

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

**Lesson No: 21**

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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.

<b>Five Omnipresent Mental Factors</b>	<b>Function</b>
(1) Feeling	To enable the mind to experience the object.
(2) Discrimination	To enable the mind to distinguish the uncommon sign of the object.
(3) Intention	To move the mind towards the object.
(4) Attention	To direct the mind towards the object.
(5) Contact	To enable the mind to meet with the object.

As long as it is a main mind, it is necessarily accompanied by these five omnipresent mental factors. From your side, you need to have a rough idea of what these five omnipresent mental factors are and the functions they perform.

### **Five object-ascertaining mental factors**

The five object-ascertaining mental factors are:

- (1) aspiration
- (2) belief
- (3) mindfulness
- (4) meditative stabilization
- (5) wisdom (Page 26)

#### **(1) Aspiration**

Aspiration is a knower that focuses on a desired object and wishes to be endowed with it.

#### **(2) Belief**

Belief “is a knower which holds an object that has been ascertained by its valid cognition, thinking, ‘It is just like this and not otherwise.’” Belief is an ascertainment of an object.

Belief is very important especially the belief in karma and its effects. This is the root of all wholesome qualities. It is important to gain an ascertainment of this through the process of learning and reflecting on the workings of karma. Through the process of hearing, learning, and

reflecting on karma and its effects, it is possible that qualms about karma may arise.

You may have doubts but they can be doubts tending towards the factual. Further learning and reflection can result in a correct assumption with regard to karma and its effects, i.e., you gain the correct assumption that is akin to a realisation. Having such correct belief in karma and its effects can help us to practise and live a life that is based on this belief.

It would be ideal if one could gain a valid cognition of karma and its effects. If one can generate an inferential cognition of karma and its effects in dependence upon the application of correct logic and reasoning, that faith in the workings of karma will be very stable and irreversible. With such irreversible faith in karma and its effects, one's practice will be greatly enhanced and one will achieve one's goal.

In the context of this discussion on belief, the belief in karma and its effects refers specifically to “a knower that holds the object that has been ascertained by its valid cognition.” That means the object of the mental factor of belief has been ascertained by valid cognition. Belief holds on to this object as ascertained by its valid cognition to be as it is, not as something else. So it is not the same as the term, “belief,” that appears in ordinary usage.

Belief is a mind that possesses these three features:

1. Its object is something that has already been ascertained.
2. Its subjective aspect holds on to the object, thinking, “It is just like this and not something else.”
3. Its function is non-captivation.

Belief is a mind that holds on to an object that has already been determined and ascertained by valid cognition. Therefore it is impossible for you to change your mind about the object that you have realised. No matter what other people may say or what conditions you may encounter, your belief will not be swayed, i.e., you will not be captivated by those counter-arguments or views. This is the function of non-captivation.

Therefore belief is very important for spiritual development, for training the mind, and practising the Dharma. Once you have ascertained something through valid cognition, you hold on to that realisation. Then whatever practice you do, you will achieve your goal. Generally speaking, belief is also important in whatever we do in life. We need this kind of belief.

Is there a difference between belief and a subsequent cogniser? A subsequent cogniser is a knower that realises what has already been realised. Belief and subsequent cognition are not the same.

- A subsequent cogniser can be a main mind or it can be a mental factor but if it is belief, it is necessarily a mental factor.

- Belief is not a knower that realises what has already been realised. It simply holds on to the object, believing it is that and not something else. These are the differences between belief and a subsequent cogniser.

### (3) Mindfulness

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

QUESTION: What is mindfulness?

RESPONSE: It is a non-forgetfulness of the mind with respect to a familiar object. It has the function of non-distraction.

Just as it has been said above, it is a knower that possesses three features. These three features are:

- (1) objective feature – a familiar object
- (2) [subjective] aspect feature – a non-forgetfulness upon having observed that object; and
- (3) functional feature – non-distraction (Pages 28 – 29)

The object of mindfulness is a familiar object. Why is this so?

- (1) Since mindfulness is not produced with respect to that which has not been previously familiarized with, the objective feature is stated as "a familiar object (Page 29)."

Mindfulness is not forgetting the object. So you cannot have mindfulness with respect to an object that you are unfamiliar with.

(2) Even though the mind might have previously familiarized itself with an object, if it does not presently dawn as an object of the mind, mindfulness will not occur. Thus, [the subjective aspect feature] is specified as "non-forgetfulness of the mind."

(3) Since the stability of the mind is enhanced in dependence on special mindfulness, its functional feature is specified as that of "non-distraction (Page 29)."

What follows are quotations from Arya Nagarjuna and Shantideva stating the importance of mindfulness.

And *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* (stanza 5.26-30) says:

Even though learned,  
Faithful and diligent in effort,  
Many become tainted by downfalls  
Due to committing the fault of lacking introspection (Page 29).

Although this verse refers manifestly to introspection, it is also highlighting the importance of mindfulness. Mindfulness and introspection (or vigilance) are very important. It says that even though one may be hardworking, learned, and has a lot of faith, but if one does not know the essential points of how to practise, then one can be tainted by various downfalls and faults due to the lack of mindfulness.

Though they have amassed merit,  
It is pilfered by the thief of non-introspection  
Who follows upon degeneration of mindfulness;  
They proceed to a bad migration (Page 29).

When one loses mindfulness or forgets the virtuous object of observation, and one's mindfulness degenerates, all the merit one has amassed may decline. As a result, one may go to the lower realms.

This band of thieves, the afflictions,  
Looks for an opportunity;  
Upon finding an opportunity, it pilfers my virtue and  
Even destroys the life of a good migration (Page 29).

The moment you forget to place your mind on and lose your mindfulness of a virtuous object, the afflictions will come readily to take its place. Due to that, your virtues will decline. When your virtues are stolen by the afflictions, you will not be able to obtain a good rebirth.

Therefore, mindfulness should never be displaced  
From the door of the mind;  
If it does go, recalling the anguish of bad migrations,  
Place it back (Page 30).

These verses talk about the great importance of mindfulness. You are reminded not to forget to focus the mind on a virtuous object. When you find that your mindfulness is indeed degenerating, you must recall the sufferings of the lower realms and think, “If I forget to place my mind on virtue, then these sufferings will happen to me.” Remembering that, you place the mind back on the virtuous object.

Due to association with spiritual teachers,  
The teachings of the abbot, and fear,  
Fortunate ones who act respectfully  
Easily generate mindfulness (Page 30).

This verse highlights the external conditions for generating mindfulness, i.e., association with a guru.

Mindfulness and introspection are extremely important and are said to be indispensable for developing good qualities.

In this vein, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says (stanza 5.22-23):

Let my gain and honor,  
My body and livelihood vanish;  
Let even my other virtues degenerate,  
But may my mind never degenerate.

I urge you,  
Those who wish to guard their minds,  
Guard your mindfulness and introspection  
Even at the cost of your lives! (Page 30)

Shantideva is advising us to always protect our mind by relying on mindfulness and introspection. Just as we would protect our possessions, body, and so forth, likewise, we must protect our mind with mindfulness and introspection. Between protecting our body and our mind, it is said that protecting our mind is more important.

When you think about this from various perspectives, you will understand how important it is to protect the mind with mindfulness and introspection. When you compare physical suffering and mental suffering, mental suffering is far more unbearable. Which is more important,

physical bliss or mental bliss? I think mental bliss is more important.

The body does not go on to the next life. It is the mind that goes on to and that determines the kind of rebirth you will get in your next life. Since it is the mind that moves from life to life, you should understand how important it is to protect the mind.

How do we differentiate between a good person and a bad person? The differentiation is not made based on their physical differences such as the size of their bodies and so forth. Rather we distinguish a bad person from a good person by the virtuous state of their minds. A good person is different from a bad person because his mind is of a better quality. He is possibly more good-hearted.

When we say we like or love someone, our affection for that person has more to do with the mind of that person. Of course the mind is there within the body. The person is alive because the consciousness is still in the body. When the person is dead and the consciousness is no longer in the body, we will not have the same affection or love when we see the dead body. In fact we may feel scared when we look at the body.

The essential point is that the state of the mind is very important. Therefore it is extremely important to protect the mind. We put in a lot of effort in protecting our body. Shantideva urges and pleads with us to put in even more effort to guard our mind. In Tibetan, this part of the text reads, "I put my palms together and I request you to guard your mind."

The discussion of mindfulness here is in the context of the mental factor of mindfulness in the retinue of a virtuous mind. It is so important to protect the mind and place it on a virtuous object. It is the mental factor of mindfulness that enables us to do this. Therefore we must understand what mindfulness is and its importance. With strong mindfulness and introspection, one can achieve meditative stabilisation (or concentration).

#### **(4) Meditative stabilisation**

Regarding the entity of meditative stabilization, the *Compendium of Knowledge* says:

QUESTION: What is meditative stabilization?

RESPONSE: It is a one-pointedness of the mind with respect to an imputed thing. It has the function of acting as a support for knowledge.

Just as it has been said above, it is a one-pointedness of mind that, within observing an imputed thing, is continuously set upon it.

The objective feature of meditative stabilization is specified to be "an imputed thing," because, when cultivating meditative stabilization, one holds the mind to an object of observation that is imputed by the mind (Page 30).

Meditative stabilisation is a knower that also possesses the three features.

1. Its object is specified to be an imputed thing.
2. Its subjective aspect is its one-pointedness.

3. Its function is to develop wisdom.

Why is the object of meditative stabilisation “specified to be an imputed thing”? This is because, when one is cultivating meditative stabilisation, one holds the mind onto an object of observation that is imputed by the mind.

There are four types of objects of observation that are used for developing meditative stabilisation.

Furthermore, although there appear to be many enumerations of objects of observation for meditative stabilization, when condensed, it is taught that there are four [categories]:

- (1) objects of observation for purifying behavior
- (2) objects of observation for purifying afflictions
- (3) pervasive objects of observation
- (4) objects of observation for [developing] skill (Pages 30 – 31)

### ***(1) Objects of observation for purifying behaviour***

What is purifying behaviour? We look into our own mind, at our own afflictions and observe which one is predominant, whether it be anger, attachment, pride, and so forth. By observing the predominant affliction, we then apply the antidote to it.

When the afflictions are too strong, it will be difficult for you even to try to develop one-pointedness of the mind. Therefore first, we have to purify our behaviour, i.e., to identify the predominant affliction and apply the respective antidote. E.g., when the predominant affliction is:

- desire or attachment, one can meditate on ugliness.
- anger, one can meditate on love.
- ignorance, one can meditate on dependent-arising.
- pride, one can think of the countless things in the world that one does not know.
- discursive thought, one can meditate on the breath.

### ***(2) Objects of observation for purifying afflictions***

Purifying afflictions means purifying the manifest afflictions by observing the good qualities of the next higher realm, thinking, “How nice if I can achieve that state.” This is the meditation whereby you look at your current realm as coarse and not as inviting as the realm above it.

The meditation on the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths can be used in the same way.

### ***(3) Pervasive objects of observation***

This refers to all existents or phenomena.

### ***(4) Objects of observation for [developing] skill***

This has to do with the meditation on the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena, e.g., meditating on whether the self exists on the body or the aggregates.

Any object can be posited to be an object of observation for the cultivation of meditative stabilisation.

An important point that is mentioned here is that meditative stabilisation is produced in relation to a mental consciousness and not a sense consciousness. You do not generate concentration through the eye consciousness. Therefore the visible form that appears to an eye consciousness is not posited to be the object for developing meditative stabilisation. You do not develop concentration by staring at something without closing the eyes or simply focusing the mind on, say, a cup. That is not how one develops meditative stabilisation.

Moreover, its object of observation is not form appearing to a sense consciousness; rather it is only a mental object imputed by the mind (Page 31).

When we are trying to develop meditative stabilisation by focusing on a particular object, we first look at it and get a clear idea of what it looks like. We then try to reproduce and focus on a mental image of the object in our mind. That mental image is what we focus on when we are trying to develop meditative stabilisation.

*Question:* Since the object of observation is said to be an imputed thing, can the object of observation of a non-conceptual meditative stabilisation be a non-imputed thing? Can there be imputation by a non-conceptual mind?

*Answer:* In general, when something is imputed by the mind, that mind may not necessarily be a conceptual consciousness.

*Student:* I thought all along that there can be imputation by a non-conceptual sense consciousness because during the classes on special insight, we learnt that even a sense consciousness can impute object. But during the discussion of the mental factor of discrimination, Khen Rinpoche explained that the imputation is done only by a conceptual consciousness only.

*Answer:* If you remember, for the mental factor of discrimination:

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

The mental consciousness is primarily a conceptual consciousness.

The question now is: does the sense consciousness, say, an eye consciousness, impute or designate, “This is form”? How does a mental consciousness designate something?

Perhaps it is not really necessary for imputation to be done by a conceptual consciousness. With regard to this imputed thing, when you

are trying to meditate, the object of observation for developing meditative stabilisation is essentially an appearance to the mind. From the perspective of this appearance appearing to the mental consciousness, we say it is imputed, i.e., it is appearing to the mind.

I think this is what the text is trying to say when it states that the object of observation is an imputed thing. It is referring to that appearance appearing to the mental consciousness.

Nowadays, it seems that there are some instructions at odds with the wording of the Conqueror's scriptures that clearly teach the method of performing staring meditation within observation of a form appearing to the eye consciousness. However, Arya Asanga clearly stated that meditative stabilization is not produced in sense consciousnesses; rather, it is only produced in a mental consciousness. Moreover, its object of observation is not form appearing to a sense consciousness; rather, it is only a mental object imputed by the mind (Page 31).

When you stare at a cup without being distracted, you won't see the cup very clearly.

When you are trying to develop meditative stabilisation, you focus on a chosen object. There is the factor of stability and the factor of clarity. Your aim is to achieve both these factors.

When you are focussing on an object with your eye consciousness, you may be able to stay on the object but there may be a lack of clarity. This is like the laxity that is experienced by those who are trying to develop concentration. When you try to place your mind on the object for a while, you are focussed but the object is unclear. This is what we call laxity.

To reiterate, meditative stabilisation is generated in a mental consciousness, not in a sense consciousness. The object of observation is not the form that appears to the sense consciousness. Rather by looking at an object, we make an image of the object in our mind and we then focus on that mental image.

Can one achieve meditative stabilisation by focussing on the breath? The object is moving. And your breathing in and out, is that an imputed thing? Does an object of observation of meditative stabilisation necessarily have to be an imputed thing?

The text then brings up a qualm.

QUALM: Well then, does the object of meditative stabilization definitely have to be a real object?

RESPONSE: No. Whether the object be real or erroneous, if one attentively familiarizes oneself with it internally over and over again, clear appearance and non-conceptuality with respect to that object will arise. It is just as it has been said in [Dharmakirti's] *Commentary on (Dignaga's) 'Compendium of Valid Cognition'(Pramanavarttikakarika)*:

Therefore, utmost familiarization with whatever – whether real or unreal  
– Results in a clear non-conceptual mind  
When that familiarization is thoroughly completed (Page 31).



*Khen Rinpoche: How do you differentiate between what is real and what is unreal?*

Do you think the real and the unreal is differentiated in dependence on whether the object in question is an existent or a non-existent?

*Khen Rinpoche: You can imagine the rabbit has horns. Can you not then meditate on that image?*

The horns of a rabbit are non-existent. It is not possible for such a thing to exist, i.e., its existence is impossible. I am not sure whether “real” here refers to an existent and “unreal” refers to a non-existent.

When you choose to meditate on the horns of a rabbit, that object does not appear to a sense consciousness as it is a non-existent, but it is possible to have a mental image of the horns of a rabbit. If you decide to meditate on the horns of a rabbit, what is your object of observation? It is the mental image, is it not?

The functional feature of meditative stabilization is specified to be "acting as a support for knowledge," because, through the force of analysis with the wisdom of individual investigation in dependence on calm-abiding in which the mind is internally set in equipoise, one achieves the special insight observing modes and varieties<sup>1</sup> (Page 31).

The function of meditative stabilisation is to act as a support for generating special insight. The root of cyclic existence and the afflictions is ignorance. In order to destroy ignorance, one first has to develop calm-abiding. In dependence upon calm-abiding, one achieves special insight. When one has the special insight focussing on emptiness, one will have the direct antidote to the afflictions.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says (stanza 8.4):

Having understood that afflictions are destroyed  
By special insight that is fully endowed with calm-abiding,  
First seek calm-abiding;  
That is achieved through taking joy in non-attachment to the world.

Also, the *Scripture on Discipline* repeatedly teaches the ways in which the training in meditative stabilization depends on the training in ethics, and the training in wisdom depends on the training in meditative stabilization. In this manner, those who wish for liberation from their hearts should regard these great texts as supreme quintessential instructions (Pages 31 – 32).

This paragraph reinforces the importance of learning the teachings, even in the context of someone who is seeking to develop a one-pointedness of the mind. Before you can achieve that:

- you must know exactly what meditative stabilisation is
- what the appropriate objects of meditation are

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<sup>1</sup> "Modes and varieties" is an expression referring to ultimate truths and conventional truths, that is, all phenomena.

- meditative stabilisation is achieved in a mental and not sense consciousness

Without learning and studying how to achieve meditative stabilisation, even though you may wish to achieve calm-abiding, you can spend your whole life thinking that you are practising correctly but you will never achieve your goal. In that way, you waste your life thinking that you have achieved something. Therefore it is very important to study.

Lama Tsongkhapa points out how important it is to study the great treaties, in particular, looking at the texts of the great Indian masters. In the context of developing meditative stabilisation, the primary source that is often cited is the texts of Arya Asanga. All the compositions and the explanations of the teachings of the Buddha by these great Indian masters can be traced back to the Buddha himself. The purity of the source is very important. It is important to rely on unmistakable explanations.

It is very difficult to achieve meditative stabilisation. But by gaining a complete and correct understanding of exactly what meditative stabilisation is and how to go about achieving it, at the very least, we place special imprints in our mind. There is then hope that we can attain this in the future. The extensive explanation on cultivating meditative stabilisation can be found in the *Lamrim Chenmo*. In the context of the 51 mental factors, we are focussing on the entity of meditative stabilisation.

We will look at the last object-ascertaining mental factor, wisdom, in the next lesson. We will then go through the eleven virtuous mental factors. It would be good if you can read these on your own. It is not difficult. It is quite straightforward. It is very important that you read.

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