Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand" A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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Aims Of The Study Group

Welcome to the first study group teaching for this year. Geshe-la is delighted that so many new study group students are here tonight.

The aim of joining the study group is to study the teachings for yourself, and then put them into practice so that others can also benefit as a result.

These were the original aims of the study group, and with continuous progress, most of them have been fulfilled. For example, this study group has produced a number of students who both practise Dharma and are qualified to teach others.

In the early days we had difficulty in finding enough qualified students to lead meditations or teach. There were too many Monday nights and not enough teachers. Now there are not enough Monday nights for all the teachers we have! This is a direct outcome of the study group. Not only do we provide meditation facilities here in the centre but we also provide them outside the centre.

However real accomplishment is making progress in one's own spiritual practice. Just having studied Dharma or gained some knowledge is not sufficient to help oneself let alone to help others. If what is learnt is not put into practice, the result is not feeling positive about that learning because there is no apparent personal benefit. Even if one teaches, what is taught has no personal meaning, so one can not feel positive about what one is teaching. Later there may even be regret about having spent time studying Dharma. If Dharma is practised that cannot happen, and so there is some personal benefit.

So Dharma gives a better way of thinking and looking at things. If we share this with close friends, there is no better way to help them see the truth.

If we think and act as a result of a mind which is obsessed with desires and hatred, or afflicted with ignorance we are no different from animals. Whereas Dharma gives us a way of thinking which is opposite to the normal way of thinking that is corrupted by afflictions.

Teaching

As a rule, only those who are past or present members of

the study group are asked to lead Monday night introductory meditations. This rule was made both to inspire and to provide experience. The study group students who have taken Monday night meditations and visited other centres have been very successful, and earned much praise.

Ultimately, one has to think of helping others, regardless of whatever one has achieved in life, be it inner knowledge or outer wealth. If we keep all our knowledge and skills to ourselves, it only becomes an object for generating pride, which is of no benefit at all. Whereas if after obtaining wealth and knowledge we seek to help others, starting with our family and friends, then whatever is achieved makes you feel more positive and able to rejoice.

Lama Tsong Khapa said:

If the mind is positive, good or wholesome, then all that follows will be good or wholesome.

If we generate the positive thought to help others, then naturally all the actions we undertake as a result will also be very beneficial.

Harmony

The most important condition for the success of this group is to have a very friendly harmonious atmosphere. Think, for example, of a school where there is a good relationship between students and teacher, where both students and the teacher are very friendly, relaxed and open with one other. Such a harmonious atmosphere makes the class not only more enjoyable to the students and the teacher, but also makes a great difference to the quality of the students' education. Similarly if we create such an atmosphere not only between students and teacher, but also between the students themselves, then the hour we spend together is very enjoyable and fruitful. You will come to these nights happy to see your friends and talk with them. Then because this loving and friendly atmosphere has been created, all will feel free to discuss anything with the others. We shall find each other very helpful, and be able to share our knowledge and experience. So even if it is only one hour, it is a very useful and beneficial hour.

In study group the emphasis is on achieving spiritual qualities, so one learns of value of friendship, love, compassion, tolerance and patience. We try to practise and develop these together as a group, so when we walk out of this hall what we learnt here has some influence in dealing with outside problems. Therefore, there is benefit while sitting here and studying with others but then also afterwards there is a benefit.

Tonight we have not started the actual teachings. According to the study group constitution, the first four nights are teaching, then follows a discussion night and the written test. Tonight's session is not counted as part of this month's teaching.

We stop here and will chant Twenty-one Taras' prayer and dedication. Then everyone should have a friendly hand shake with everyone else, to introduce each other and say "Very happy to meet you".

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 Bunnett then checks the typescript against a tape recording, and edits the text, which is finally checked by Alan Molloy.

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