

## CHAPTER 10 – MINDFULNESS

The first teacher of Garchen Rinpoche was his father. From the age of eight until age 19, he learned reading, writing and the Dharma from his father. Because of the harsh training and discipline he had to endure from this very strict teacher, his own father, who was with him all day and all night, he often felt deep frustration. And he couldn't tell anyone how he felt.

He not only had to read the scriptures, he also had to study them. In order to understand them, he asked his father questions about them. He was taught how to chant prayers, and he had to repeat them over and over again to learn to chant them correctly. Having to sit inside alone with his father studying, memorizing and chanting day after day, made him long to be outside.

His father did teach him one thing outside - mindfulness meditation. While they were traveling on horseback from place to place, his father made use of the long hours by teaching him mindfulness meditation.



As their horses were walking along through the beautiful valleys between the mountains, his father would notice a particular tree that was standing alone or that looked a bit unusual, and say:

“Now, look at that tree over there in the distance! Be mindful of that tree, and make sure that until you get there your mind is not distracted from it.”



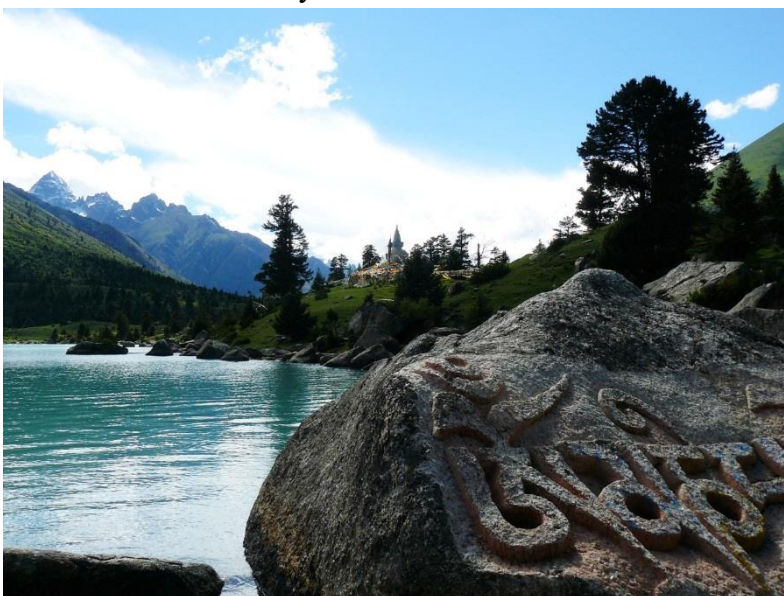


The tree was far away, so it took several minutes until the horse got near it. The young tulku tried to keep his eyes and mind on the tree until he passed it.



He tried to notice everything about the tree so his mind wouldn't wander – the shape of the tree, its colors, how the sun shone on it, its shadow, how it moved slightly in the wind, and how it looked different as he got closer to it.

Later his father would say, “Now, look at that stone over there! And never let your mind be distracted from it until you arrive in front of the stone!”



Sometimes it was a *mani* stone that he had to focus on. A *mani* stone had been carved with the Chenrezig mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum* by someone who wanted to express their devotion and inspire others to remember to chant the *mani* mantra. These stones are located along paths, roads, temples, stupas, lakes or rivers. He stared at the stone, noticing every detail of the stone – its form, its colors, and as he got

closer, the Tibetan letters forming the mantra.

His father told him he could use anything he saw along the road as an object of mindfulness. He told him that if he could keep focusing on an object without interruption, then his mind would be trained not to wander around and he could keep his mind sharp and focused, able to attain deep concentration. When they got close to the village where he was born, he focused on the colorful banner hung on the roof of his mother's house.

His father also taught him to be mindful of every little act. When he was eating, he was taught to notice every little movement of his hands and fingers, to notice the moment he first smelled the food as he brought it to his mouth, to notice as he first tasted the food on his tongue, the exact way the food felt in his mouth, and the movements of his lips, tongue and teeth. He was taught to be mindful - noticing each little movement, each sound, each feeling - as he drank tea, as he took a bath, as he got dressed, as he sat down, as he got up, as he walked, as he laid down, as he picked up a book or any object, and as he set it down. He had to slow down his movements and move gracefully to notice all these things.

He was taught to maintain mindfulness and alertness at all times. Wherever he went and whatever he did, during all his activities, he was taught to pay close attention to what he was doing. He had to notice everything in detail that he was seeing, hearing, touching, feeling, smelling or tasting, moment by moment. His mind had to be very aware of the present moment, and to be alert to what was around him.

If he ever did anything carelessly, then his father immediately noticed and hit him hard! Slowly, the young tulku learned to be mindful, and became very careful and gentle in all his actions.

After a few years of training with his father, he was old enough to travel by himself. Sometimes, on rare occasions, he was allowed to take a few days off from the monastery to go back home for a short visit. He was full of joy and eager to go when he was permitted to visit his home. He went with several attendants, who helped him pack for the trip.

They started packing quickly, because Garchen Rinpoche wanted to go quickly and be home in Dong-go drong as soon as possible. Soon after they started packing, his father watched him and scolded him, saying "Don't bring so much stuff! Don't make the horses carry too much weight! If you make these animals carry too heavy a load, they will suffer so much, and then when karma ripens, you will have to carry just as heavy a load!"

So Garchen Rinpoche had to obey his father and take the time to unpack some things and leave them at the monastery. He had to be mindful of what he was doing to the horses. And from that, he learned to be mindful of the effects of his actions - to always be aware of whether his action is causing any suffering to another being.

Garchen Rinpoche was always offered the strongest and most beautiful horse to ride. He had excellent horse riding skills which he learned naturally, without much instruction. He could



ride at a trot or gallop easily, maintaining his balance on the horse even at high speeds. He could steer the horse with movements of his legs and with the slightest touch of the reins. He liked to speed up his horse, trotting over hills and around curves, galloping over long, flat stretches of the trail, and letting his horse walk whenever it needed a rest. He was mindful of when his horse might be tired, needing a rest. But he would always be the first one to arrive back in his village, three or four hours ahead of his attendants.

He didn't forget to be mindful even when he was traveling fast. He looked ahead to a tree or rock, and kept his mind focused there, noticing also the sounds of rhythmic hoofbeats and the wind in his ears, until he arrived at the landmark. Then he chose another object to focus on.

He kept up this practice until he arrived at the last object to focus on, the colorful banner waving in the wind on the roof of his mother's house.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. Which objects did Garchen Rinpoche's father tell him to focus on to practice mindfulness while they were riding horses? (tree, rock, or any other object)
2. What are some of the actions that Garchen Rinpoche learned to be mindful of? (eating, drinking, getting dressed, bathing, walking, sitting down, getting up, laying down, putting something down, packing to travel on a horse)
3. Why did Garchen Rinpoche's father tell him not to pack too much stuff? (the horses would suffer carrying a lot of weight, and then later he would have to suffer the results of that karma like the horses suffered)
4. From learning not to make the horses carry too much weight, what did he learn to be mindful of generally? (whether his actions cause any suffering to another being)
5. Why do you think the father caused suffering to his son by being so strict, when he was teaching his son not to cause suffering to another being? (it is the important job of the father to teach his son to have strict discipline as a Rinpoche, and the other monks were not able to teach him in a gentle way)

#### DHARMA DISCUSSION:

*"You should practice mindful awareness in all your activities; this is the perfect conduct....Whatever thoughts arise, sadness, afflictive emotions, do not follow them but*

*continue to observe with mindfulness. When this mindfulness is sustained, arising thoughts will naturally dissipate without the need to abandon them.*“ Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 34.

*“Now is the time to be mindful of our thoughts and how they arise so that our afflictive emotions will lessen. In that way, mindfulness is like a strong fire.”* Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 84.

*“You must recognize the emotions upon arising and see its fault. Then, you must sustain mindfulness and not fall under the power of the emotion, not act out on it. Then, gradually the negative emotions will disappear. Always remember this. This is the root of all practice.”* Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 57.

What is mindfulness? Mindfulness is very carefully noticing exactly what is happening in your mind this very moment.

We learn to be mindful by keeping our mind occupied with only one thing at a time, that we see, hear, feel, smell or taste.

Like Garchen Rinpoche, who started learning by keeping his mind occupied with seeing one object – a tree or stone.

While he was eating, he learned to keep his mind occupied with just the sensations – tastes, smells, feelings of touch, and sounds - of eating.

And he kept his mind occupied with just the sensations of walking while walking.

You can choose to be mindful of only what you hear – noticing very carefully whatever it is you hear.

Or you can choose to be mindful only of the sense of touch while you are sitting- all the different sensations you can feel in your body.

For example, feel your toes touching each other. Feel your eyelids on your eyes.

It's easier to do it in a quiet place without distractions.

Another way you can practice mindfulness is to do mindful breathing.

Choose to focus on either the tip of your nose, deep inside the nose, the chest, or stomach. Notice all the sensations of breathing in at that point, and all the sensations of breathing out at that point.

For example, as you focus on the tip of your nose, notice the coolness of the air as you breathe it in, and the warmth of the air as you breathe out.

Or as you focus on your stomach, notice it move outward as you breathe in, and notice it move back in as you breathe out.

Why should we practice mindfulness?

One reason is that it helps calm your mind when you face a stressful situation.

For example, when you take a difficult test, or when you find yourself in a frightening or upsetting situation, mindfulness makes you remain calm, so you can think clearly.

Most importantly, mindfulness makes you quickly notice any impure thoughts, like anger, impatience, craving, or jealousy, so you can stop them before you say or do something you later regret.

When you notice you are having negative thoughts, then you can remember they aren't helping you, they're hurting you.

And then just be mindful of the way you feel when you are having negative thoughts.

Notice the feelings in your body – for example, notice if you feel any discomfort, notice your posture, notice your breathing.

Ask yourself, “how does it feel in my body to have anger?”  
That makes the negative thoughts weaker and they start to disappear.  
Garchen Rinpoche tells us that this is the root of all practice! It’s extremely important!

When you’re aware of what is in your mind, moment by moment,  
then you can control your mind and make it very focused on whatever you want to focus on.  
Because you notice quickly when you’re getting distracted.  
And then you can study better, and learn anything better.  
And, you can meditate deeply, which leads to a clear mind and wisdom.  
Also, because you are more aware of what’s going on around you, you can avoid danger.

Mindfulness is one of the most useful and practical things we can learn!

**PRACTICE THIS WEEK:** Choose one very simple, routine activity that you do alone for a few moments every day. For example: brushing your teeth, putting on your pajamas, drinking juice or water, or getting into bed at night. Be mindful as you do that activity very slowly, noticing every little movement you make, every feeling or sensation on your hands, feet or body as you move, and every sound, taste, or smell. Try to practice mindfulness every day while you do that activity.

**ACTIVITY:**

**Mindful walking:** Walk very very slowly, looking at the floor in front of you, and just focus on every detail of what you feel in your feet and legs, arms and hands, of each step as you walk. Feel the foot rising from the floor, the leg extending out, the heel touching the floor, the rest of the foot and toes touching the floor, the weight of the body on the foot, the shifting of the body forward, the other foot rising from the floor, and so on.

**Mindful walking outside:** Use the same technique, but notice how the ground underneath the feet (and shoes) feels. For example, the softness or crunchiness of grass, the swish of grass against the toes, the shifting movement of gravel, the hardness of concrete. Also, feel the sun or wind against the skin, and breeze in the hair, the coolness of shade. You can also be mindful of sounds.