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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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5 March 1996

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Tonight we commence the Study Group teachings for this year. Geshe Doga is delighted to see you and would like to welcome everyone to these teachings.

Geshe Doga says he will not begin the actual teaching tonight. Rather he will give an introduction to meditation. Apart from this it is very important that everyone who joins the group is aware of the commitments, the constitution and what Study Group involves. Tonight we shall use the time as relaxation for all of us.

There is one truth which we must understand and accept in our life, and that is the truth of interdependence. No matter what we try to do in life we have to rely upon various other conditions. We cannot do things solely by ourselves. For example if we undertake a course of study, there are many factors which we need to meet. There are factors and conditions from our own side and factors and conditions from the side of the outside world/outside conditions. Without depending upon others we cannot get anywhere, and we cannot even live our life. This is an important fact, and we should try to realise how everything is interdependent.

## The True Cause of Happiness

Whether there is happiness or suffering in our life depends upon the respective causes and conditions. We all know that when the conditions in our life are favourable for us, then naturally there is more joy and happiness.

To some extent we can directly perceive the causes of both our happiness and suffering. We all wish for more happiness of course, so what is the nature of the happiness which we seek in life? It consists of our own good physical health, and the happiness of our mind.

Therefore the conditions for happiness can be explained in terms of external and internal factors and the creation of those conditions depends upon each one of us. There are certain conditions that each one of us has to create by ourselves, and there are other factors or suitable conditions which we must find by observing the outside world, e.g. by observing other people. By observing how other people do things we can create the same conditions for ourselves, and thus take care of the external

conditions essential for the health of our mind and body. Our body is so important to sustain happiness in daily life, because if we physically get sick and experience pain this has a direct effect upon us. There are many factors which generate, bring or enhance good health in our body.

But the happiness we seek does not just depend upon outside factors. There is also inner happiness which is essential for us. It is this inner satisfaction which brings true joy and satisfaction to the mind.

The mind is a very important part of our reality so it is essential to secure happiness in our mind. It's link with ourself is something very intimate and unbreakable. It is a deeper, more important link than the relationship of the physical body to ourself.

The mind is always with us. What the mind experiences is a personal experience, and those experiences of our mind also depend upon various conditions. There are conditions which enhance the peace and happiness in our mind, and which are very healthy for our mind.

Generally speaking in our daily search for peace and happiness in life our focus is mainly on outer, **external** conditions and factors. This is not to say that they are unimportant, but we have to realise at the same time that we are responsible for creating the right conditions within ourselves. Then, having created those conditions within, we must then know how to maintain them - just as we would cherish and try to safeguard good external conditions.

In order to maintain physical health we must apply some discipline about what we eat and drink, otherwise we can damage our physical health. Our body is like a basis or home for our mind and self, and if our physical health is damaged it can also affect our mind and ourself. On the other hand if we enjoy good physical health it is an advantage to ourself, and to our mind. Then we have more capacity to direct our energy to developing our mind. It is through developing our mind that we can decrease or minimise the negative qualities in our mind, and increase the positive ones, and so give access to the limitless source of peace and happiness within ourselves.

## Suffering and Joy as Experiences of the Mind

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On most occasions experiencing some happiness or misery is the immediate result of our own actions. Although changing our ways of performing the actions of body, speech and mind takes commitment, understanding and effort from our own side, experiencing the results is very overwhelming. This is because we are the one who gains the most benefit from any feeling e.g. joy, which we experience in life. Unlike material things, joy and happiness cannot be shared, nor can a friend relieve or even share our feelings of misery.

The spiritual teachings always stress that the practice of spiritual teachings or dharma must be performed individually through the actions of body, speech and mind. If, in our daily conduct of body, speech and mind, we try our best to stop harmful negative actions, and adopt positive ones as much as we are able, we will find more joy and happiness in our life, and less cause of suffering.

By talking of both happiness and suffering in terms of one's own mind, then there is not much help to be sought from the outside, even if there is evidence that some drugs can relieve mental problems and suffering in the mind. In fact they don't work but it is hard to be convinced of what it is that really helps the mind unless we undergo that experience for ourselves. If we undergo some great mental disturbance and misery in the mind, is there any drug which can solve our problem? What is the best help?

In fact the only effective means to solve conflict and confusion in the mind is to first know our own mind well. What are the causes for this problem and confusion? Is the cause outside one or is it something within?

Then we find, as discussed earlier, the causes of our mental suffering and happiness are all within our mind. They are something which we create within ourselves in our mind. Therefore -to remove such problems which are all related to our mind is to transform our mind, and that is easy.

When we talk about how it is important for everyone to enjoy good health of body and mind, most of us know how to maintain good bodily health. What we cannot avoid is confronting some conflict and confusion in our mind, while enjoying good health and living conditions. If it builds up it can become a deep source of worry and suffering.

In dealing with this problem we have to be very careful. We must know the precise cause of the problem. It is not related to our body so it is useless trying to relieve it by an external means like feeding the body more drugs, or becoming so worried and restless that we do something

physically to damage our health. Rather we must see the cause which brings happiness and suffering to our mind, and the cause of happiness and suffering to our body as two different things.

What is most important to bring peace and calm to our mind is relaxation or calming our thoughts. If our mind is too concerned about the problems it only makes the problems worse, instead of solving them. So we need a very relaxed and very gentle approach when confronting any difficult problem within the mind. With such an easy approach the problem becomes less over time.

In this way, what is happiness to us is the happiness of our mind and body. This is the main goal of our life. If that is our goal then it is our responsibility to be very appreciative if we enjoy very good health; to know its advantages and enjoy it. One should think "How lucky I am to have such good health, and some balance and understanding of the mind!" It is of great benefit to you to gain some control over your mind through this understanding.

So continually remind yourself of the value of having good health and a good mind. They are priceless treasures. Every single day try to protect them, and that protection involves the discipline of one's own actions of body, speech and mind, which is the practise of Dharma.

The reason why we focused upon interdependence of things, is because our success in the Study Group depends not only on our individual efforts, but also on everyone's combined efforts. Everyone will benefit if, as a part of this group we are all very friendly and helpful to each other.

In the Study Group there are differences in background, education, and so on, but the reason why we are in this group is to learn and to develop knowledge and develop friendship. It is like a family situation. Parents in a family can influence their children. If parents are very bad tempered this will influence their children. Not only do we want our own life to be very happy and meaningful, but we also want to be a good example to other fellow beings.

Being such a good example is easy! Do the admirable things that you see in others, just as you admire those who are polite, considerate, kind hearted and generous of their time to others - those who always try to prevent harm to other beings. As part of this human world, the way to help each other is to prevent harm to others and is to assist other beings. By joining this Study Group there is opportunity to extend your knowledge and develop friendship. It becomes like mixing milk with water.

It is important whenever you come to a session here to think "This is a most peaceful place, and these people around me are spiritual friends, so there is no better place to develop spiritual practice." Just as you are physically present, make sure that you are mentally here, and engage in Study Group sessions remembering that we do so not to compete with each other, but to learn and share our knowledge from the heart.

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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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