

## **How to study**

*(taken from "Chidön", 2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*

*"Study is like a lamp which illuminates and clears away the darkness."*

Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche

### **Examining Your Motivation to Study**

The point of doing anything in this life is to be truly in touch with oneself, and to move closer to the truth. However, if we are not quite in touch with ourselves our motivation could distort what we do.

I want to encourage you very much to be honest with yourself and be clear about your motivations. If you don't do that, then you can be in such an incredible place as Lerab Ling—and be receiving teachings and be practicing—but all in all it would just be a sort of 'summer camp'. Of course, a summer camp might have some benefit. It might be relaxing or fun, but what we have to work on is our individual path of liberation from the suffering of samsara.

To be honest and to be in touch with oneself is very difficult. This is because there are many fears to overcome. At least we have to have the courage to face them. Holding up an image of oneself or projecting that out onto the world may serve to fool others, but it will not serve you—ultimately. Eventually, one has to begin to see through one's own veil of ignorance and denial.

### **'Busting' the Ego**

The whole mind training in the Buddhist tradition is to bust the ego! If you could take delight in busting the ego, then it can work! But if one dreads to do that, then no matter how much one is diligent, devoted and dedicated, how much one follows the routines of studying and practicing, you will not face reality. I've seen students go through this. This is something that only you can work with.

A lot of spiritual materialism and also a certain danger comes from that. One can be caught in all sorts of dream-like hopes and fears, dreams of power and fame. It is hard to see through it when you are caught up in it. The bubble is hard to pop when you are in it. But the bubble is not permanent and when it gets popped, maybe because of some intense suffering, then one realizes "Yes, I've been caught in this for all these years!"

So try not to identify so much with your ignorance. Take a delight when you can actually see the long-term habitual patterns of ego and the ignorance that it has been based on. If we identify with what we have to shed off, then it is going to become very difficult. Rather we can realize that we have a lot of potential— potential to develop an incredible wisdom to see through things and a potential to know. This comes not only through intellectual contemplation but also through experience. This is why we are here. This is what makes us practitioners of the Buddhist path.

## **Taking Delight in Overcoming Ignorance**

We have to accept that we have lots of faults. Nobody is perfect from the beginning, not even the Buddha himself. Ego is there, and nobody is an exception in having ego problems. But how much you identify with it as who you really are, or how much you recognize it as the ignorance aspect of your mind, that is up to you!

Therefore take a delight in working with that ignorance. Whenever it comes more to light, instead of having a negative reaction, try having a positive one. Like a sigh of relief, "Ah! Now I see my own ego quite clearly!" Then there will be a real sense of working with ego and overcoming ignorance. Then the path will be joyful.

## **Working with Resistance**

I think in this area of study we all have a certain resistance. We, as human beings, all have a strong ego. Naturally when we find that we don't understand everything at first, ego is threatened in some ways. So there is a danger of ego closing off one's mind. Either one feels discouraged and hopeless, or with a different twist, by feeling one's pride is being hurt. We can feel, "I might not be able to understand the teachings." Know that it is ego which feels threatened. It is that very feeling of ego being threatened which has brought us many obstacles and difficulties in our lives. It is very helpful to watch that and work with it. Of course, as you study, it is going to be difficult to understand everything. The scope of the Dharma is vast and the meaning of Dharma is very deep, so you can simply acknowledge as you begin that it's not going to be easy.

Yet by coming back to a topic the second or third time, one will understand it in a much deeper way. Just as if you catch a single raindrop from the roof in a huge pot, the pot won't fill up; however, many drops will eventually fill up the whole pot. So if you gather meaning after meaning, your mind becomes full of knowledge and understanding of the Dharma.

With an open and fresh mind you can give room to understand it the next time around or the time after that. As your knowledge increases, your understanding increases. This will serve as a foundation for you to understand what you have not understood. So it becomes just a matter of time, rather than feeling completely doomed. Be patient and create the foundation first.

## **Training in Joy**

We all need to work with resistance that comes up from our laziness. Often we don't recognize excuses as excuses, but instead see them as valid points of resistance. If we simply accept such attitudes within ourselves without discernment, then one will never get over the laziness. It will become more and more difficult to expose that laziness to our own wisdom mind. But on the other hand, when it becomes a deep joy and fun to study and practice, then the excuses of our lazy tendencies will be much more exposed and won't have that much weight. As the joy grows, one feels much more ready to let go of

laziness and its excuses.

To train yourself in the joy of study, you need to know what study does and how important it is. Working with whatever you do not enjoy—with what triggers your resistance, can itself increase joy. For instance, sometimes when we are practicing shamatha, you feel like you really want to get up and go; you feel very discontent and unhappy on the cushion. If you just think about what you are going to do if you get up and go, you realize it is all frivolous; not that significant. Naturally your mind then becomes more restful and peaceful and has some joy about staying where you are.

If you're just fighting directly with the resistance, you are only giving more power to the resistance by fighting it. Then, not only do you not have any joy, neither do you overcome the resistance! When you contemplate on the importance of practice, on what the practice means to you and what benefit it has brought you, then naturally you will find joy. It is the same with your study as well. These are ways of training in joy.

### **First Applying the Teachings to Oneself**

Sometimes people come to study the teachings with only the idea in mind of wanting to benefit others. This may seem fine, but actually it is very important to first think about how to take the teachings to benefit yourself. Sometimes it can happen that people who are in a position to help or teach others get into the so-called 'mara' of the eight worldly concerns.

The eight worldly concerns are:

- the hope for gain and fear of loss
- hope for pleasure and fear of pain
- hope for praise and fear of criticism
- hope for fame and fear of blame.

When we are caught in the mara of the eight worldly concerns, we will never be able to benefit anyone. It is important to be aware of them.

I have seen people who, as soon as they learn something, think about how to communicate that to others. They think about how to make an impression on others, before taking it into their own being. Even if one might manage to make an impression on others, there's not going to be much blessing if one has not seriously practiced it. It is very important to apply the teachings to oneself, especially the teachings like those on emptiness. They are intended to help oneself to be free from the two kinds of ego rather than to add to the ego of the self and make it grow even more.

Often we don't know what our motivations and our attitudes actually are. We get caught-up in excitement and all sorts of temptations and then tend to just follow along rather blindly wherever these may lead us. It takes a subtle mind to examine where we are. If we find our mind is not in a good place, it is important to change it, or correct oneself in order to not harm oneself or others by one's own wrong motivations or attitudes. As Dakpo

Rinpoche (Gampopa) said, if one does not practice the Dharma properly, Dharma itself can become problematic. This is just a warning.

### **Clearing Ignorance with the Three Wisdom Tools**

We clear away ignorance through the cultivation of wisdom with the three wisdom tools or the three prajñas: the wisdom of hearing, the wisdom of contemplation, and the wisdom of meditation. Whether regarding the phenomenal world or one's own perceptions and mind, over time we will arrive at seeing the nature of things accurately—as it is. Then one's true nature becomes much stronger. If one studies, contemplates and meditates, one can see the change day by day, week by week, or month by month.

What is the prajña of hearing? As you hear me, there is an imprint brought made into your mind. It is made differently depending on whether you are open or not; the imprint is made much stronger in people with an open mind.

A general sense of the meaning is cultivated while hearing. But when you come back to what you have heard and then contemplate, it is going to become more refined. Although shunyata cannot be an image, still the words will create some sense of an image in one's mind. One's own contemplation on the teachings will then refine that understanding more and more and over time you will arrive at a more complete picture of what the subject of study is. This understanding is called gowa.

When one does shamatha and vipashyana meditation and follows the instructions on shunyata meditation, such as the Heart Sutra contemplation, then there comes a dawning of realization. There is a direct view of that which you had a picture or a sense. Gowa turns into realization, which is a true living experience. This is the wisdom of meditation.

So there is a path and one has to honour the process. The wisdom of hearing leads to the wisdom of contemplation and that leads to the meditative prajña. Throughout this process it is important not to disrupt one's discipline in hearing, contemplation or meditation.

### **Examining the Words of the Buddha**

We don't have to trust the three jewels or the Buddha's words with blind faith. Buddha himself has said, "Examine my words as a goldsmith examines gold; do not take my word on faith." If we examine and actually clear up our own ignorance and delusion, our perceptions could slowly match with the perceptions of the Buddhas.

However, as one begins to study, there has to be some faith to pursue the study. Self-doubt defeats the whole purpose of study and forward momentum on the path.

### **The Importance of Study**

According to the sutras, study is the most valuable treasure. A treasure which no one can take away from you. Sakya Pandita said that if you study in this life, it will be 'stored away' and in your next life, as soon as the right conditions come about, you will be the

true owner of that treasure without any difficulty.

He also said, “To meditate without having studied is like trying to climb a rock without arms.” He said that if you try to meditate on Mahamudra without having studied, only the most fortunate will be able to realize the true nature of Mahamudra. But if you are not fortunate, you might just be meditating upon *alaya*—the ignorant mind. Study is very important for one’s meditation.

It is true that there have been great Dzogchen masters who achieved great knowledge without much study. The absolute truth is the nature of all phenomena; therefore an elimination of all ignorance naturally comes from the realization of absolute truth. The wisdom of seeing the multiplicity of phenomena, which enlightened beings have, does not only come from studying and cultivating knowledge. It is through the realization of the absolute nature that wisdom naturally comes—without study, practice and contemplation. If one is very, very fortunate and has a very strong stable faith, it is possible to realize the absolute nature and have the vast understanding of the multiplicity of phenomena without much study.

Who are these people? It is common knowledge that Jikmé Lingpa is one who obtained this vast understanding of the Dharma without studying—but Jikmé Lingpa was not an ordinary sentient being. We can be sure that he had studied many lifetimes before he became who he is. We could say that Jikmé Lingpa had already stored away the treasure and received it fully in his lifetime.

## **Two Aspects of Dharma: Scriptures and Realization**

Seeing study as important, one can also understand that it is part of a flow of logic. By hearing the teachings, we learn how to contemplate; by knowing how to contemplate, we learn how to meditate. Through meditation we learn how to fully embody the meaning of the teaching so that it becomes a true experience. That’s the ultimate reason why we are in the Dharma and studying and practicing.

As Vasubandhu said in the *Abhidharmakosha*, there are two categories of the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni: the Dharma of scriptures (*lung gi chö*) and the Dharma of realization (*tokpé chö*). The scriptural aspect of the Buddhadharma is directly sustained by study which consists of teaching, hearing, composing and debating. This involves both *ché*, which means to explain the Dharma and *nyen*, which is to hear the Dharma. The realization aspect of Dharma includes contemplative meditation and actual realization, and this second aspect derives from the first.

By engaging in these activities we preserve the Dharma—not just in books—but in the experience of beings. We keep the tradition of scriptural Dharma alive and preserve the Dharma of realization. If we were to lose one of the two aspects of Dharma, it would have a tremendous effect on the other; Dharma would become incomplete. Just as it is important for us, it is also important for future generations to ensure the possibility of engaging and becoming well-versed in both the Dharma of scripture and realization.

This generation especially has a tremendous responsibility because Dharma is just now coming to the West and taking root. If this generation does not learn, preserve and then pass down the complete Dharma, future generations will not have a base or an example to follow. So this generation now holds a greater responsibility than any of the future ones.

If the study and learning of the Dharma is kept alive, with the help of meditating and realizing, we will be able to preserve the complete Dharma. This will benefit both ourselves and others, and therefore be of service to the Dharma and all beings. Through this, the Dharma can be well established and preserved in the West in our lifetime and continue into the future. Keeping this in mind might inspire you to study more and more!

### **Understanding Mind**

Having recognized the relevance of study and examination, it is very important for us to be given proper directions in our studies of the Buddha's teachings and proper guidance in examining our mind.

This is the essence of the emptiness teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni. It is the 'Middle Way' of Madhyamika: to understand different states of mind and to discern within the different states of mind what is delusion and what is the truth.

When we speak of phenomena and mind, it can seem like a really huge and abstract subject. But it is not very abstract. It is as simple as learning moment to moment how one's mind works and having some tools to examine it, to the point of seeing what the true reality is—be it relative or absolute. The more prajñā (wisdom) we have, the deeper the understanding will be.

With this, you will not only penetrate to the absolute more accurately with an intellectual grasp, but more from the experiential point of view—through your meditation practice and meditative experience. In the long run, there will be a sense of waking up from ignorance and all the confusions which have been coloring your perceptions, thoughts and emotions; this will have a tremendous impact on your way of being and your well-being.

There is no enlightenment that you can go and 'get', like a piece of fruit from a tree. As the great sages of all times have said, enlightenment is just waking up from all errors and faults.

### **Working with One's Own Tendencies**

While studying, it is important to be aware of one's own tendencies. I have noticed that many people tend to go in one of two directions. One direction can be easily taken by those who are very intellectual and caught up in pondering over all sorts of mysterious subjects and questions. These people tend to distance themselves from the experience of everyday life and the relevance of working with and relating to their mind as it is.

The other direction can be taken by those who tend to be strongly caught up in wanting everything to be based on their own experience. This tendency may lead them to believe that anything they experience is somewhat valid and authentic— not having any other

basis to enable them to question or discern whether their experience is deluded or non-deluded. Therefore, they may not have any clarity or actually pursue a valid combination of study, practice and experience.

Whatever your tendency is, I hope that you will be able to bring these together with some understanding. I need you to be open, not resistant to being more 'intellectual', or to exercising one's intellectual capacity. Try to develop as best you can your intellectual capacity to understand the teachings.

If you are someone who tends to be the intellectual type, you can work with this by turning your mind inward onto what you are studying—to contemplate what you study. As an integral part of your contemplation, always be alert to connect what you are studying to your actual life situation and experience. Especially use any experience you have from your practice as a reference for your understanding. Use it as a guideline to understand the teachings and to help clarify your discernment as to how they actually apply to your life. In this way, your study will not be too intellectual.

Whereas, if you realize you are someone who expects to immediately relate everything you study to your own experience or your practice, you might realize this is a rather biased way of studying. If you find this direct relationship, then you are interested; however if you do not see the possibility to do this right away, then you are not interested. There is a certain closed-mindedness in that thinking. It would be much more helpful to be aware of this and not hold that kind of bias towards study—study openly instead. Study whether it is something you can apply or not, with the appreciation that it will enrich your intelligence, wisdom and knowledge—and that in itself is a very wonderful result!

With an open attitude like this, your study can create a foundation which will more readily add to your experience and your practice. Even if you cannot immediately see a direct relevance to your practice, eventually, you will. As you see this happening more and more, this becomes part of your experience and you will naturally develop an appreciation for study.

We all have ordinary ignorance and we relate to things from that perspective. When you study philosophy and logic, it will have an impact on your perceptions as well as on your emotional relationship to the world. It is very helpful. Try to have a certain openness even if you are not so intellectually oriented. Try not to be resistant to exercising and developing your intellectual capacity to understand the teachings. Whether you find you have this kind of resistance or another, study will show you how to differentiate between delusion and waking up to the truth.

### **The 'Speedy Tourist'**

There is no point in going to the Louvre, taking a quick walk and then just coming out and saying, "Louvre? I've done it!" People who hang out in the general sense of things are often like that. When you ask them "What did you see in the Louvre?", they say "Mona Lisa". "What did it look like?" "Well, I think it was dark." That is just not good enough. If

something is really beautiful, it's good to take your time to look at everything about it. When you enter into a temple, it is important to enjoy the temple; its overall beauty as well as the details of its design, paintings and sculptures. You don't just want to go in, have a general look around and then walk out like a speedy tourist.

A lot of meditators take the 'speedy Louvre tour'. They have some general sense of how their mind is empty, but they don't quite see how all phenomena are empty. They are meditating without refining their mind with logic and reasoning. Therefore when you ask them, "How is your mind?" they say, "Empty", but it doesn't serve them as the view to go deeper into the meditation experience of Dzogchen. We need to understand how things manifest in our mind, how we conceptually think and how we emotionally behave out of ignorance.

If both shedra and drubdra are established, it will serve the lineage in the larger sense of the Buddhadharmā. You will understand the practices much more genuinely. In this way, when one does the ngöndro, one will have the whole understanding of the ngöndro. When one does the three roots, there is the whole understanding of the practice of the three roots. And when one does inner yoga practice, one will fully understand what the inner yoga is. And if one does the practice of Dzogchen, then one will understand what the whole teaching of Dzogchen is. Otherwise, there's a chance to 'hit and miss'—and then there would be much more of a miss than a hit!

### **Not Holding on to Old Views**

In the process of creating the foundation, even though we may realize the necessity for knowledge and understanding, we need to be sure we fully understand any meaning that we have struggled to understand. Maybe we have understood basically, but somehow it still doesn't make so much sense, or we don't yet feel its personal connection to us. One possible cause is that we might be still holding on to an old view, and trying to assess everything from that old view; because of that, perhaps we are still caught in a struggle.

If we realize we are in such a situation, we could let go of that in the practice, and then start afresh. Then all of a sudden we can open up and begin to understand how it has personal relevance and a connection to us—and this changes our life. What was the most difficult for you and gave you the most trouble may be the very thing that will change your life the most.

Also we can find that because our mind changes through our practice and also our life experience, there can come to be much more openness towards understanding what we have not understood before. Then when we do understand, there is a tremendous sense of joy which one feels very personally. The breakthrough of understanding something that you have not understood before has a great impact on one's life. Keeping this in mind might help you to stay more open.



## **Paying Attention to the Words**

Some people find it rather difficult to not only retain the meaning of the teachings but also the words, the details, as it is advised in the teachings.

Of course, as long as you have not clearly understood the meaning, it's very difficult to focus on the words. But once you have a clear sense of the meaning, the words naturally become clear. Sometimes there are parts that you have not paid attention to. Because of that you may know the meaning and there are words you might use to describe it, but you're not very precise or you don't really know the traditional words. That can be improved by studying the specific words once we already have an understanding of the meaning. Just the process of doing this illuminates the meaning further and brings complete understanding. So one should definitely focus on the words and memorize them.

For example we all have some understanding of what enlightenment is, but maybe we don't know the word 'enlightenment' that well, or don't know how to describe it. So after knowing the general meaning, you focus on the word, learn the meaning more deeply through the word and also learn how to comment on the word. For example, sangye means enlightenment. Sang is 'pacification'. Pacification of what? Of the two obscurations. And gye means 'enriched' or 'completeness'. All the qualities of enlightenment—wisdom, love, compassion— are fully enriched or complete. In this way the meaning you already know becomes more complete—so this helps you become a little more enlightened!

## **The Woodpecker**

Yet on the other hand, if you spend too much effort on the details of a text, you become like a woodpecker. You can lose the whole meaning of what is there for you to understand. If you become so picky with each and every word and concept, then again it is just a waste of a time.

We don't want to become such a woodpecker, nor a speedy tourist who has just a general sense of how things are. There has to be a balance of these tendencies. That is very important. You have to focus on getting to the essence.

Sometimes it can also happen that all the information we have collected from study and teachings might become overwhelming. When all this information is not structured and floats around in your head, you don't know what to do with it and how to put it in a structure so that it can benefit you. But then all of a sudden sometimes in practice we understand something very absolute. We have a clear experience of all this buzzing, floating information. All the words of many different teachers echoing in our head will all of a sudden fit together to illuminate the experience we have in meditation practice. After that it doesn't float any more. It just stays as a sort of shining light illuminating the experience further and further. It all becomes part of one's experience.

## **Questions and Doubts**

Of course while studying, many questions will arise. In fact there has to be room for questions, curiosity, doubts. It is not disrespectful to ask questions; nor is it disrespectful to have doubts. But in this it is very important to examine the way one doubts, how we approach asking questions, or how we express our doubts.

If you start with a feeling that you are right and that you have some understanding of truth, and then doubts surge up in your mind with a sense of aggression because that view that you hold to be true is threatened, that has to be noticed because aggression is not helpful to anyone. In this case you should first work with the aggression and then express the doubt, or if the doubt stimulates a specific question, then ask the question.

People can become very charged when their own views are not confirmed, or get shaken up personally when their views are shaken up. In all exchange of viewpoints, or in learning viewpoints from a teacher—even when we are wanting to go deeper and study in a very passionate way—it is very important that it is done with tremendous clarity and non-violence. If we remain aware of this, our studies and exchange will be much more pleasant and joyful.

## **Building Confidence**

Over the years, even though it may be a slow process, or take longer than expected, there should be some sense of growing confidence in ourselves. This is very important; and when it is happening we should identify ourselves with it more and more. Probably you are trained in Western studies, and Western studies train you in not trusting yourself. That is the whole path of Western philosophy. So at the beginning of studying Dharma you might not have much trust in yourself; slowly it will develop.

According to the Buddhist view, ego is something that needs to be abandoned, but people often take ego to be worse than the teachings actually present it. The teachings are never extreme; people often are. So when the teachings say one has to realize egolessness, because ego is the one that brings all the suffering into one's life, people beat themselves up for having ego. But if you study the teachings closely, they never suggest that you have to get rid of your ego immediately, right away. They never say that there is no time for you to allow your realization of egolessness to grow before letting go of ego.

Whenever we talk about ego in the West, we need to also address the question of self-esteem. There are two kinds of self-esteem. One is basically egotistical, with a connotation of pride and arrogance. In this case, no matter how well one can project to others an image that one is very confident, has a lot of self-esteem or is very efficient, there is still a lot of insecurity underneath. Especially if we have been practitioners for a while we know such a kind of self-esteem doesn't serve us at all. On top of that, it hinders us from going further and deeper on the path.

But at the same time, we all have to have a self-esteem that inspires us—not only temporarily but long-term. When you watch His Holiness the Dalai Lama or any other

great master, they don't seem to lack self-esteem. They are not without confidence, nor do they seem insecure. So there must be another kind of self-esteem— and this self-esteem is based on physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. This well-being grows over time.

The idea of self-esteem might seem to be in contradiction with the Buddhist teachings, because of the words we use. But there is no contradiction in meaning because this kind of self-esteem does not confirm any neurotic ego to be truly existent. We must distinguish and realize that this well-being is not based on grasping onto a self. It is possible to acknowledge the relative existence of a self without grasping onto that sense of self as being absolute or permanent. The word 'self-esteem' is used here in the sense that over time there is growing confidence with one's study and practice.

### **A Life Passion**

In general, we need a long-term perspective rather than being impatient and looking only for quick results. The studies and practice are for one's whole lifetime. There is not really a quick path to realization. If there were, then I think all of us would be realized by now. So we should not become too goal-oriented in our study and practice, or look upon them in terms of simply a 'project'. This is for a lifetime, concerning your well-being. You would not say, "I want to be well for such and such a period of time; I want to be happy and joyous for such and such a time." Study and practice definitely has to be your whole life's passion; not just for a few months, a few years, or till you get a piece of paper that says, "You are a master."

His Holiness the Dalai Lama says very clearly that for him it is a whole life passion; he continuously studies. One may think that just at the beginning study is quite important. Then when it becomes more clear and one becomes more aware of the essence, one should just meditate. But if you look at the great realized teachers, they are always reading, whether for themselves or for someone else.

There is a very profound saying that, "The more learned you are, the less arrogant you become." Learning is infinite; there is always more to learn. Whereas arrogance is a big obstacle for learning. Arrogant people get swollen up in their chest and then don't have appreciation for anything. It all begins to seem secondary, or only like someone's tale, or like just repeated information.

One has to try to establish a manner of becoming more learned by being more open-minded, not arrogant; which is to say, truly humble. One can see how the great scholars, such as the Kadampa teachers, have such a humility. They have a total openness to any knowledge that one can offer. There is never an 'I know it all' quality. The great realized masters have a tremendous depth of honesty, freedom and peace from their own mind, and are not stuck in any kind of negativity or kleshas of afflicting emotions. They always have poise and serenity.

Many of these masters are still here. A great example is His Holiness the Dalai Lama, for both the learned and meditative quality. These are the examples that we can follow.

Instead of becoming full of oneself and stuck in one's own limited views and arrogance, or swelling up in one's chest to the point of suffocating oneself and not being able to breathe out or in with any appreciation.

In fact, appreciation is the key to life! If you don't have appreciation, then you don't have much of a life. Appreciation is very tangible, so you can discern whether you have it or not. Whether it's appreciation of things of a phenomenal nature, of people, of one's own qualities, opportunities, knowledge, studies and growth, or whatever, we have to have appreciation for all the things that are good in our lives. Otherwise we just get fixated in thinking, "If I could just get some more..." Or, "If I could just have done something a little bit differently to get the satisfaction that I long for..." and end up missing the whole sense of what is already actually in one's life, undermining the whole experience of what you have.

In essence we need to have appreciation for everything—appreciation not just for the good things but also the difficult things. In this respect the teachings on emptiness will be of great help; because in essence everything is empty, isn't it? It is logic. It is one taste.

### **The Outcome of Study: Understanding and Intelligence**

In the process of studying you develop *gowa*, understanding, and *rigpa*, precise intelligence. When you study text after text, or even if you just read one text again and again, then naturally your *gowa* and *rigpa* will develop. When studying the teachings of the Buddha and philosophy, one can use that *rigpa* to analyze the teachings in greater depth, bringing in one's own perception and experience.

In fact, when you study, the most important thing is to learn how to think. Of course the subject is a very important part of the study. The main point is to learn to think about the subject like the mahapanditas, to use the mind like the scholars who taught on that subject. When that is established, you could use that capacity not only in your own study and practice of the Dharma but in all aspects of your life. At that point the whole functioning of your brain will have improved—and that is real education.

When I was teaching at Naropa Institute in the Buddhist Studies department, the students who were doing the Master of Arts Degree program sometimes got concerned about their future livelihood. They would come to me and ask, "How am I going to get a job with this Masters degree?" I used to tell them that this study would not only establish a more precise understanding of the Buddha's teachings and make them much more sane when they apply them to their lives, but that they can also use this *rigpa* in any field they would want to engage in the future. If they decided to become a lawyer they could bring *rigpa* into the law; if they decided to become a doctor, they could bring it into medicine.

Dharma itself makes you much more free from attachment to any career. But if someone has done the studies and then wants to pursue a particular career, this can actually help them in any career they choose. I feel this very strongly. For example whenever I am personally confronted with anything, I experience that the studies and the *rigpa* that I

developed help me tremendously to be able to think things through deeply. Also, if I have a dialogue or discussion with someone, whether I am familiar with the subject or not, there are some basic tools for using my mind so that I can understand the other's point of view.

With this capacity I can discern whether something is rather hypothetical or really based on the experience of individuals or mankind, whether it is applicable and of true benefit. All those things become clear. For this, I give the credit to the studies that I was able to do when I was younger and the great teachers who have taught me.

Of course it depends on one's own interest. If you don't have any interest to pursue studies, then you just don't have interest. But as far as rigpa is concerned, it gives one tremendous confidence as a human being—and since this is developed through studies and teachings, one may well reconsider and become more open to the possibility of developing an interest in study. It gives the intelligence and the skill of using one's mind or brain, which is clearly so necessary to be actively involved in life, while maintaining or even developing a sense of well-being in the society or world we are in.

As well, study plays an important role in mastering our understanding and use of language, which is integral to one's studies. This also gives a sense of mutual ground to communicate with others. I think that much of this capacity comes from the Buddhist teachings being very broad and very essential to life. There is a strong foundation within the practice lineage to take all teachings personally and to try to work with one's mind.

## **Dharma in the West**

The Rigpa Shedra program, of which these teachings are a part is mainly oriented towards the traditional style of study as it is done in the Tibetan shedras. It is my hope that as we develop the study program here among Western students, we will also be able to create an understanding of the relevance of these studies to everyday life; thus how this can be applied to working with our own mind on an everyday level. It is my hope that through the blessings of the lineage and any source of higher power, it may benefit in this way.

Even though the Dharma has already been in the West to some extent for over twenty years, there is still a lot of room to become more clear on how to approach the study and practice of it—or rather, how the Western mind can assimilate the whole Buddhadharma. It is hopefully going to be established over this century. It took many centuries in India and also many centuries to become established in Tibet. We should certainly be patient enough for it to take at least one century for the Dharma to take root in the West.

Though people in the West go to school at an early age and study a lot, the style of study is different from what we are developing in this shedra. The difference here is that there is a lineage; this is very significant. The style that is taught in Tibet comes directly from the noble land of India. It is unique, with a magnificent power to shape one's mind.

Within the Tibetan Buddhist schools, there are also different styles of studying. Here in this shedra we will study in the Nyingma and Kagyü tradition, which is Rimé. In the Rimé

style, there is a lot of room for deeper contemplations which are based on a profound level of openness to all the teachings of the Buddha. There is an active attempt to see how in essence there is no conflict or contradiction within all the yantras and all the different points of view, which may sometimes seemingly contradict each other. In this way, the studies can be most effective and have a deep impact on one's mind.

As long as we are going in this direction, it is wonderful. If we are not going in that direction, with a sense of lineage and using the support of what has already been established in Tibet and in India—if instead people just get caught in some 'innovative' kind of Dharma on their own to support their own needs and become caught up in worldly concerns—then it will not work in the long run. Though it may seem very exciting and appealing, it will not work. Therefore we should always appreciate that a sense of lineage, not only in practice but even in study, is very important.

I hope we will be able to make the bridge and inspire people to study the traditional texts, rather than only studying somebody's versions of the teachings of the Buddha. Because when you just study different peoples' versions of the Dharma, you get further and further away from Buddha's teachings. But when we study the original texts, then we have a solid base; there is a tremendous blessing received from studying the text. This is the blessing of all the great teachers and masters who have taught the text in the past.

For the future, it is very important that study of the authentic teachings of the Buddha is developed and maintained in the West. Even though from time to time during your studies you may feel bored or distracted, if you have the discipline to study the teachings, to go through it with both an oral transmission and an oral explanation—it needs an oral explanation—then there is a *shedra*! If people continue, then there is a *shedra*. If there is no continuity there will not be a *shedra*.

Always remind yourself why you are doing this. What is the purpose of *shepa*, the study done in the *shedra*? It is to help one's mind; it is to help one's practice! It is to establish an authentic lineage of a truly realized, awakened state of mind.