective of it being opposite to a permanent phenomenon, it is called an impermanent phenomenon. From the perspective of it being the opposite of a non-product, it is a product. They are different isolates.

The process by which their names are imputed are different based on the different reasons. From it being opposite of a permanent phenomenon, it is called an impermanent phenomenon. From the perspective of it being opposite of a non-product, it is called a product. These two are different because their names are different.

- A product and an impermanent phenomenon have the same meaning but because they have different names, they are different.
- When two phenomena are being compared, even though they are different, it does not necessarily mean that they have different meanings.
- In the case of a product and an impermanent phenomenon, these two are mutually inclusive. Because they are mutually inclusive therefore

they have the same meaning but they have different names.

- It is also not the case that when you compare two phenomena, as long as they have different names, it necessarily means they have the same meaning.
- In the case of the mind and mental factor, we are not saying that the mind is a mental factor and that the mental factor is the mind. These two are not mutually inclusive but they are one entity. These two – the mind and the mental factor – are *not* one. They are different.
- Do they have the same entity or are they different entities? We say these two are one entity.

Question: Can the main mind be understood to be like a collective engager while the mental factor is similar to a partial engager?

Answer: Using the object blue, when the eye primary consciousness apprehends blue, blue is the entity. What are the features of blue? I can't say exactly because it is not so straightforward.

The main mind and its mental factors have similar objects of observation and similar aspects.

A main mind engages the mere entity of the object, whereas the mental factor in its retinue engages the different features of the object.

Just as an eye primary consciousness apprehending blue is generated in dependence upon observing blue, similarly, the mental factor in its retinue must also observe blue. What does the eye primary consciousness apprehending blue know? It knows the mere entity of blue. Just as it knows the entity blue, the mental factor in its retinue must also know the entity, blue. Whatever the main mind knows, the mental factor in its retinue also knows.

For this reason, in some texts, it is mentioned that it is insufficient to posit a main mind to be a mind that knows the mere entity of an object and a mental factor that knows the features of the object. Rather one has to add the words, "by its own power." Therefore in some texts it is said that you have to posit:

- a main mind to be a knower that knows the mere entity of the object by its own power; and
- a mental factor knows the features of an object by its own power.

The definition of a doubting consciousness is a knower that has qualms two-pointedly by its own power. A doubting consciousness is a mental factor and is in the retinue of a main mind.

Let us say that the main mind is a mental consciousness. This mental consciousness, the main mind that has doubting consciousness in its

retinue, also has qualms two-pointedly about the object but it does not have qualms two-pointedly by its own power. The main mind does not have qualms two-pointedly by its own power.

Therefore in some texts, it is mentioned that *both* the main mind and mental factor know (1) the entity of the object and (2) the features of the object.

- But the main mind knows the entity of the object *by its own power*. The mental factor also knows the mere entity of the object but *not* by its own power.
- The mental factor knows the features of the object *by its own power*. The main mind also knows the features of the object but *not* by its own power.

For this reason, when you think about it, the main mind and the mental factor in its retinue are not the same. They are not one. They are different.

Coming back to blue, blue is the mere entity of blue. Maybe we can posit the features of blue to be a bright blue or a dull blue.

Question: Khen Rinpoche said that the definition of a main mind according to Ge-dun Drub's text is used for debate purposes. If a question were to come up in an exam asking for a definition of a main mind, is this the definition we must use? The reason I am asking this is because this definition doesn't tell me anything about what a main mind is.

On page 11, we are told that, "A main mind is a knower distinguished by mere observation of the object itself and does not need to be posited in terms of the other attributes." Can that also be seen as a definition of a main mind? Or must we stick to the earlier definition given by Ge-dun Drub?

Answer: The earlier explanation of a main mind and a mental factor (on page 11) is given from the perspective of what they do. It is to help us to understand what exactly is a main mind and what exactly is a mental factor.

The definition in Ge-dun Drub's text is for the purpose of establishing the boundary of pervasion, what is and what is not.

Question: Should the earlier presentation of the seven-fold division of consciousnesses and the presentation of the mind and mental factors be kept separate? Is there anything that we can carry over from what we have learnt from the seven consciousnesses into this presentation of mind and mental factors?

Answer: Presenting the mind by means of the seven-fold division of

consciousness is just to understand the mind in general whereas in the study of the main mind and its mental factors, the emphasis is on the mental factors and identifying their respective entities.

We study the 51 mental factors such as the afflictions, virtuous mental factors, and so forth by studying and knowing their individual entities. When we talk about anger or attachment, you can definitely connect it to the seven-fold divisions of consciousness.

Among the 51 mental factors, there are virtuous mental factors and non-virtuous mental factors. Among them, some are subsequent cognisers, some are valid cognisers, and some are wrong consciousnesses.

Question: Referring to the footnote on page 11 on the term, “isolate,” can I say that an isolate can also be understood as opposite of something as it is also translated as a “double negation”?

Answer: To clearly explain this paragraph:

Just as it has been said above, that which knows the mere entity of an object is called a mind. That which, taking the observation of that very object as its basis, engages the object by means of the isolates of other attributes, such as its function, is called a mental factor (Page 11)

Gyel-tsab Je’s text says:

To explain this clearly, when the mindfulness of an object, for instance, a form, is produced, the two – the mind and the mindfulness in its retinue – are similar in observing the object, form; nevertheless, they are posited separately. The knower of the mere entity of the object, form, is called “mind,” but from the point of view of the function of acting not to forget, “mindfulness” (Page 12).

That is the isolate.

In the next lesson, we will look at the five similarities as described in the *Compendium of Knowledge*. We will go through that quickly. I hope to finish the five omnipresent factors. It would be good if you can read up on these five omnipresent factors.

I think the best way to conduct class is through Q&A. You read beforehand. Then we discuss through Q&A in class. I think this is the best approach. As the text has already been translated, you should read it. If there is anything that you don’t understand, you can ask and I can clarify. I think that is the best approach. It is difficult to read everything in class.

Question:

That which, taking the observation of that very object as its basis, engages the object by means of the isolates of other attributes, such as its function, is called a mental factor (Page 11).

Is it a collective engager?

Answer: It is not exactly like that. In terms of an eye consciousness, it is a non-conceptual consciousness and a collective engager, but an eye consciousness can be a main mind and it can also be a mental factor. The mental factors in the retinue of non-conceptual consciousnesses, such as sense consciousnesses, are also sense consciousnesses.

Having said that, you cannot say that all mental factors are eliminative engagers and all main minds are collective engagers. Just as an eye primary consciousness apprehending blue is a collective engager, the mental factors in the retinue of this eye consciousness are also collective engagers.

- You should not think that a main mind is necessarily a collective engager just because the main mind is a knower that knows the mere entity of an object.
- You should not think that a mental factor is an eliminative engager just because it knows the features of an object.

Translated by Ven. Tenzin Gyurme

Transcribed by Phuah Soon Ek, Vivien Ng, and Patricia Lee

Edited by Cecilia Tsong