

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

Lesson No: 25

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

The Eleven Virtuous Mental factors

There are eleven virtuous mental factors:

- (1) faith
- (2) shame
- (3) embarrassment
- (4) non-attachment
- (5) non-hatred
- (6) non-ignorance
- (7) effort
- (8) pliancy
- (9) conscientiousness
- (10) equanimity
- (11) non-harmfulness (Page 33)

We should have a rough idea of these eleven mental factors by way of their three respective features: object, aspect, and function. We should try to develop these mental factors in our own mind. This is the essence. We have to see for ourselves the benefits when these eleven virtuous mental factors arise in us.

It is mentioned in the text that these eleven mental factors are virtuous by entity, i.e., they are virtuous from their own side without depending on any kind of motivation. It is mentioned that the imprints of these virtuous mental factors are also virtuous. The physical and verbal actions following from these mental factors also become virtuous.

These eleven virtuous mental factors can only arise in our mind through the assertion of effort. Subsequent to the arising of these virtuous mental factors in our mind, virtuous imprints are left in our mind. When imprints of virtue are left in our mind, we are more likely to perform virtuous physical and verbal actions motivated by such mental factors. These positive effects do not only occur in this life. They will remain with us from life to life. So from life to life, we have to familiarise ourselves with these mental factors over and over again.

It is obvious that, in order for any of our physical and verbal actions to be virtuous, they have to arise from imprints of virtue. In order for there to

be imprints of virtue, first a virtuous mind must arise. Therefore we have to put in the effort to generate such virtuous minds. These virtuous minds leave positive imprints that give rise to virtuous physical and verbal actions. Reflecting on this process, one should understand that it is extremely important to develop virtuous minds.

The text mentions virtue by way of attainment at birth. This does not happen without reason. In order for this virtue by way of attainment at birth to arise, in the first place, there has to be the virtue by way of application. The virtue by way of application means putting in the effort to develop virtuous minds. When we put effort into developing a virtuous mind, when the virtuous mind arises, definitely there is hope for the future. From the moment you are born, you will have all these virtues.

In essence, we have to know what these virtuous mental factors and their respective entities are and we have to know what is in it for us when we develop them in our minds. Following from this, as mentioned in *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*, we have to work on developing them. We have to depend on joyous perseverance, the enthusiasm for virtue.

Question: Can the virtue by way of application that has these four conditions—relying on the virtuous spiritual guide, listening, reflection, and meditation—be equated with the second type of joyous perseverance, the joyous perseverance of application that has two types: (1) constant application and (2) respectful application?

Can we relate respectful application to reliance on the spiritual guide and constant application to listening, reflecting, and meditating on the teachings?

Answer: I am not sure.

I saw a commentary explaining these two applications, but now I don't remember.

Question: Can I say that non-harmfulness is no different from compassion?

Answer: I can't say for sure but it would seem that when you look at the definition of non-harmfulness, it seems to be saying that it is compassion. The definition of non-harmfulness is almost the same as the definition of compassion¹.

Question: Among the four immeasurables, equanimity and compassion are among the eleven virtuous mental factors. There seems to be no

¹ It is a mind of compassion and is involved with non-hatred (Page 48).

mention of joy and love?

Answer: The equanimity that is part of the eleven virtuous mental factors is not immeasurable equanimity. In general, there are three types of equanimity:

- (1) equanimity of application (or compositional equanimity)
- (2) equanimity that is feeling
- (3) immeasurable equanimity

The mental factor of equanimity that is part of the eleven virtuous mental factors is the equanimity of application. Not everything is listed there but we can check whether immeasurable love and immeasurable joy can come under non-hatred or not. This is something you can think about.

Question: How does pliancy overcome obscurations?

Answer: This has already been explained. In this context, remember that there are five obscurations;

1. aspiration for the desire object
2. malice
3. sleep and lethargy
4. excitement and regret
5. doubt

Question: Is wisdom necessarily a conceptual mind?

In the definitions: wisdom “strongly differentiates the qualities of things that are to be examined” (Page 32) and non-ignorance is the “knowledge arisen from fruition, scripture, contemplation or realization, and is a wisdom of individual investigation” (Page 38). So when one directly realises emptiness, is the mental factor of wisdom in the mental continuum?

If wisdom is a conceptual mind and non-ignorance is present in the continuum of a mind that directly realises emptiness, how about wisdom then? Can a direct realisation of emptiness still perform analysis?

Answer: You are saying that the mental factor of wisdom is necessarily conceptual by reason, that it is an analytical mind. The mental factor of wisdom is not necessarily conceptual because there is also non-conceptual wisdom such as the direct perception of emptiness.

Question: Equanimity has the function of not allowing an opportunity for the afflictions to arise. It gives the impression that we don't have to realise emptiness then because merely achieving equanimity means the afflictions do not arise.

Answer: The answer is there in the text:

The function of equanimity is specified as "not allowing an opportunity for afflictions," because upon attaining the ninth mental abiding, the manifest afflictions of the desire realm are easily overcome, and in particular, laxity and excitation do not arise during meditative equipoise" (Page 48).

The afflictions here refer to the manifest afflictions of the desire realm. Without the wisdom realising emptiness, it is not possible to abandon the afflictions of the three realms. Therefore in order to destroy the afflictions of the peak of cyclic existence, the highest possible existence in samsara, one needs the wisdom realising emptiness without which there is no way to destroy the afflictions of the peak of cyclic existence.

The Six Root afflictions

The six root afflictions are:

- (1) attachment
- (2) anger
- (3) pride
- (4) ignorance
- (5) doubt
- (6) afflicted views

Regarding the general defining characteristic of afflictions, the *Compendium of Knowledge* says:

The definition of an affliction is a phenomenon such that when it arises, the characteristic of being very unpeaceful arises, and due to its arising, the mental continuum arises as being very unpeaceful.

Just as it has been said above, it is an awareness that causes the mental continuum to be very unpeaceful when it arises (Page 53).

When a mind causes one to be very unpeaceful, that very mind is called an affliction. There are six root afflictions and twenty secondary afflictions.

(1) Attachment

Regarding attachment, the *Compendium of Knowledge* says:

QUESTION: What is attachment?

RESPONSE: It is clinging of the three realms. It has the function of producing suffering.

Just as it has been said above, it is a mental factor that perceives a contaminated thing to be attractive by way of its own entity and thereupon seeks it. Regarding this, the Foremost Omniscient [Tsong-kha-pa] says in [his *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path*]:

Attachment observes an external or internal object that is beautiful and attractive and then becomes attached to it. For example, just as oil that has soaked into a piece of cloth is difficult to remove, likewise [attachment] spreads on and adheres to its object of observation, making it difficult to tear oneself away from it (Page 54).

- What is the object of observation of attachment? It is either an external or internal object that is beautiful and attractive.
- What is the aspect of attachment? Difficulty in separating from the object.
- What is the function of attachment? It produces suffering.

Attachment is of three types:

- (1) attachment of the desire realm
- (2) attachment of the form realm

(3) attachment of the formless realm

The *Treasury of Knowledge* divides it into two:

- (1) attachment of the desire realm
- (2) attachment for [cyclic] existence

[The *Treasury of Knowledge*] condenses the attachment of the two upper realms [i.e., form realm and formless realm] into one.

- (1) Attachment of the desire realm is aspiration for and attachment to the five qualities of the desire realm – form, sound, and so forth – within observation of them.
- (2) The attachment of the two upper realms is condensed into one, known as the "attachment for [cyclic] existence," because the two upper realms are referred to as "[cyclic] existence" in order to overcome the mistake of taking the meditative absorptions of the form and formless realms as a path of liberation.

The function of attachment is specified as "producing suffering" for the purpose of making us understand that the root of all suffering within the three realms of cyclic existence is rebirth which connects us to cyclic existence, and the principal cause for rebirth within cyclic existence is attachment, craving itself (Page 54).

One may have accumulated the projecting karma for rebirth in cyclic existence, but having that karma alone does not necessarily mean that you will experience the result, i.e., rebirth in cyclic existence. What nourishes that projecting karma is attachment and craving. Attachment nourishes the projecting karma that has been accumulated and gives it the strength and power to actualise rebirth in cyclic existence. It is said that attachment is the principal cause for rebirth in cyclic existence. Due to attachment, karma is nourished, and we will be reborn in cyclic existence. Rebirth in cyclic existence is suffering.

(2) Anger

Regarding anger, the *Compendium of Knowledge* says:

QUESTION: What is anger?

RESPONSE: It is a malice towards sentient beings, suffering, and phenomena that are sources of suffering. It has the function of acting as a support for not abiding in contact and for misconduct.

Just as it has been said above, anger is a malice that, upon observing the three objects of observation of anger, cannot tolerate them and wishes to harm them. The three objects of observation of anger are:

- (1) sentient beings,
- (2) one's own sufferings, and
- (3) the sources from which these sufferings arise (Page 55).

- In order for anger to arise, there must be an object towards which the anger is directed. These three objects are: (1) sentient beings, (2) one's own sufferings, and (3) the sources from which these sufferings arise.
- What is the aspect of this anger? It is malice that is essentially a very gross, rough or hard mind that wishes to harm.
- The function of anger acts "as a support for not abiding in contact," i.e., one will not come into contact with happiness.

Regarding the teachings on "the nine bases of malice", the *Precious Garland* (stanza 5.31) says:

Harmful intent arises from nine causes

Of intending to harm others:

Bearing senseless misgivings in the three times

With regard to oneself, one's friends and one's enemies (Page 55).

With regard to oneself, it applies to the three times: the past, the present, and the future:

- (1) I was harmed (in the past).
- (2) I am being harmed (now in the present).
- (3) I will be harmed (in the future).

These are the three bases.

Anger arises because when you think:

- (1) “I was harmed,” you get upset.
- (2) “I am being harmed,” you get upset.
- (3) “I will be harmed or he is going to hurt me,” you get upset.

The same thing applies to one’s friends, i.e., people we consider to be on our side:

- (1) They were harmed.
- (2) They are being harmed.
- (3) They will be harmed.

Because of these three reasons, again one gets angry.

With regard to one’s enemies, i.e., people who are not on our side, when we think:

- (1) “They had benefited from this,” we get upset.
- (2) “Someone is helping them now so they are benefiting from this,” we get upset.
- (3) “In the future, they will be helped and they will benefit,” we also get upset.

These are the nine causes of malice with regard to oneself, one’s friends, and one’s enemies in term of the past, present, and future.

This is just as it has been said in the *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path*:

Anger is malice, a harsh mind that observes sentient beings, suffering, and the sources of suffering such as weapons and thorns, and intends to harm those objects.

It has the function of causing one not to abide in happiness in this lifetime, and produces immeasurable suffering in future lives (Page 55).

When we are happy, we feel calm and peaceful. But the moment anger arises, that sense of peacefulness degenerates. When we get very angry, we forget every good thing that the other person has done for us and the benefit we have received from that person. As a result of anger, we make many enemies, even among our loved ones who have helped us. The function of anger is to increase the number of enemies that we have.

Usually we are able to sleep well but when we get very upset, we find it difficult to fall asleep. Anger also hurts our reputation. Because of anger, we will not have a good and happy life. Obviously anger will also affect our future lives where we will have to experience much suffering.

In this vein, *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says (stanza 6.3-5):

If one maintains a painful mind of hatred,
mind does not experience peace,
Nor obtain joy and happiness;
Sleep does not come and there is no stability (Page 55).

With anger, we cannot experience physical nor mental happiness.

He saddens his friends.
He gathers them with generosity but is not served.
In brief, joy does not exist in one
Where anger abides comfortably (Page 55 – 56).

With anger, we destroy our friendships. In brief, “joy does not exist in one/ Where anger abides comfortably.”

The *Garland of Birth Stories* (stanza 21.29-33) also says:

Due to the fire of anger, one colors unflatteringly,
Even adorned with ornaments, one does not look good.
Even though one may lie on a comfortable bed,
One's mind suffers due to the agony of anger.

Forgetful of the benefits one has enjoyed,
Tormented by anger, one proceeds on a bad path.
One's reputation and achievements degenerate,
Like the waning moon, one's glory fades.

Although supported by friends,
Due to anger, one plummets senselessly into the abyss.
One's contemplation of benefit and harm degenerates;
One becomes erratic and confused.

Due to anger, one becomes habituated to misdeeds,
And will experience suffering for hundreds of years in the bad migrations.
Even an enemy who goes to great lengths to inflict great harm cannot manage more than this (Page 56).

As said in the *Jataka Tales*, when you look at a person who is generally regarded as attractive and pleasant, when that person is very upset, even if that person wears a lot of makeup, jewellery, and adornments, I don't think you will find that person attractive.

By not controlling our anger and getting upset over and over again, we will get used to being angry. What anger does is to create the causes for us to be reborn in the lower realms and to remain there for a very long time. This is something that even an external enemy cannot do. So the essential advice is to see anger as a fault and to try to manage and reduce it.

We have to see this for ourselves by looking at our own mind. When anger manifests, do we feel happy? Do we feel peaceful? We should analyse and think about the faults of anger. What is its function? What does it do to me? By thinking about this, when we start to feel upset or angry, we should remind ourselves of what we have reflected on and try to manage our anger.

(3) Pride

Regarding pride, the *Compendium of Knowledge* says:

QUESTION: What is pride?

RESPONSE: It is a puffing up of the mind in dependence on the view of the transitory collection. It has the function of acting as a support for disrespect and suffering.

Just as it has been said above, it is a mental factor that has the aspect of a puffing up of the mind upon observing the basis for puffing up – one's own wealth, qualities and so forth (Page 56).

- The object of pride is one's own wealth, one's possessions, and one's qualities.
- The aspect is the puffing up or inflating of the mind, i.e., the mind takes on the aspect of feeling very superior.
- The function of pride is acting as a support for disrespecting others and for suffering in future lives.

The disrespect we show to others basically comes from pride and following from that comes the different negative actions. Our mind becomes inflated and by focussing on our wealth or qualities, we feel superior in relation to others.

Here the *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path* says:

Pride is based on the view of the transitory collection and is a puffing up of the mind upon observing an external or internal phenomenon that is high or low, good or bad; it involves an aspect of loftiness.

"In dependence on the view of the transitory collection" is specified because all pride is generated in dependence on the innate conception which thinks "I". Pride is of seven types:

- (1) pride
- (2) exceeding pride
- (3) pride beyond pride
- (4) pride of thinking "I"
- (5) pride of vanity
- (6) pride of slight inferiority
- (7) wrongful pride

- (1) Pride is a puffing up of the mind, thinking that one is superior to lower persons.
- (2) Exceeding pride is a puffing up of the mind, thinking that one is superior to peers.
- (3) Pride beyond pride is a puffing up of the mind, thinking that one is greatly superior even to other superior persons.
- (4) Pride of thinking "I" is a puffing up of the mind, thinking "I" within observing the appropriated aggregates.
- (5) Pride of vanity is a puffing up of the mind, thinking that one has attained what has not been attained.
- (6) Pride of slight inferiority is a puffing up of the mind, thinking that one is just slightly lower than others who are actually greatly superior.
- (7) Wrongful pride is a puffing up of the mind, thinking that one has attained excellent qualities when one has actually gone astray (Pages 56 – 57).

An example of wrongful pride will be feeling very proud because you have beaten up someone or you have given someone a hard time, thinking, "I really did well."

However, the *Precious Garland* explains them as follows (stanza 5.6cd-12):

Pride is of seven types;
I shall explain each of them (Page 57).

Seven types of pride are also mentioned in the *Precious Garland*, but this text describes the first two types of pride—pride and exceeding pride—differently.

Regarding these, being conceited that one is lower than the lowly,
Or equal with the equal,
Or greater than or equal to the lowly
Is called the {1} pride of selfhood (Page 58).

In the *Precious Garland*, the first verse is a description of the first type of pride, pride itself.

The second verse describes “exceeding pride.”

Being conceited that one is equal to those
Who by some quality are superior to oneself
Is {2} exceeding pride.
Being conceited that one is superior to the superior,

Thinking that one is higher than the very high,
Is {3} pride beyond pride;
Like sores on an abscess,
It is exceedingly virulent.

Conceiving through obscuration an "I"
In the five empty [aggregates]
Which are called "the appropriated"
Is explained to be the {4} pride of thinking "I."

Thinking that one has attained fruits not yet attained
Is the {5} pride of vanity.
Praising oneself for committing negative actions
Is known by the wise as {6} wrongful pride.

Deriding oneself, saying,
"I am useless," is called
The {7} pride of lowliness
Such is a brief description of them (Page 58).

The pride of lowliness refers to putting down oneself, thinking, “I am stupid. I am useless,” and so forth. This is considered to be a kind of pride. You have to think about this: how is this pride? Pride has an aspect of the puffing up of the mind. If thinking, “I am useless,” or “I am stupid” is considered to be a pride of lowliness, how does this pride have the aspect of the puffing up of the mind?

In the first verse, the first type of pride refers to, “being conceited that one is lower than the lowly,/ Or equal with the equal,/ Or greater than or equal to the lowly.” How is this thought, “I am lower than the lowly” pride?

Khen Rinpoche: If that is pride, then it cannot be the practice of the bodhisattva where you have to think, “I am lower than the lowly.” When you feel you are lower than the lowly, you are more humble. Isn’t that the practice of a bodhisattva? How can it be pride?

Pride has the function of obscuring any new attainment of the Dharma of scriptures and realization due to its disrespect for those who possess excellent qualities, causes rebirth in bad migrations in future lives, and even when reborn as a human, acts as the cause for rebirth in a low caste, as a servant and the like. Therefore, it produces the undesirable in both this and future lives. In this way, the *Precious Garland* (stanza 1.17cd-18) says:

Through being inflated comes a bad lineage,
Through jealousy little magnificence.

Through anger comes a discolored face, and
Through not questioning the wise, stupidity.
These are the results for humans,
But prior to all of them there is a bad migration.

The *Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* says:

Since pride is the greatest hindrance in developing the path in this life, and is the cause for becoming a servant and the like in future lives, abandon it (Pages 58 – 59).

You have to understand what these seven types of pride are as well as the function of pride. In brief, in this life, pride obstructs the generation of qualities and, in future lives, it causes a lowly rebirth. By reflecting on the faults of pride, we try to reduce it in this life.

(4) Ignorance

Regarding ignorance, the *Compendium of Knowledge* says:

QUESTION: What is ignorance?

RESPONSE: It is unknowing of the three realms. It has the function of acting as a support for the arising of wrong ascertainment, doubt and afflictions with respect to phenomena.

Just as it has been said above, it is the mental factor of unknowing that is obscured regarding the mode of abiding of all phenomena. It is of two types:

- (1) obscuration that is the mental factor of unknowing
- (2) an awareness that apprehends erroneously

From among these two, the explicit indication in the *Compendium of Knowledge* explains [ignorance] to be the mental factor of unknowing. Since Acharya Vasubandhu also explained it in this way in his *A Discussion of the Five Aggregates*, the assertions of both Asanga and his brother agree. However, Acharya Dharmakirti asserts [ignorance] to be an awareness that apprehends erroneously. In this way, although there are two types of assertions with regard to ignorance—(1) the assertion that it is a wrong conception and (2) the assertion that it is an awareness that does not realize—[both] are alike in asserting that the principal antidote to ignorance is the wisdom realizing selflessness (Page 59).

There are two types of ignorance. It either refers to: (1) a mind that apprehends erroneously or (2) a mind that simply does not know.

Both the lower and higher Abhidharma agree that ignorance refers to the mind that does not know. This unknowing mind is ignorance. Ignorance is the opposite of knowledge. In this context, ignorance is posited to be not knowing.

Ignorance is of two types:

- (1) ignorance that is obscuration with respect to actions and their results
- (2) ignorance that is obscuration with respect to the meaning of suchness

- (1) The ignorance that is obscuration with respect to actions and their results causes one to accumulate actions for rebirth in the lower realms.
- (2) The ignorance that is obscuration with respect to the meaning of suchness causes one to accumulate actions for circling in the good migrations.

Its function is specified as "acting as a support for the arising of wrong ascertainment, doubt and afflictions with respect to phenomena," because other afflictions arise in dependence on ignorance; in dependence on them [i.e., afflictions] actions arise; in dependence on actions all sufferings of cyclic existence arise. Therefore, all afflictions and faults arise in dependence on ignorance (Pages 59 – 60).

In brief, this ignorance is the root of circling in the three realms of cyclic existence. Since it is the basis for all actions and afflictions, ignorance is taught at the beginning of the twelve links of dependent-arising² (Page 61).

(5) Doubt

Regarding doubt, the Compendium of Knowledge says:

QUESTION: What is doubt?

RESPONSE: This is being two-minded with regard to the truths. It has the function of acting as a support for not engaging in the class of virtue.

Just as it has been said above, it is a mental factor that wavers between two points within observation of the four truths, cause and result, and so forth. This doubt hinders all virtuous activities and especially hinders the seeing of the truth. Since it will be overcome when one sees the truth, it is said to be a thorough entanglement that is an object of abandonment of the path of seeing³ (Page 61).

Doubt here is the afflicted doubt that is abandoned by the path of seeing. It is an object of abandonment of the path of seeing, unlike anger, ignorance, the afflicted views, and so forth, that are not abandoned by the path of seeing.

When we have doubts regarding karma and their results or the four noble truths, we will not abandon what needs to be abandoned and cultivate what needs to be cultivated. Therefore it hinders virtue.

We will look at the afflicted views in the next lesson.

Question: What are the objects of observation for doubt and ignorance?

Answer: The objects of observation for afflicted doubt can be posited to be the four noble truths and the presentation of karma and their effects. I guess the objects of observation for ignorance can be all phenomena.

Student: With regard to the pride of lowliness and the pride of selfhood, the inflated mind relates to observing the "I" that is the view of the transitory collection and cherishing this "I." When I think that I am lower than the lowly, I am actually seeking attention for myself.

In the case of the bodhisattva who cherishes others thinking, "I am lower than the lowly," that thought comes from cherishing others and observing others. So there is a big difference between these two minds.

² The twelve links are: (1) ignorance, (2) action, (3) consciousness, (4) name and form, (5) sources, (6) contact, (7) feeling, (8) attachment, (9) grasping, (10) existence, (11) birth, and (12) aging and death.

³ The three thorough entanglements are: (1) view of the transitory collection, (2) view holding [bad] morality and conduct as supreme, and (3) doubt.

Khen Rinpoche: That is a good suggestion.

Question: I refer to ignorance. I am not sure what “unknowing of the three realms” means. If it means not knowing all phenomena, how would the wisdom realising selflessness make us know all the three realms?

Answer: There is always an answer to everything. The final ultimate antidote is the wisdom realising selflessness. The mind that does not know, ‘this is a microphone,’ is basically opposed by the mind that learns and knows that this is a microphone. Of course there is also a mind that does not know the final mode of abiding of the microphone. The antidote to that mind is the wisdom realising selflessness.

Discussion questions for 23 September 2012:

1. (a) What is the difference between a main mind and a mental factor?
(b) Explain their concomitance by way of the five similarities.
2. (a) What is the difference between discrimination and attention?
(b) Is discrimination necessarily conceptual?
3. Is there a difference between aspiration and belief?
4. What is the difference between wisdom and non-ignorance?
5. Is there a common locus between faith and aspiration?

Some of the questions may be difficult. You may not be able to arrive at a conclusion but that is not the point of the discussion. The discussion is an opportunity for you to read and study the text and to get a clearer idea of what is being discussed.

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