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# Study Group - “Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*”

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering



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12 December 1995

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Try to generate the best motivation that you can.

## **Influencing the Effectiveness of our Practice**

One of the main elements which makes a great difference to the quality of our practice is the motivation with which we engage in it. It is more important to perform a practice properly than to just consider the length of time for which we perform that practice. When we know how to perform our practice in the right way we know that our future - be it good or bad - is all in our own hands. As our motivation is a very important part of any practice we need spiritual inspiration in order to always keep it alive in ourselves.

To generate such spiritual inspiration we must realise that the life we presently enjoy is very fortunate, since we are born as human beings having all the suitable conditions to practise the dharma. This human life allows us to freely follow spiritual practice. Both mind and body are sound, and endowed with the potential to practise dharma. Having obtained a human rebirth with healthy mind and body, but no contact with spiritual teachings is a disadvantage. However we have met spiritual dharma, and are born in a place and time where it flourishes. But even with all these, it would be a disadvantage if we had not found a perfect, qualified spiritual guide. We are very fortunate in having met such a spiritual guide. Therefore our life is very fortunate in having all these favourable internal and external conditions. With such a favourable situation you must generate the motivation to seize the benefits it provides.

Therefore, when you practise dharma focus more on the quality of the practice, since the quality of the practice acts as a cause to accumulate the causes to achieve liberation. If, for even two minutes every day we create the cause for liberation, then over a year we accumulate so many causes! Thus performing our practice properly will be of great benefit in the long run.

## **Our Best Refuge or Protection**

When facing difficulties or sadness our own dharma practice can protect, or give us refuge. Therefore it becomes very important for us to perform our practice as well as possible, and also to consider the way dharma practice saves us from the suffering of life's problems. The practice of dharma means calming one's own mind. When we have achieved some control over our own

mind; when we are able to discipline and change our mind by ourselves; then if we apply the practice of dharma in a time of misery, it will be very soothing, and very effective in solving problems.

Therefore, as part of our practice we have to focus on our mind or inner continuum. By doing this we can see its faults by ourself. Through this we can see that all the problems we face, and those events which take place in our life which introduce some change, are all like the reflections of change in our own mind.

Normally the causes of all the changes which take place in ourselves are something which we identify with external objects or conditions in life. For example, we become angry when we see someone who we do not like or who we hate. The reason why we hate that person is because we see some outward fault in that person. Likewise when an outer object is seen as very attractive, the quality of beauty seen in our mind is something 'out there', and thus we generate desire or attachment for that object.

In fact it is due to our perception of things that we generate these various types of emotions. Anger, desire, and so on, are all due to something within our own mind. For example if the force of anger is very strong and deep within us, then it is very easy to become angry at any object at any time. Similarly the force of desire in us may be very strong, so that we become attached to things very quickly.

Therefore in terms of practising dharma and making progress in that practice, we must investigate our mindstream. Then within ourselves we must check whether we have more positive or more negative energy. If we have more negative energy it shows **that** this energy is very strong, and it abides in us very naturally because we have familiarised ourselves with its force in this life, or in past lives.

If for example the force or energy within us is dominated by the force of the three poisonous minds, try to see how our life and actions are dominated by those three poisonous minds. Then by the force of these three poisonous minds our daily actions become more harmful both to ourselves and to others. For example, through the influence of anger our mind changes even towards those close to us, causing us to show a very unfriendly

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face and speak with harsh words. Whereas if the force within us is dominated by love and compassion, then our actions will be more caring towards others and so will be more beneficial to both ourselves and to others.

The practice of dharma then, means to make an effort to generate more positive states of mind. Whether it be actual love and compassion, or an intellectual love and compassion, or even artificial love and compassion, at least we cultivate some love and compassion in our mind.

Then, even if in this life the influence of negative minds is so strong because of familiarity with such negative minds over many lifetimes, we shall be able to cultivate actual love and compassion in future lives. Gaining control and cultivating positive states of mind will benefit both ourselves and others. It will reduce negative minds, and increase positive states of mind, and this progress will have direct influence on our deeds and will benefit others. For example, in general children can pick up a lot of habits from their parents. If the parents are very kind, friendly and hospitable to others, then the children are inspired to do the same. It also benefits others either directly or indirectly in terms of being able to show tolerance by acknowledging our own faults if we cause problems to others (especially our close friends). There is no need to feel ashamed about saying sorry. As we develop more self-awareness, this will naturally increase our practice of patience and so on.

### **Why is There a Need to Calm the Mind?**

Before realising that the practice of dharma or meditation is to calm the mind, one has to know why there is this need to calm the mind. It is because all our problems derive from the mind. All our dissatisfaction or unhappiness is like a form of mental illness, which results from various negative states of mind.

If we examine within ourselves very thoroughly we can clearly see that anger, for example, is a form of mental illness, or can be a cause of mental illness which brings pain to us. How does this pain arise? It is simple. Out of anger we can upset even a very close friend. As a result of that our relationship changes. The resulting damage will make us feel very unhappy. Every thought of that friend, or that relationship, is very painful. And this pain is the result of our own anger.

Likewise desire or attachment can cause pain or bring mental illness. When you generate attachment you become very attracted to that person, (even if they have been your enemy) and out of attachment, you will place all your trust and hope in them. But later on when that person does not fulfil your hopes you will feel very disappointed. That feeling of disappointment is like an illness resulting from attachment.

Instead of applying dharma or meditation to remedy this illness some people seek help in external things such as alcohol, cigarettes or drugs. As a result they lose not only their mental health, but their physical health as well.

Their hygiene deteriorates, and they attract diseases. Mentally they may lose their memory, clear thinking and so forth.

### **What is the Use of Spiritual Practice or Meditation?**

Spiritual practice or meditation enables us to recover from, or prevent that mental illness. Spiritual practice removes negative states of mind. We receive benefits, and where possible we should show this path of meditation or dharma to others; for example to your friends who are in need. If they are caught up in problems, and if you think the solution lies in the practice of dharma, or meditation, then you **should help** them.

Thinking back over this year we should try to feel positive about attending the Tuesday night study program. Try to feel that all the effort - listening to teachings, studying putting into practice and discussing topics with others - you made in attending Study Group over the year is the accumulation of causes to attain the state of everlasting joy and happiness, or liberation. So, like a beggar finding millions of dollars, take delight in finding this opportunity and try to rejoice **in our effort** as part of this Study Group.

To conclude these Study Group teachings we shall offer the Long Mandala, then 21 Taras, then the final Lam Rim dedication prayer, and then Lama Tsong Khapa prayer three times.

Geshe-la would personally like to thank everyone, since this Study Group has been most beneficial for the centre and for himself. Many of you have made a great contribution to the centre by attending the Study Group. There are some who, having learnt from the Study Group, have continued their own practice, and taught the teachings to others. Geshe Doga says that he has great admiration for them. Others took Study Group teachings in the past and no longer attend them, but continue the practice of dharma teachings in their own life and help others. Geshe Doga would like to thank them too. In this way it has been a fruitful year for all of us here.

Geshe Doga would like to say that his motivation for supporting the centre is all to benefit all beings, not only now, but in the future as well. Therefore you should feel confident that the support that you give the centre will not only benefit people now, but will also be of benefit in the future.

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

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