

# The Value of Study

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To have taken on the interest of undertaking a study of Buddhist philosophy, to allocate time in your life to undertake this special study, this is a very fortunate thing to have decided from your own side.

To study Buddhism, you don't have to become a Buddhist. What is unique about Buddhism is that it isn't only about having blind faith or trust or belief. The many rituals of Buddhism that you may have been exposed to, or the many recitations or offerings, all these kinds of formal things that you see in an expression of faith, this is just one branch of Buddhism. When we take the heart essence of the teachings of the Buddha, then the goal is to subdue or pacify one's own disturbed, un-centered, negative mind: that is the heart essence.

The Buddha himself at one time in his life was an ordinary person like us, so how did he come to the state of being known as someone who is completely free of all mistakes, fully-completed in all positive qualities and knowledge? That state didn't happen without causes, nor did that state come about from discordant causes; it all came from causes which accord with their method.

How we may come to abandon our failings and mistakes, the antidotes to our failings and mistakes, all of the



skillful means that the Buddha taught were completely his own experience, showing us his own experience on the path. So the Buddha, who is extremely skillful and highly compassionate, what is his first and foremost essential advice? It is how we can eradicate our three most poisonous minds [*ignorance, attachment, and anger*] and all the physical, verbal, and

mental attributes which arise from our three most poisonous minds.

The second stage is the Buddha's teachings set in full for us, the methods as to how we may extinguish all of our failings and shortcomings, primarily all directed toward our ignorance, the ignorance which grasps at a truly-existent self – the method as explained within the topic of wisdom-realizing emptiness.

The Buddha trained in a path of spiritual development that was completely rooted in great compassion. Not being satisfied with his own liberation from cyclic existence, but feeling that others' suffering is unbearable, having a sense of cherishing others that is far greater than any concern for the self, with that kind of extraordinary thought of bodhichitta he trained in the path; whereby, one gets rid of one's most subtle failings, the imprints of our delusions, and the obstacles to omniscience.



In the study of Buddhism that we do, just to have an academic, intellectual understanding of what Buddhism is about, that alone is not going to be of any benefit to you. Instead of leaving it in the realm of intellectual understanding or academic study, one should ascertain these points of study for oneself. After having the intellectual understanding, then when one ascertains it in a way where one has complete faith and trust and sees the necessity and benefit of it in terms of future result, then when one practices it, it has value and one will receive benefit from it.

In terms of the benefit, even in terms of this lifetime, there is much difference if one goes about it in this way. There is a peace or relaxation in one's way of thinking or one's mind set. When problems occur or hardships happen, they don't have an overwhelming effect when one has the background of understanding and practicing Dharma. One is able to take the resources of one's Dharma study, particularly with regards to karma – cause and effect of one's actions – toward the understanding that whatever one experiences in one's life it is because one has created the cause for it.

Whatever suffering or problems that one has in this lifetime, when one sees that these are the results of previous lifetime's non-virtuous actions, when one understands this, it inspires us to abandon non-virtuous actions in terms of this lifetime. When one understands that whatever one seeks or wishes for, it comes from causes that are positive, that are virtuous, then one is inspired toward undertaking virtue.

When one reflects along these points, it is very helpful in cutting out our sense of pride or self-importance; it is very helpful in inspiring us toward thoughts and actions of compassion, kindness, renunciation, etc. When one thinks of suffering in terms of one's own suffering, one is able to generate a thought of renunciation, a thought of definite emergence of this type of existence, and when one thinks of suffering in terms of others, then there is a sense of great compassion toward others.

Therefore, in the first stage of our path and practice which accords with the path and practice of the small scope, where the emphasis is primarily to do with abandoning non-virtuous actions (specifically targeting the ten non-virtuous actions of our body, speech, and mind), this is something completely within the capacity of our practice and something that as Buddhists one should aspire to accomplish in our thoughts and actions. From that stage, you progress to the next phase of getting rid of your shortcomings at the

mental level, abandoning the very afflictions and delusions that give rise to our non-virtuous thoughts and actions.

In Buddhism, one will be exposed to a variety of practices that one can cultivate in one's life, but one shouldn't be over-expectant and look for immediate results in one's practice. That is not a very good way of thinking. Our minds have been habituated to ignorance for countless beginningless lifetimes. We are so habituated to our thoughts of aggression and obsession that it's not a very easy thing from which to part. Even when we look at the spiritual path of the historic Buddha, it was over the course of many lifetimes of accumulation of merit and purification that brought forth that kind of result.

However, from the historic time of the Buddha up to now has been a stream of highly-learned masters who have studied the teachings of the Buddha, practiced them, seen the value of them, and achieved the results of them; these are the teachings that have withstood the test of time.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha himself has emphasized in regard to his teachings that you have to examine them through logic and reasoning. Through examination with reasoning if you find it to be valid, then you should accept it and practice it; if it does not stand up to one's examination and logic and reasoning, then one need not practice it.

After having studied Buddhist philosophy, one of the results is to have faith in the Dharma. The faith and belief that is generated because of your understanding, because of having well-examined, because of having applied your analysis, that kind of faith is irreversible.

Even if one does not have faith that has arisen out of analysis, but one has a positive kind of doubt, a doubt that is more inclined toward what is correct, that kind of faith also has benefit.

Persevere continuously in what you do. Take to heart the advice of the first Dalai Lama, Gendun Drup: "May I never be separated from the attitude of bodhichitta in all of my lifetimes; may I be able to persevere in the lifestyle of a bodhisattva, and may my perseverance be like an unbroken flow of a stream."

Study well, then one can come to an appreciation of the teachings of the Buddha. When one appreciates them, one is able to put them into practice, and when one puts them into practice, one is able to taste the delicacy of the Dharma. ☸

*Translated by Ven. Thubten (Tsenla) Dekyong and lightly edited by Mandala staff.*