
Study Group - “Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*”
A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga
Translated by Samdup Tsering



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Geshe Doga said that he was happy to begin another year of study group. He was also happy because we had not met together as friends for two months.

Since this Study Group was started, the Centre and its Members have derived great benefit from the program. Many of the senior students have contributed to its success. For example this year while there were no teachings from Geshe-la, a few students taught and led meditations.

Harmony: The Basis Of Success In The Study Group

From past experience, the main element which makes this study program successful and enjoyable is the maintenance of harmony in the group.

We learn not only the importance of establishing good relationships with others, but also how to establish those relationships. We learn this through the teachings and by cultivation of faith. Through this, Geshe-la said, you learn to meditate with others or meditate alone.

The most important benefit of the teachings, is in seeing the value of showing love and respect to other beings. For this reason Geshe Doga says he gives teachings to the best of his knowledge. Although he appears to sit on a higher seat, this is not necessarily because of his higher realisations, but because of respect for the teachings which he is providing for others.

By studying and meditating with others we learn how to open our mind and heart to other beings. This is important as we live in a society where we are all dependent upon each other, whether bound by faith in dharma or not. To survive in happiness, we must depend upon others and have good relationships with them.

Comparing Internal And External Factors Which Cause Happiness And Problems

Obviously in our day-to-day life happiness depends upon two factors - external and internal.

External factors are those apparent to our sense faculties - those beautiful things that we see with our eyes and so on. Externally there are many things that are seemingly a source of happiness. Of course if we become lazy and make no effort, we cannot attain them. But does having those external things definitely secure peace and happiness in the mind? The answer is no. Happiness

depends upon *internal factors*. This internal factor is our way of thinking. So it is necessary that just as we turn our minds to external things, we should also turn inward to see what is in us which is beneficial or very destructive to our life. We can study a lot of dharma but the most practical thing is to observe our own thoughts and actions, knowing that we continuously produce different types of thought.

Take the thoughts produced when one is in a bad mood with friends or when one is very unhappy, and compare them with the thoughts we have when we are very happy or peaceful. In this way we can see within ourselves that there are positive and negative states of mind, just as in daily life there are positive and negative states [of conduct]. In this way we develop an understanding of cause and effect in our daily experiences.

Whenever there is some good experience, then the main cause is within oneself. If one believes in that, then one believes in the cause of happiness, and that is belief in dharma in the true sense.

From this perspective, we are always our own witnesses of the occurrences in our lives. So there is more understanding of the cause and effect of our own happiness and suffering. In this way we can also understand how it is the same for other people. We become more conscious of how we talk to others and the attitude that we adopt towards them. That is what is learnt in this Study Group.

Normally people are very absent minded in their conversations with other people, and so they cause a lot of unhappiness in the minds of others. Your own experience of calmness and happiness can very quickly switch to unhappiness, simply by hearing some slander or idle gossip from another. This can completely destroy your peace of mind. Through understanding your own state of mind, you develop the practice of patience towards other beings. It is possible to create a very stable way of thinking that is not easily influenced by external factors. Rather, inwardly you maintain your own way of thinking. Through this one can feel an inner peace, relaxation and calmness regardless of where one lives or what one does.

Benefit Of Dharma Practice

Next week we shall return to the current Study Group topic. Tonight we are focussing on the importance of having harmony at home, with friends and within the Study Group. Spiritual knowledge does not necessarily depend upon how much you study or how many teachings you receive. Rather it depends on the way you share your knowledge and practice with your friends. Even if it is a very small group, if there is a good atmosphere, if everyone is relaxed and prepared to share their knowledge, then automatically you learn and make progress in the study of dharma.

The point of learning dharma is to transform our way of thinking into positive states of mind, and to help others to cultivate a similar state of mind.

No matter what situation we meet, we have to remember to view it from the perspective of dharma knowledge. It is common to think that there is no control over the mind, and as a result people are very absent minded about their thoughts and deeds.

Suppose that at present, you enjoy a very harmonious relationship with a special friend. Then imagine somebody tells you how, in the past, your friend was involved in a relationship with some other person . By just being told about that past event, you become very cross or upset with yourself and with your friend. This shows how the mind is overpowered by delusion. If it were not, then there would be no reason to become very disturbed or upset. After all, right now, you have a good relationship with your friend. As far as the past goes, you too, might have had relationships with others or done many wrongs.

If you sit and think carefully, then even though what you have heard causes some disturbance in the mind, you can conclude "Why should I worry about what my friend has done in the past?" You become completely calm. There is nothing to worry about. We cannot completely prevent changes which might happen, but we can still find the best way to handle them.

Sometimes some suffering must be tolerated, since in the long run there is more advantage In daily life how often do we consider tolerating some loss now, because there is some long term benefit? It is best to learn how to be self-guided.

We can further develop our habits of thought by seeing how our own mind brings a lot of unnecessary problems through worrying about something that has not yet happened. We must give some thought to our own future, but worrying about our future all the time will not bring peace and happiness in the present. If the main cause of worry is not here and now but somewhere in the future, then it is easily prevented. It is only a matter of getting rid of that thought, like turning on a light in a dark room. All it takes is to remove that thought. This is the very apparent benefit of dharma - developing the wisdom of one's own mind.

Through using one's own mind as an example, we can see how it is so easy to lose control and become upset. How much more do we appreciate it, when out of compassion someone tries to help us without any selfish motivation.

In the same way we should try to do the same for others - to understand that if someone is showing negative thoughts or is angry, then that person has some unhappiness in their mind. You can understand their dissatisfaction because you feel the same, whenever you lack a sense of happiness or satisfaction in your own mind.

Especially if the other person is a close friend, you should take the time to ask what is worrying them and to think how to be of help. Saying "What is wrong with you?" with an angry face or "Because of that behaviour I cannot put up with you!" is like putting wood on a fire. The best, the most effective way, to help others is to show sincere love. Then out of love you truly extend your help to others.

We shall say the prayers now, then shake hands with the person beside us showing a full gesture of delight, saying "Nice to meet you!" While doing this, your mind should be completely open to that friend so you will not feel any embarrassment.

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.

The original typescript is prepared from Alan Molloy's original transcript, which has been checked against Damien Busby's notes. Adair Bunnnett then checks the typescript against a tape recording, and edits the text, which is finally checked by Alan Molloy.

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