

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

Lesson No: 19

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

When we talk about the mind and its mental factors, we are not talking about something that can be perceived with our naked eyes. When we talk about something that we cannot see, it is challenging to have a feel for what we are talking about.

In describing the mind and its mental factors, there are many terms in the text to help us understand what they are. Many quotations are cited. Some of these are quite challenging. There are words and terminologies that are difficult to understand. Of course, it would be ideal if we can go through and understand thoroughly each and every single word but that would be quite difficult.

Since this is the case, it is possible that sometimes you may feel discouraged and depressed when you read the text and find one or two words that are difficult to understand. When this happens, you must really know how to think. You must understand that it is not right to be discouraged.

When you compare the difference between not reading the text and having read the text, definitely there will be more benefit to having read the text even though you may not understand everything. Definitely you will stand to gain from learning at least some new words and new concepts. Everyone has to try their very best to learn, bearing in mind that it is impossible to know everything.

It is said in the teachings of the Buddha that everything is the creation of the mind. In particular our experiences of happiness and suffering are ultimately the creations of our own mind. That being the case, it is important to understand what a mind is. Therefore we are now looking at the presentation of the mind and mental factors.

The main mind is considered to be primary. The mental factors that accompany the main mind are said to be secondary. The main mind and

the mental factors in its retinue can be likened to a king and his ministers.

A main mind is posited from the perspective of it knowing the mere entity of an object. A mental factor is posited from the perspective of the different function that it performs and knowing the features of the object. For example, the mental factor of mindfulness functions to enable us not to forget a particular object.

In the last lesson, we discussed how the main mind and the mental factors in its retinue are one and the same entity but they are not the same. Just as you will not be able to find a main mind that is of a different entity from the mental factors, similarly, you will not be able to find a mental factor that is of a separate entity from the main mind. Therefore, the main mind and the mental factors are one entity.

Five similarities

A main mind is concomitant by way of the five similarities with the mental factors in its retinue. What are these five similarities?

1. Similar support (or basis)
2. Similar object of observation: both the main mind and the mental factors in its retinue observe the same object.
3. Similar [subjective] aspect: they both have the same aspect.
4. Similar time: they are both produced, abide, and disintegrate at the same time.
5. Similar substance: just as there is only main mind, e.g., an eye primary consciousness apprehending blue, there can only be one mental factor of feeling in the retinue of that main mind. In that sense, they have similar substances.

These are the five similarities mentioned in *The Treasury of Knowledge* by Vasubandhu.

This is a summary of what we covered in the last lesson. For the time being, if you are able to understand what I have summarised, that is sufficient. It is not possible to know and have the experience of everything right now. That takes time. Here we are just trying to understand what this topic is talking about. We are trying to understand what the Buddha, and particularly the great Indian masters such as Vasubandhu, said and presented in their texts. Of course it will be very good if you have some feeling or experiential understanding of whatever is mentioned in the text, thinking, “Yes, it is like that.” That will be ideal but even just having an idea of what the mind is can be challenging and difficult. Just understanding the concept itself is difficult.

The *Compendium of Knowledge*, the *Higher Abhidharma*, has a slightly different presentation of the five similarities between the main mind and the mental factors in its retinue.

The explanation in the *Compendium of Knowledge* regarding the five similarities is as follows:

- (1) similar substance
 - (2) similar object of observation and [subjective] aspect
 - (3) similar entity
 - (4) similar time
 - (5) similar realm and level
- (1) Similar **substance** refers to the following. In the retinue of a single main mind, there can arise only one mental factor, for instance, feeling, of a similar type; two [mental factors] of a similar type but of different substances cannot occur.
 - (2-3) Similar **object of observation** and **[subjective] aspect** and similar entity refer to the following.
 - [A mind and the mental factors in its retinue] are similar in observing one object – the object of observation – and they are similar in being afflicted or non-afflicted in terms of the object of observation and the [subjective] aspect.
 - If a main mind has become afflicted, then the mental factors in its retinue also become afflicted, whereas if a main mind has become uncontaminated, the mental factors in its retinue also become uncontaminated.
 - (4) Similar **time** refers to the following. A main mind and the mental factors in its retinue are simultaneous in regard to the three – production, abiding and cessation.
 - (5) Similar **realm and level** refers to the following. If a main mind is a mind of the desire realm, then it is impossible for a mental factor of the form or formless realms to arise in its retinue, and it is impossible for a mental factor of the desire realm to arise in the retinue of a mind of the form realm. That realm in which the main mind is included is also necessarily the realm in which the mental factor in its retinue is included (Page 13).

Here the object of observation and [subjective] aspect is grouped together and counted as one similarity. There is no need to explain similar substance, similar object of observation and aspect, and similar time as they have been explained earlier.

Similar entity

- If the main mind is afflicted, the mental factors in its retinue will also be afflicted.
- If the main mind becomes contaminated, the mental factors in its retinue also become contaminated.
- If the main mind becomes uncontaminated, the mental factors in its retinue become uncontaminated as well.

Similar realm and level

In general, there are three realms and nine levels.

The three realms are:

1. The desire realm
2. The form realm
3. The formless realm

The nine levels are:

1. The desire realm
2. The four concentrations of the form realm:
 3. first concentration
 4. second concentration
 5. third concentration
 6. fourth concentration
7. The four levels of the formless realm:
 8. Infinite space

9. Infinite consciousness
10. Nothingness
11. Peak of cyclic existence

You will find these terms, the three realms and nine levels, in the treatises.

What does similar realm and level mean? It means that the main mind and the mental factors in its retinue are similar in terms of realm.

- If the main mind is a mind of the desire realm, the mental factors in its retinue are mental factors of the desire realm.
- If the main mind is a mind of the form realm, the mental factors in its retinue are mental factors of the form realm.
- It is the same for the formless realm.

From this you can extrapolate what a similar level means.

According to the *Compendium of Knowledge*, these are the two differences in terms of the five similarities; the presentations of similar entity and similar realm and level.

Five similarities according to Vasubandhu's <i>Treasury of Knowledge (Abhidharmakosha)</i>:	Five similarities according to Asanga's <i>Compendium of Knowledge (Abhidharmasamuchchaya)</i>:
1) Similar support	1) Similar substance
2) Similar object of observation	2) Similar object of observation and [subjective] aspect
3) Similar [subjective] aspect	3) Similar entity
4) Similar time	4) Similar time
5) Similar substance	5) Similar realm and level

Question: Since the mind and mental factors are included in the continuum of a person in that particular rebirth, why is it necessary to mention that the main mind and its mental factors are concomitant with the realm and level?

Answer: For a person who is a desire realm being, it is not necessarily so that all his minds are minds of the desire realm. In order for a desire realm being to be reborn in the form realm, he must accumulate the projecting karma to be reborn as a form realm god. Not only that. The actualising karma for that rebirth in the form realm must also manifest.

In order for a desire realm being to accumulate the karma to be reborn in the form realm, he must first actualise the realisation of calm-abiding. Only on the basis of such a realisation can he accumulate the projecting karma for a rebirth in the form realm. Since it is possible for a desire realm being to have the realisation of calm-abiding, such a desire realm being can accumulate the projecting karma for a rebirth in the form realm.

Therefore we cannot conclude that all the minds of desire realm beings are necessarily minds of the desire realm.

Question: Why are there two separate presentations of the five similarities? Is it because the *Compendium of Knowledge* by Asanga does not represent the view of the Sutra School since he was known to be a proponent of the Mind-only School?

Answer: They are just two different explanations. I don't know exactly why there are two different explanations but in general, many explanations from the higher tenets, including the explanations of the mind, are usually different.

The Five Omnipresent Mental Factors

The first five mental factors are known collectively as the five omnipresent mental factors. This means that they necessarily accompany all main minds. If it is a main mind, whether it is a sense primary consciousness or a mental primary consciousness, definitely you will find these five mental factors in its retinue.

The five omnipresent mental factors are:

- (1) feeling
- (2) discrimination
- (3) intention
- (4) contact
- (5) attention (Page 16)

(1) Feeling

The entity of feeling is just as it has been taught in the *Compendium of Knowledge*:

QUESTION: What is the defining characteristic of feeling?

RESPONSE: It has the characteristic of experience; through the entity of experience, it experiences individually the fruitional results of virtuous and non-virtuous actions (Page 16).

What is the entity of feeling? It is an experience. What is the entity of experience? "It experiences individually the fruitional results of virtuous and non-virtuous actions."

What is to be understood from this sentence? Whatever feelings of pleasure or suffering that arise in our mind are the fruitional results of our own karma or actions.

Here, that which is experienced by feeling is taught to be a fruition; this is taught for the purpose of making known that all feelings that arise within us, whether pleasant or suffering, are solely the fruitional result of actions (*karma*). Moreover, the *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path* says:

The manner in which actions are definite is as follows. Regardless of whether we are ordinary beings or superiors, all happiness in the aspect of pleasant feelings – even as slight as that produced in dependence on a cool breeze when one is born in hell – arises from virtuous actions accumulated in the past. Happiness cannot arise from a non-virtuous action. Also, all suffering in the aspect of painful feelings – even as slight as that produced in the mental continuum of a foe-destroyer – arises from non-virtue accumulated in the past. Suffering cannot arise from a virtuous action (Page 17).

This is related to the presentation of the general characteristics of karma in the lam-rim; how karma is definite, how we will not experience the result of an action that we did not do, and so forth. Whatever experience of happiness or suffering in our mind, no matter how big or small, are all the fruitional results of our own karma. We must understand and gain conviction in this.

We should think about this: is it possible for there to be an experience of happiness in our mind due to a non-virtuous action, even if that is a small action? Is it possible for a non-virtuous action to result in some kind of happiness?

This goes back to the presentation of how karma is definite. Whatever result, including the happiness we seek, cannot arise without a cause. Not only must it arise from a cause, it must arise from a concordant cause. Therefore it is impossible for a pleasurable feeling or happiness, no matter how big or small, to arise from non-virtue. It is just as Arya Nagarjuna said in his *Precious Garland*:

From non-virtue comes all sufferings
And likewise all bad migrations.
From virtue comes all happy migrations
And the happiness within all rebirths.

Therefore, happiness and suffering neither arise without cause nor arise from discordant causes such as the fundamental nature, Ishvara and so forth. Rather, in general, happiness and suffering come from virtuous and non-virtuous actions [respectively], and even the various instances of happiness and suffering arise individually, without even the slightest mix-up, from the various instances of these two types of actions. Hence, gaining certainty regarding this definiteness or infallibility of actions and their results is known as "the correct view of all Buddhists" and is praised as the foundation of all wholesome qualities (Page 17).

Therefore it is very important that you gain an understanding of and the definite conviction in the following:

- that karma is definite
- that you will never meet with the result if you have never created the cause in the first place
- that non-virtue can only lead to suffering
- that virtue can only lead to happiness

So far in our study of *Lorig*, there has been the discussion of cause and effect at an external level. Different kinds of minds also arise from different kinds of causes. This is now a more in-depth presentation of cause and effect. Ultimately the main purpose of understanding how the natural principles of cause and effect work externally is to relate it to our experiences of happiness and suffering.

We had been talking about the eye consciousness apprehending blue. You may wonder, "What does this have to do with my life?" Using the eye consciousness apprehending blue as the subject, in order for that consciousness to arise, you must have the observed object condition, blue. Without blue, you cannot have an eye consciousness apprehending

blue. In the same way, without the eye sense power, you also cannot have an eye consciousness apprehending blue.

We are talking about causality here, i.e., an effect has to be preceded by a cause. Applying that to the internal world of our experience of happiness and suffering, the happiness we seek can only arise after we have created its cause, virtuous actions.

Hence, gaining certainty regarding this definiteness or infallibility of actions and their results is known as “the correct view of all Buddhists” and is praised as the foundation of all wholesome qualities (Page 17).

Gaining this ascertainment of actions and their effects, i.e., the workings of karma, becomes the foundation for all good qualities to arise in our mind. This is like the root. Without it, it is very difficult to practise the Dharma. Whether we succeed in our practice and spiritual transformation depends on whether we have this whole-hearted conviction in the workings of karma.

When we talk about the eightfold noble path¹, the first is **right view**. That refers to this conviction, i.e., the right view about actions and their effects, the root of spiritual transformation. Therefore from the very beginning, it is important to learn and to reflect on the natural principles of causality, cause and its effect, keeping in mind that cause and effect is not karma.

Based on the natural principles of causality, one tries to understand actions or karma and their results. It is very important to develop this root at the outset. It is very important to gain an understanding of and conviction with regard to the infallibility of karma, actions and their effects. This becomes the right (or correct) view. By keeping this conviction in mind, then our whole life changes and in the future, no matter how we look at the world or how we think, everything will be coloured by this conviction.

On the basis of the right view, this conviction in the workings of karma, whatever perspective one may have of things will be the right perspective. When one has the right perspective of things, **right thought**, then one’s speech will also be **right speech**.

There are also **right actions**. This refers to one’s physical actions or behaviour. Whatever physical actions one undertakes will also be right. When one accumulates karma, one does so through the actions of body, speech, and mind. On the basis of right view, one accumulates virtuous karma with one’s mind. One accumulates virtuous karma with one’s speech. One accumulates virtuous karma with one’s right physical actions. In other words, the right physical actions can also be virtuous

¹ The eight branches of a superior’s path are: (1) correct view, (2) correct thought, (3) correct speech, (4) correct aims of actions (5) correct livelihood, (6) correct effort, (7) correct mindfulness and (8) correct meditative stabilisation (Page 64, Basic Program Study Manual for Maitreya’s *Ornament for Clear Realisations*, Chapter 4)

karma. Whether one accumulates virtue or non-virtue with one's body, speech, and mind therefore depends on whether one has the right view of the Buddhists, i.e., whether one has the conviction in and ascertainment of actions and their effects. When one has such conviction, it is then possible to accumulate virtuous actions. Without this conviction, one may accumulate only non-virtuous actions.

- On the basis of right view, it is possible to have **right livelihood** in one's life.
- With conviction in the workings of karma, one will also make **right effort**. Whatever one engages in will be right endeavours.
- Then there is **right mindfulness**. Whatever effort one is making, one works at one's goal with right mindfulness.
- When right effort is accompanied by right mindfulness, one is then able to have the conditions for developing the single-pointed mind. When one is able to develop a very strong and stable concentration and achieve calm-abiding, then one has **right concentration**.

From this, you can see how it is extremely important to have an ascertainment of and the conviction in karma and its effects for this is the foundation of all wholesome qualities. Using the eightfold noble path as an example, this is how the eightfold noble path is based on the right view.

Without this conviction in the workings of karma in our minds, it is very difficult to engage in virtue, the foundation of all wholesome qualities. When you are unable to generate wholesome qualities, liberation and enlightenment will never happen. Therefore without conviction in the workings of karma, there is no way to achieve liberation and enlightenment.

Developing such conviction in karma and its effects is extremely important, particularly in relation to all our unhappy experiences, suffering, and problems. We have to understand and ascertain how all our unhappiness and suffering are our own doing. They are the results of our own karma and afflictions.

This is where the four noble truths come in. Generally we talk about true suffering first. The purpose of looking at true suffering is to understand what suffering is. It is not looking at someone else's suffering. First we look at our own suffering.

Where do our suffering and pain come from? We need to understand how we are tormented by suffering and pain. While we don't like them, they still come our way. The reason for this is because we have already accumulated the cause for them to occur, i.e., non-virtue. Since the cause has been accumulated, whether we like it or not, they will come our way. Therefore we need to develop an understanding of and conviction in how

this is so.

When we are convinced of this in relation to ourselves, we then shift this understanding to look at how others are suffering as a result of their own actions. Without a thorough understanding of how we are tormented by the various kinds of suffering and their causes, it is not possible for us to have a thorough understanding of why and how others suffer.

Without that thorough and decisive understanding of why and how others suffer, it is impossible to develop love and compassion when we focus on the suffering of other sentient beings. The realisations of love and compassion can only arise in one's mind in dependence on first knowing how oneself is suffering. This is an extremely important point. This is why the Buddha said, "This is the truth of suffering," when he first taught the the four noble truths. It is very important to first acknowledge our own suffering by looking within ourselves, not looking outside.

On the basis of having a thorough understanding of how and why our own suffering arises, then when we see other sentient beings, we know how and why they are tormented by suffering. When we see sentient beings suffer, we will then have the right understanding rather than a perverse or wrong understanding of their situation.

On the basis of understanding how our own suffering and problems arise from our karma and afflictions, we will be able to understand how this is also the case for others. With the right view, the conviction in the workings of karma, we will be able to develop love and compassion for others. This is right thought. Once we have right thought, right speech will arise and right livelihood and so forth will naturally follow. What we have to do is to gain an understanding of how the conviction in the infallibility of actions and their effects is the root of every good quality.

When feelings are divided, there are three:

- (1) pleasant feelings
- (2) suffering feelings
- (3) neutral feelings

Furthermore, it is just as it has been said in *A Discussion of the Five Aggregates*:

QUESTION: What is feeling?

RESPONSE: It is the three types of experience – pleasant, suffering, and that which is neither suffering nor pleasant.

- Pleasant [feeling] is that which, when it ceases, you wish to meet with again.
- Suffering is that which, when it arises, you wish to be separated from.
- That which is neither pleasant nor suffering is that which, when it arises, neither of the two wishes occurs.

When these three types of feeling are differentiated in terms of the supports of body and mind, there are six types – three bodily feelings and three mental feelings.

First, the three bodily feelings are:

- (1) bodily pleasant feelings
- (2) bodily suffering feelings
- (3) bodily neutral feelings

Second, the three mental feelings are:

- (1) mentally pleasant feelings
- (2) mentally suffering feelings
- (3) mentally neutral feelings

What is the difference between bodily and mental feelings?

- Feelings that arise in the retinue of the five sense consciousness are called "bodily feelings";
- Feelings that arise in the retinue of the mental consciousness are called "mental feelings." (Pages 17 – 18)

Feeling is essentially an experience.

- When feelings are divided, there are three: (1) pleasant feelings, (2) suffering feelings, and (3) neutral feelings.
- Feelings can also be divided into: (1) bodily feelings and (2) mental feelings that in turn can be divided into three bodily feelings and three mental feelings.
 - Bodily feelings refer to the mental factor of feeling accompanying a sense primary consciousness.
 - Mental feelings accompany a mental primary consciousness.

Also, when these six feelings are differentiated into the two – the materialistic and the non-materialistic – [feelings] are of twelve types.

QUALM: What do materialistic and non-materialistic mean?

RESPONSE: Feelings that are concomitant with the craving for the contaminated appropriated aggregates are called "materialistic feelings." Feelings that are concomitant with the exalted wisdom directly realizing selflessness are called "non-materialistic feelings." (Page 19)

After stating what a non-materialistic feeling is, there is a qualm.

QUALM: Well then, if one were to explain the above-mentioned "non-materialistic suffering feeling," how can a suffering feeling be present in those who possess the exalted wisdom directly realizing selflessness?"

RESPONSE: There are many such cases. For example, the *Scripture on Discipline (Vinayagama)* says that even foe-destroyers who have abandoned the conception of self experience suffering feelings such as headaches due to the fruition of past actions (Page 21).

Moreover, when feelings are divided by way of object of abandonment and antidote, there are two:

- 1) feelings that support adherence and
 - 2) feelings that support deliverance.
- 1) Feelings that support **adherence** are feelings that are concomitant with the craving for the attributes of the desire realm.
 - 2) Feelings that support **deliverance** are, for example, feelings that are concomitant with the mental consciousness that, having turned away from the attachment to the attributes of the desire realm, is included within the actual first concentration (Page 19 - 20).

Feeling is an experience. A main mind is necessarily accompanied by feeling. For example: in the retinue of an eye primary consciousness apprehending blue, there is a mental factor of feeling. Since feeling is an experience, what does the mental factor of feeling in the retinue of this eye primary consciousness apprehending blue experience? It experiences blue.

(2) Discrimination

Regarding the entity of discrimination, the *Compendium of Knowledge* says:

QUESTION: What is the defining characteristic of discrimination [Tibetan: 'du shes, literally, aggregation-knowing]?

RESPONSE: It has the characteristic of knowing upon aggregation. It has the entity of apprehending the sign and apprehending the mark, through which one designates an expression to objects of perceptions, hearing, differentiation and knowledge.

Just as it has been said above, discrimination is a knower that, upon the aggregation of the three – object, sense power, and primary consciousness – apprehends the uncommon sign of an object (Page 20).

Discrimination apprehends the uncommon sign of an object. If this is so, we must be able to posit the uncommon sign of any object. So what is the uncommon sign of an object? Think about this. We will continue in the next lesson.

Question: Are sense consciousnesses necessarily non-conceptual? The qualm I have is this: assuming that all the 51 mental factors can be concomitant with the sense primary consciousness, the mental factor of doubt that is concomitant with a sense perceiver would end up being a sense consciousness that is conceptual.

Answer: Is there such a thing in the first place? I wonder whether there is such a thing as doubt accompanying a sense consciousness.

Question: So we cannot assume that all the 51 mental factors can be concomitant with a sense consciousness? Are sense consciousnesses necessarily non-conceptual?

Answer: Yes.

Student: The definition for a sense consciousness does not mention that it is free of conceptuality. It only says that it is a knower that is generated in dependence on a physical sense power ...

Questions for Sunday discussion session:

1. The definition of a doubting consciousness is a knower that has qualms two-pointedly by its own power. What is the reason for including, “by its own power” in the definition?
2. If it is a mental factor that has qualms two-pointedly, is it necessarily doubt?
3. Is a doubting consciousness and a wrong consciousness mutually exclusive or is there a common locus between them?
4. Can a sense consciousness become a conceptual consciousness? Can a direct perceiver become a conceptual consciousness?
5. Is the subsequent consciousness induced by the eye consciousness apprehending blue necessarily a sense consciousness?

6. What is the Sutra School's reason for positing self-knowers? Why are self-knowers not main minds and mental factors?

As I mentioned before, the entire text of the mind and mental factors has been translated in English. You should read it before class.

Question: For the five omnipresent mental factors that are present in all minds, does that mean that these five mental factors will always be with the main mind at any one time?

Answer: Yes.

Five similarities according to Asanga's <i>Compendium of Knowledge</i> (<i>Abhidharmasamuchchaya</i>)	
1. Similar substance	In the retinue of a single main mind, there can arise only one mental factor; for instance, feeling, of a similar type. Two [mental factors] of a similar type but of different substances cannot occur.
2-3 Similar object of observation and [subjective] aspect and same entity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [A mind and the mental factors in its retinue] are similar in observing one object – the object of observation – and they are similar in being afflicted or non-afflicted in terms of the object of observation and the [subjective] aspect. • If a main mind has become afflicted, then the mental factors in its retinue also become afflicted, whereas if a main mind has become uncontaminated, the mental factors in its retinue also become uncontaminated.
4. Similar time	A mind and the mental factors in its retinue are simultaneous with regard to the three - production, abiding, and cessation.
5. Similar realm and level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a main mind is a mind of the desire realm, then it is impossible for a mental factor of the form or formless realms to arise in its retinue. • It is impossible for a mental factor of the desire realm to arise in the retinue of a mind of the form realm. • That realm in which the main mind is included is also necessarily the realm in which mental factor in its retinue is included

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