

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

**Lesson No: 20**

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

The five omnipresent mental factors are:

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

### **(1) Feeling**

Feelings have three divisions: (1) pleasant feelings, (2) suffering feelings, and (3) neutral feelings.

In some texts, feelings have five divisions:

1. pleasant feelings
2. suffering feelings
3. neutral feelings
4. feelings of mental happiness
5. feelings of mental unhappiness

When divided in this way:

- pleasant and suffering feelings are associated with the sense consciousnesses
- feelings of mental happiness and unhappiness are associated with the mental consciousness
- neutral feelings

### **(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, it is a knower that, upon the aggregation of the three – object, sense power, and primary consciousness – apprehends the uncommon sign of an object.

QUESTION: What is discrimination?

RESPONSE: It apprehends the sign of an object.

When discrimination is divided, there are two:

- (1) the apprehension of a sign and
- (2) the apprehension of a mark (Page 20).

- The apprehension of a sign is related to the sense consciousness.
- The apprehension of a mark is related to the mental consciousness.

Discrimination is a knower that apprehends the uncommon sign of an object. What is an uncommon sign of an object? E.g., blue and yellow: they each have their own entity. Blue is not yellow. Yellow is not blue. Discrimination is that which apprehends this uncommon sign of an object. What is it that allows one to know blue? It is discrimination that apprehends that which is uncommon, blue.

- (1) The apprehension of a **sign** is an apprehension of an uncommon sign of an object which appears to a non-conceptual consciousness.
- (2) The apprehension of a **mark** is an apprehension of an uncommon sign of an object which appears to conceptual thought (Page 21).

The mental factor of discrimination occurs in the retinue of both a sense consciousness and a mental consciousness.

- The discrimination that is in the retinue of a sense consciousness is the apprehension of a sign.
- The discrimination that is in the retinue of a mental consciousness is the apprehension of a mark.

For example, the eye primary consciousness apprehending blue is a main mind. In the retinue of this sense consciousness, there is the mental factor of discrimination that enables this eye primary consciousness apprehending blue to apprehend the uncommon blue, the blue that is unshared with anything else.

Another example is a conceptual consciousness apprehending blue. In the retinue of this conceptual consciousness apprehending blue, there is also the mental factor of discrimination that, in this case, apprehends a mark. This mental factor of discrimination in the retinue of this conceptual consciousness apprehending blue enables this conceptual consciousness not to mix up blue and yellow. This discrimination enables this conceptual consciousness apprehending blue to conventionally designate that the object is blue and not yellow.

The *Treasury of Knowledge* explains discrimination as being twofold:

- (1) the apprehension of a sign with regard to an object and
- (2) the apprehension of a sign with regard to a convention (Page 21)

This is just a different way of saying of what I have just explained.

*Question:* Regarding the explanation of the uncommon sign, can we say that discrimination is the mental factor that performs the function of

apprehending the opposite of whatever is not the object or, put another way, apprehending the isolate?

*Answer:* It is all right if you want to say that. Blue is the opposite of non-blue. The opposite of non-blue is blue. That only exists on blue and not anything else. Therefore it is uncommon or unshared.

*Question:* How would one posit a non-conceptual consciousness that is concomitant with the mental factor of discrimination labelling and designating the object?

*Answer:* This is related to what is mentioned in the text:

The bases of engagement for these two types of discrimination are perceptions, hearing, differentiation and knowledge. Their meanings are as follows.

- Perceptions involve designating an expression to objects manifestly perceived.
- Hearing involves designating an expression in dependence on hearing credible words.
- Differentiation involves designating an expression to objects ascertained in dependence on signs.
- Knowledge involves designating an expression to objects ascertained directly (Page 21).

Usually it is the conceptual consciousness that designates terms, determining this is this and that is that. I don't know whether the mental factor of discrimination in the retinue of a sense consciousness designates an expression (or term) to an object or not.

When we see blue, i.e., the eye consciousness apprehends blue, almost immediately after that, the mind thinks, "This is blue," i.e., the mind designates "This is blue." We have to think about this: whether this mind that designates, "This is blue," is the eye consciousness or not.

Or when you hear a sound, i.e., the ear consciousness apprehending a sound, I guess it has to be a conceptual consciousness that distinguishes the kind of sound that you heard, "I heard this" or "I heard that."

When we talk about designating an expression or term, it is mainly done by the conceptual consciousness. With regard to how these different consciousnesses are generated, we discussed this before: the generation of a sense consciousness is followed by the mental consciousness and the conceptual consciousness. They are generated very quickly.

I am not sure whether a sense consciousness designates an expression but in any case, it is mentioned here that the mental factor of discrimination in the retinue of:

- a sense consciousness is a discrimination that apprehends a sign
  - a conceptual consciousness is a discrimination that apprehends a mark
- One can understand from this division of discrimination that it is mainly the mental consciousness that designates an expression.

Further, when discrimination is differentiated in terms of its support, there are six:

- 1) discrimination arising from contact upon the aggregation of a visible form, an eye [sense power], and an eye consciousness;

- 2) discrimination arising from contact upon the aggregation of a sound, an ear [sense power], and an ear consciousness;
- 3) discrimination arising from contact upon the aggregation of an odor, a nose [sense power], and a nose consciousness;
- 4) discrimination arising from contact upon the aggregation of a taste, a tongue [sense power], and a tongue consciousness;
- 5) discrimination arising from contact upon the aggregation of a tactile object, a body [sense power], and a body consciousness; and
- 6) discrimination arising from contact upon the aggregation of a phenomenon, a mental [sense power], and a mental consciousness (page 21).

### (3) Intention

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

QUESTION: What is intention?

RESPONSE: It is a compositional mental action of the mind. It has the function of engaging the mind in virtue, non-virtue, or the unspecified<sup>1</sup>.

Just as it has been said above, the mental factor which rouses and moves the mind that is concomitant with it to an object is called "intention." This is said to be the principal among all mental factors; it is taught that any mind or mental factor engages an object due to the power of this mental factor. For example, just as iron is helplessly drawn by a magnet, the mind helplessly engages an object due to this mental factor intention (Pages 22 – 23).

When we talk about this mental factor of intention, it is karma. Karma is intention. The mental factor of intention moves the mind towards an object. There are physical, verbal, and mental karma (or actions). There is a mind that moves the body to engage in a certain action. There is a mind that causes a certain kind of speech. We had discussed karma at some length in the previous module on the lam-rim.

This intention is mental action. In general, there are two types of actions:

- (1) actions that are intentions
- (2) intended actions

It is just as it has been said in the *Treasury of Knowledge* (stanza 4.1cd):

They are intention and that produced by it.  
Intention is mental action.  
That produced by it are actions of body and speech.

Intended actions are of two types:

- (1) physical actions
- (2) verbal actions (Page 23)

- Therefore the three physical actions and four verbal actions are intended actions.
- On the other hand, actions that are intentions are mental actions.

The main thing is to understand exactly what intention is:

- Intention is an omnipresent mental factor that accompanies all main minds.
- Intention moves the main mind and all the mental factors in the retinue of this main mind *towards* an object. The analogy given here is a piece of iron that is helplessly drawn towards a magnet.

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<sup>1</sup> Unspecified can also be translated as neutral.

## (4) Contact

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

QUESTION: What is contact?

RESPONSE: It distinguishes the transformation of the sense power upon the aggregation of the three. It has the function of acting as a support for feeling.

Just as it has been said above, contact is a knower that, upon aggregation of the three – object, sense power and primary consciousness – distinguishes an object in accordance with whatever subsequent feeling, pleasant and so on, that is to be experienced (Page 24 – 25).

Contact is when the mind meets with the object. It is the knower that causes the mind to come into contact with or to meet the object.

- Intention moves the mind towards the object.
- Contact causes the mind to meet with the object.
- When contact causes the mind to meet with an unpleasant object, unpleasant feelings arise.
- When contact causes the mind to meet with a pleasant object, pleasant feelings arise.

That is the reason why it is said that contact “distinguishes an object in accordance with whatever subsequent feeling, pleasant and so on, that is to be experienced.”

*Question:* Since these five omnipresent mental factors arise, abide, and disintegrate simultaneously, how does one reconcile that contact is a cause and the remaining four mental factors are the results? It seems that they do not share a similar time.

*Answer:* What we can say with certainty is what we had discussed earlier at the beginning of this text. The main mind and the mental factors in its retinue are concomitant by way of the five similarities, one of which is similar time.

Therefore we cannot say that the five omnipresent mental factors are generated at different times. As soon as the main mind is produced, these five omnipresent mental factors are produced simultaneously. This is what we can say for sure because this is stated by all the main treatises.

But in the presentation of the twelve links of dependent-arising from the basis of contact → feeling → craving → grasping → potential existence → birth. How are we to explain that feeling and contact are established simultaneously?

I don't know exactly but you can say that with contact as the basis, it is possible for the mental factor of feeling to increase or strengthen. You cannot say that there is no feeling when contact arises. You have to say that there is feeling. On the basis of contact, feeling manifests and becomes stronger. Think about this. Perhaps we can say something like that. When we are talking about the mind, it is very difficult to pin-point

things exactly and to be able to say, “This is this” and “That is that.” What we can say for sure is that all the great treatises had clearly stated that the five omnipresent mental factors are established simultaneously.

For now, if we can get some idea about these different mental factors, I think that is enough.

- Feeling allows us to experience the object in question.
- Discrimination allows us to know and apprehend the uncommon sign of a specific object, i.e., apprehending it is the object and not something else.
- Intention moves our mind towards the object.
- Contact allows us to distinguish the object and makes the mind meet the object.

The divisions of the various mental factors are in the text. Read them on your own and if there is anything you need to clarify, you can bring it up in class.

## (5) Attention

Regarding attention, the *Compendium of Knowledge* says:

QUESTION: What is attention?

RESPONSE: It is an engagement of the mind. It has the function of holding the mind to the object of observation.

Just as it has been said above, it is a knower that focuses the mind which is concomitant with it on a particular object of observation. What is the difference between intention and attention? **Intention** moves the mind to general objects, whereas **attention** directs the mind to a particular object (Page 25).

- Attention directs the mind to an object and causes it to hold on to the object.
- Attention is *like* meditative stabilisation (or concentration) but it is *not* meditative stabilisation. It allows the mind to focus and hold on to its object without thinking about something else.

These are the five omnipresent mental factors: feeling, discrimination, intention, contact, and attention. You should have a rough idea of their individual entities.

### [Discussion of the category of omnipresent mental factors]

What is the reason for calling these five mental factors – feeling and so forth – “omnipresent” [Tibetan: *kun 'gro*, literally, go all]? They are so-called because they are mental factors that accompany [Tibetan: *rjes su 'gro ba*, literally, go after] all minds. Furthermore, if any of the five omnipresent mental factors are missing, then the utilization of an object will not be complete:

- if feeling is absent, then there will be no experience;
- if discrimination is absent, then there will be no apprehension of the uncommon signs of the object;
- if intention is absent, then [the mind] will not be directed to an object;
- if attention is absent, then [the mind] will not be focused on a particular object of observation;
- if contact is absent, then there will be no support [for feeling].

Therefore, in order for the utilization of an object to be complete, all five omnipresent mental factors must be present without exception (Page 26).

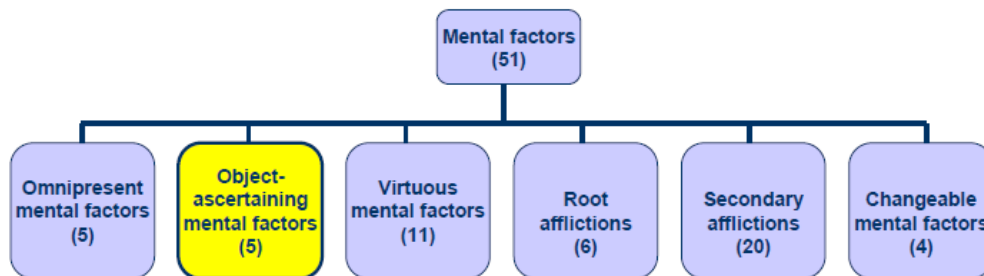
If it is a main mind, it is necessarily accompanied by the five omnipresent mental factors. Why? Because:

- without feeling, there is no way to experience the object.
- without discrimination, one will be unable to distinguish the uncommon sign of the object.
- without intention, the mind will not be directed to the object.
- without attention, the mind will not be able to stay on the object.
- without contact, the mind will not be able to meet with the object.

If you had read the text, whatever I had said should not be difficult. Sometimes it is hard to tell the difference between two mental factors. It seems as if we are talking about the same thing.

Five Omnipresent Mental Factors	Function
Feeling	To enable the mind to experience the object.
Discrimination	To enable the mind to distinguish the uncommon sign of the object.
Intention	To move the mind towards the object.
Attention	To direct the mind towards the object.
Contact	To enable the mind to meet with the object.

### Five object-ascertaining mental factors



The five object-ascertaining mental factors are:

- (1) aspiration
- (2) belief
- (3) mindfulness
- (4) meditative stabilisation
- (5) wisdom

#### (1) Aspiration

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

QUESTION: What is aspiration?

RESPONSE: It is the very wish to be endowed with this or that [attribute] of a desired thing. It has the function of acting as a support for making effort.

Just as it has been said above, it is a knower that, upon observing some intended thing, seeks it. The way in which aspiration acts a support for effort is as follows. *[Maitreya's] Discrimination of the Middle and the Extremes* (stanza 4.5ab) says:

The support and that supported by it and  
The cause and the result (Page 26).

We can look at aspiration in terms of three features or characteristics: (1) its object, (2) its aspect, and (3) its function.

- The object is the “attribute of a desired thing.”
- The subjective aspect of aspiration is the very wish to be endowed with that desired object.
- The function of aspiration is that it is the support for making effort.

A knower that possesses these three features is aspiration. The aspiration referred to in this context is the mental factor of aspiration in the retinue of a virtuous main mind.

There is a quotation from the *Lam-Rim Chenmo* that highlights the importance of aspiration. When there is aspiration, it is then possible to have effort and all the excellent qualities that come from effort.

The *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path* also says:

If you cannot stop the laziness that is a non-enthusiasm toward cultivating meditative stabilization, and that takes joy in its discordant class, then from the outset you will not be inclined to engage in meditative stabilization. Even if you do achieve it once, it will quickly degenerate since you will be unable to sustain it. Therefore, it is most crucial to put an end to laziness at the beginning. Regarding this, when you attain pliancy in which your body and mind are filled with joy and bliss, laziness will be overcome, since no weariness will arise in your application to virtue all day and night. In order to generate that [pliancy], you must be able to undertake continuous effort in meditative stabilization, the cause for generating pliancy. And in order to produce that [effort], you need a continuous fervent aspiration that seeks meditative stabilization. As a cause for that [aspiration], you must have the stable faith of captivation due to having seen the excellent qualities of meditative stabilization. Therefore, for a start, you should meditate again and again on faith that reflects upon the excellent qualities of meditative stabilization. Having witnessed the sequence of these through your practice, you will apprehend this excellent essential point with the clearest certainty (Page 27).

With regard to achieving this meditative stabilisation (or calm-abiding), it is very important to have the strong aspiration for doing so. The cause of such a strong aspiration is the faith of conviction. How do you develop this faith of conviction in attaining this single-pointedness of mind?

- You develop a strong faith of conviction through hearing and then reflecting on the advantages of having such a mind.
- This faith of conviction becomes the cause for you to aspire strongly to attain this mind.
- Strong aspiration leads to strong effort (or joyous perseverance)<sup>2</sup>, a mind that is enthusiastic about virtue.
- With strong joyous perseverance, you will develop physical and mental pliancy.
- When physical and mental pliancy is attained, you overcome laziness.

The actualisation of calm-abiding is being used here as an example to understand the importance of aspiration. When there is a strong aspiration to actualise calm-abiding, you will generate strong joyous perseverance to achieve this. When you have physical and mental pliancy, all kinds of laziness are overcome. It is always laziness that blocks us from achieving what we want.

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<sup>2</sup> Ven. Tenzin Gyurme prefers effort to be translated as joyous perseverance.



The text points out how important aspiration is because it is only with strong aspiration that it is possible for us to engage in perfect virtue.

When aspiration is divided, there are three types:

- (1) the aspiration wishing to meet
- (2) the aspiration wishing not to be separated
- (3) the aspiration that seeks (Page 27)

- When you have strong aspiration, then you will have strong joyous perseverance.
- With strong joyous perseverance, you will develop qualities that you have not yet developed.
- With strong joyous perseverance, you will be able to maintain those qualities that you have already developed without losing them.
- Whatever qualities you accumulate through joyous perseverance will be enhanced.

What we are seeking to achieve is:

- to gradually reduce and then remove the non-virtuous mind
- to generate a virtuous mind and
- to strengthen the virtuous mind that has already been generated

All this can only come about through joyous perseverance and in order to have that, one needs to have aspiration. You have to understand how aspiration functions as the support for making such effort.

- Strong and stable joyous perseverance is supported by strong and stable aspiration.
- Strong and stable aspiration comes from stable faith.
- Stable faith comes from a strong foundation in hearing and reflecting on the teachings.

Strong foundation in hearing and reflecting on in the teachings → strong faith → strong aspiration → strong joyous perseverance

That is why Lama Tsongkhapa emphasises the importance of hearing (i.e., studying the teachings), reflection, and meditation. Without these three, nothing happens. Why? Because without them, there is no faith. When faith is weak, aspiration and effort are also weak. Then nothing happens.

Ultimately, it depends on whether one's hearing, reflection, and meditation are stable. You have to think about what we have discussed so far. The three-fold process of hearing, reflection, and meditation makes sense. By thinking about this, you can gain faith in studying, reflection, and so forth.

## **(2) Belief**

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

QUESTION: What is belief?

RESPONSE: It holds an ascertained thing to be just the way it has been ascertained. It has the function of non-captivation.

Just as it has been said above, it is a knower which holds the object that has been ascertained by its valid cognition, thinking, "It is just like this and not otherwise" (Page 28).

We can look at belief in terms of the three features:

1. The object of this mind is something that has already been ascertained.
2. The subjective aspect of this mind in relation to its object, understands the object to be, "It is just like this and not otherwise."
3. Its function is non-captivation.

Here its function is specified as "non-captivation," because when one has gained firm belief in the object that one has ascertained, an opponent cannot steer one away from it. For example, reflecting upon the difference between the Buddhist and non-Buddhist teachers in the context of going for refuge, one analyses, "Which is an infallible refuge?" and ascertains that only the Teacher, the Buddha, is an infallible refuge. Then, when the doctrine taught by him and the spiritual community properly practicing this doctrine are also ascertained by valid cognition to be infallible refuges, a firm belief in them as final refuges is gained. Thereupon, Forders and so forth cannot lead one astray and one has then joined the ranks of Buddhists. Based upon this, all wholesome qualities will increase. Furthermore, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says (stanza 7.40):

The Muni has taught that belief is the root  
Of all that belongs to the class of virtue,  
And the root of that is  
Constant meditation on the fruitional results (Page 28).

What is belief? It is a mind that holds on to an object that had already been ascertained earlier, holding on to it to be as it is and not something else, "This object is only like this."

It is important to have stable belief in the virtuous class of phenomena. As Shantideva says in *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*, it is the "root of all that belongs to the class of virtue." The root of such stable belief is the strong conviction in cause and effect and the workings of karma.

In the previous lesson, we saw how conviction in the workings of karma is the right view. With such conviction in cause and effect and karma, one can then generate aspiration and one can have belief. We had talked about inference through belief. This is how you can generate inference through belief.

*Question:* On page 26 of the text, can you please explain the term, "utilisation," of an object?

*Answer:* In the context of the lam-rim, this can be understood to mean "enjoyment." But here in this subject, we cannot say, "enjoyment." We say, "utilisation."

*Questions:* (1) I refer to materialistic feelings. On page 19, what does "craving for the contaminated appropriated aggregates" mean?  
(2) If the mental factor of intention can move the mind towards the object, can it also move the mind away from the object?

*Answers:* (1) You can say that materialistic feelings refer to the mental factor of feeling that is concomitant with a contaminated consciousness

and non-materialistic feelings are the mental factor of feeling that is concomitant with an uncontaminated wisdom.

(2) Intention moves the mind towards an object. When the mind moves towards an object, you are moving your mind away from another object. You can think about how you move away from a non-virtuous state of mind towards a virtuous state of mind.

Intention is a mover. It moves the mind towards an object. Think about this: in order for your mind to move towards an object, your mind has to move away from something else. There isn't an intention that is stagnant and does not move.

*Question:* When the time of death is near, you crave to live longer. During the bardo state, you also crave for a body and to quickly take rebirth. Can this be the “craving for the contaminated appropriated aggregates”?

*Answer:* When we talk about materialistic feelings, they are concomitant with craving. There are different kinds of craving: craving for the body, craving for existence, and so forth. The mental factor of feeling that is concomitant with craving is a materialistic feeling.

*Question:* The observed object of a sense consciousness would be a sense object whereas the observed object of a mental consciousness is a phenomenon source form. For an eye consciousness apprehending blue, the observed object is blue. For a mental direct perceiver apprehending blue, the observed object is also blue. Are they the same blue?

*Answer:* Yes, they are the same blue.

*Question:* The objects of observation for both the sense consciousness and the mental consciousness are the same then. So there is no difference between a sense object and a phenomenon source form?

*Answer:* They are different. What is a phenomenon source form? It is a form that is *not* the object of apprehension of a sense consciousness. It can *only* be the object of apprehension of a mental consciousness.

We are not saying that whatever appears to a sense consciousness does not appear to a mental consciousness. When we are talking about blue, whether it is an eye consciousness apprehending blue or a mental consciousness apprehending blue, the blue that is the observed object is the same blue.

The form that appears to a conceptual consciousness apprehending blue is blue. It is not a phenomenon source form. The object of the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue is not the blue that cannot appear to a sense consciousness. This is clear if you know what is a phenomenon source form. What is it? It is a form that cannot be an object of a sense

consciousness. It can only be a form for a mental consciousness. For example, the elephant that appears in a dream. The dream elephant is a phenomenon source form.

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