

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING THE BUDDHADHARMA

HOMAGE TO THE OMNISCIENT ONE.

Whenever we listen to the teachings of Lord Buddha, the sole benefactor of all beings of the three realms, it is important to do so with great respect.

Having cultivated great compassion for countless eons, the unsurpassable Teacher attained the wisdom of omniscience. His purpose was to transmit the teachings concerning the obtainment of rebirth in the higher realms and teachings about attaining liberation. In this way he opened the eye of wisdom for those who, as if blinded by ignorance, had not yet seen the path of benefit and happiness. Even though, at present, we do not have the fortune to meet the Buddha directly, those who have devotion for his words will accomplish the eye of wisdom by listening to his teachings. In this way, they will earnestly strive to enter the true path and guide others on it as well. These are indeed unsurpassable activities.

ON THE BENEFITS OF STUDYING THE DHARMA

It is stated in many sutras that expounding and listening to only four lines of the Buddha's teachings is far more meritorious than making offerings to the Triple Gem of an entire world filled with seven different kinds of precious jewels. The reason is that making offerings of material wealth is the cause of samsaric prosperity, whereas expounding and listening to the teachings is the cause for attaining the qualities of the noble ones.¹ As it is stated in the *Great Compassion Lotus Sutra* (*Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarīkasūtra*),

If someone reveres, honors, pays homage and makes offerings to the tathāgatas who fill the whole three-thousand-fold world system, and reside therefore as many eons as there are sand grains in the River Ganges, and if that person also generates similar merit by revering, and so forth, the stupas of those gone to parinirvāṇa, then, compared to the merit generated thus, the merit of someone who perfectly engages with, and utters the words of the well-spoken Dharma, such as ‘all compounded things are impermanent,’ or ‘all defiled states are suffering,’ or ‘all phenomena are empty and devoid of self,’ then the latter, Ānanda, is more meritorious than the first. Why is this so?

Ānanda, it is like this because acts of giving, other than these, are accompanied by defilements and afflictions and are the cause of one’s wandering in saṃsāra. Whereas, Ānanda, the treasure of the precious, immaterial Dharma, which has been practiced for millions of immeasurable eons, is unsurpassable. With it, the continuum of saṃsāra is cut. Ānanda, when they hear this precious and unsurpassable Dharma, beings who are subjected to birth will be totally liberated from birth; beings who are subjected to sickness, death, anguish, wailing lament, misery, unhappiness, and mental disturbances will be totally liberated from all of those, from sickness, up to mental disturbances.

Ānanda, having understood the basis for this, I say that both those who respectfully expound the Dharma, and those who listen to it with respect, generate much merit.

Ānanda, those who respectfully expound the Dharma to bhikṣus seeking the Dharma, and the bhikṣus who respectfully listen to the Dharma, both generate immeasurable merit; they generate vast, immeasurable merit.

Whether one can abandon saṃsāra or not, is solely dependent upon whether one has heard the Buddhadharma or not. To confirm this, Ācārya Āryadeva states in his *Four Hundred Verses (Catuḥśataka)*,

It is extremely rare for three things to come together:
Someone who wants to hear the Dharma, the Dharma to be
listened to,

And a teacher who expounds the Dharma.

This is why, briefly stated, samsara is both endless and not endless.

This means that a human life which has the freedoms and opportunities that enable one to listen to the Dharma, the Buddha's teachings that are listened to, and a Dharma master who teaches, are all hard to find. If these three conditions are gathered and one is able to listen to the Dharma, one can abandon samsara. In this sense, samsara is not endless. If any of these three factors is not present, then one cannot abandon samsara, in which case samsara has no end. This is further illustrated in another sutra,

For the exhausted, the road is long,
 For the sleepless, the night is long,
 Likewise, for the child-like beings
 Devoid of Dharma knowledge, samsara is long.

Only the Buddhadharma is confirmed to be the path which abandons samsara. This is because although there are other teachings which explain that samsara should be viewed as suffering, which recognize attachment to be a fault, which encourage us to discard negative actions karma and practice austerities, and in which adepts receive various vows and so forth, these methods alone cannot harm the root of samsara. Therefore, these teachings cannot reverse samsara. The root of samsara is self-grasping, and the antidote for this is the wisdom realizing selflessness. This selflessness which is to be realized is only expounded by the Buddha. Moreover, the wide variety of methods for obtaining liberation and omniscience are also taught by the Buddha alone.

Therefore, Ācārya Vasubandhu said,

Buddha's doctrine is hard to find;
 Without it there is no liberation.
 Thus, aspiring for liberation,
 One should listen devotedly to it.

THE STAGES OF THE PATH

Furthermore, in the *Treasury of Abhidharma (Abhidharmakośa)*, when briefly showing the direct realizations of the path for each of the three vehicles, Vasubandhu said,

Abiding by the discipline, and having heard and contemplated
the teachings, one should undertake the practice of meditation.

For all three vehicles it is true that path must be completed with these four characteristics: moral discipline, which is the cause of not being distracted; hearing, which is the cause of not being ignorant; contemplation, which is the cause of ascertainment; and meditation, which is the cause of discarding the afflictions.

In the *Ornament of Mahayana Sutras (Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra)* it is also said,

If the purport were realized merely by hearing,
Meditation would become purposeless.
If one engages in meditation without having listened,
The Buddha's teaching would become purposeless.

This clearly shows the importance of both hearing and meditation. Otherwise, if one could comprehend the meaning merely by hearing, there would be no purpose for meditation. Similarly, if only meditation without hearing were sufficient, the Buddha's teachings would have no purpose. In the Vinaya it is further stated that one should not meditate in isolation unless one holds the Tripiṭaka. Likewise, a treatise on epistemology (*pramāṇa*) states,

Attainment is preceded by practice,
Practice is preceded by understanding.

This means that the attainment of the fruit must be preceded by its cause, which is the practice of the path. Likewise, the practice of the path must be preceded by understanding. While it is true that the enlightenment of a śrāvaka can be achieved even with a little hearing, the attainment of perfect awakening requires vast hearing. That is why it is explained in the

sutras that perfect and complete awakening depends upon vast hearing. In *The Way of the Bodhisattva* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*) it is also said,

There is nothing
A bodhisattva should not be trained in.

Some say that even though listening to the Dharma is required in order to teach others, listening to the Dharma is not required for one's own practice. Making this kind of statement is an immense obstacle, barring oneself and others from entering into the Buddha's doctrine. This is because, without ever hearing it, one cannot know the Buddha's Dharma in the first place, so what would it be that one is practicing? Without knowing the essential points, even if one were to exert oneself in activities of physical and verbal virtue through imitating others, it would be difficult to achieve anything of real value. In *The Way of the Bodhisattva* it is said,

Just as a person afflicted, or shaken with disease,
Is rendered without strength,
Likewise, if someone's mind is agitated by ignorance,
They will become powerless in Dharma activities.

Some even say that meditation by itself is sufficient and that there is no need to listen to the Dharma at all. Such statements indicate a lack of understanding that hearing and contemplation of the Dharma are, in fact, the causes of meditation. Of three types of wisdom based on hearing, contemplation, and meditation, the second is based on the first, and the third on the second. This is because it is impossible to have a result without a cause.

In the *Stages of Meditation* (*Bhāvanakrama*) Kamalāsīla states,

What is the accumulation of superior insight? It is seeking vast hearing of the Dharma, appropriate contemplation, and so forth.

In our modern times, many claim that it is sufficient to go through the sutras by oneself, without even the need to study under a spiritual teacher. This assumption is erroneous, since, without seeking the spiritual

guidance of a learned master, it is difficult to understand the meaning of the profound intent of the Tathāgata. In the *Compendium of Sutras* (*Sūtrasamuccaya*),

The Victorious One, who possesses supreme qualities,
Said that it is in reliance upon spiritual masters
That one will comprehend the Buddhadharmā.

Based on the numerous statements found in the sutras explaining the benefits of relying upon a spiritual master and the faults of not doing so, we can understand the necessity of having a spiritual master. Otherwise, one would be going against the instructions stating, “Even at the cost of your life, do not forsake the spiritual master,” and “Honor the spiritual master from whom you have received the Dharma, in the same manner as you would honor the Tathāgata.” Also, it would become purposeless for the buddhas and bodhisattvas to teach the Dharma.

Moreover, those who believe that their wishes can be fulfilled merely by chanting and recitation should understand the essence of the means that make a human life truly meaningful. It is said that making austerities the essence of the path is the Jain tradition; making recitation the essence of the path is the Brahmin tradition; and, abiding by superior discipline, to make meditation preceded by listening and contemplation the essence of the path is the tradition of the Buddha.

THE IMPORTANCE OF UPHOLDING THE DHARMA

The main objective of human activity is to be free of harm and suffering, and to obtain benefit and happiness. This can only be achieved to a small degree by means other than the Dharma. The Buddhadharmā, however, can put an end to all harm and suffering without exception, and one can accomplish both temporary happiness in the form of the fortunes of the higher realms, and the ultimate benefits of liberation and omniscience.

Śāntideva prayed for the holy Dharma to remain long, in this way,

May the doctrine of the Buddha,
The only medicine for the suffering of sentient beings and
The source of all happiness,

Long remain, through the presence of
Benefactors making offerings and
Devotees paying reverence.

In this verse, Śāntideva is praying for the holy doctrine expounded by the Buddha to remain in this world for a long time, being the unsurpassable protection able to fulfill the hopes and wishes of all sentient beings.

The Sutra of the Lion's Roar of Śrīmālādevī (Śrīmālādevīsīmhanādasūtra) states:

If all aspiration prayers were to be condensed into one, what would this prayer be?
“May I uphold the holy Dharma.”

In the *Treasury of Space Sutra* Lord Buddha addressed Maitreya thus:

Maitreya, the four activities of the bodhisattvas are: putting an end to all māras and all suffering; surpassing all opponents by being in harmony with the Dharma; bringing beings to spiritual maturity and upholding the holy Dharma. These four can be condensed into one. Which one? To uphold the holy Dharma.

We also read:

The great Bodhisattva known as “Adorned with Merit” addressed the Bhagavān, “I perceive the roots of goodness, other than upholding the holy Dharma, to be only of the size of a mustard seed. The roots of goodness consisting in upholding the holy Dharma, however, I perceive to be as vast as all of space encompassing the ten directions.”

In this way, many sutras describe the merit arising from upholding the holy Dharma as immeasurable.

The Buddha said to his disciples,

After my parinirvāṇa, this holy Dharma will be your teacher.
That is why you should preserve it, without losing the words or the meaning.

To Ānanda he spoke,

Ānanda, you must make sure that this holy Dharma will remain for a long time, and that it thoroughly benefits humans and celestial beings.

It is said that the merit gained by one sentient being who generates the enlightenment thought in order to attain supreme enlightenment is far superior and far greater than the merit gained from building a stupa to house the Buddha's relics, made entirely from precious jewels, high enough to reach Akaniṣṭha and wide enough to contain a three-thousand-fold world system; and moreover, for endless eons, making offerings to that stupa with all available offering substances. This is because the former will enable the holy Dharma to continue for a long time, so that the lineage of the Buddha will not be broken.

A quotation from the *Four Hundred Verses (Catuḥśataka)* supports this,

One may build a stupa made of precious jewels,
 Making it as high as the world.
 But taming a single being
 Is said to be more supreme.

If one should ask, "What is this holy Dharma to be upheld and what are the means to uphold it?" the *Commentary on the Treasury of Abhidharma (Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam)* gives the following answer,

The Buddha's holy Dharma is twofold:

The teachings and the realization.
 The only way to uphold this,
 Is by both expounding the teaching and by practicing.

The Dharma of the teachings refers to the Tripiṭaka and the Dharma of realization to the three higher trainings. Expounding the Dharma of the teachings without error, and the flawless practice of the Dharma of realization, are the methods by which these two should be upheld.

If one does not take refuge in the Triple Gem, one cannot bring an end to the sufferings of samsara. However, the taking of the refuge vow

cannot, by itself, accomplish the goal. The precepts of refuge also need to be observed and protected. Associating with noble beings, listening to the holy teachings and practicing in accordance with the Dharma are the precepts of refuge that need to be followed and kept. The one who teaches and practices the Buddhadharma as it has been expounded by the Buddha, is a noble being. The Tripiṭaka, which is confirmed to be truly the Buddha's words and the treatises composed in accordance with the purport of the Buddha's own words by authentic masters, such as Maitreya, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, Nāgārjuna, Śāntideva, and Candrakīrti are the Dharma we should study. "Practicing in accordance with the Dharma" means that the teaching and all the practice should be accomplished according to the Buddha's words.

The benefits of hearing the Dharma are explained in the *Sutra Requested by Nārāyaṇa (Nārāyaṇapariṣcchāsūtra)*,

Noble son! One who has heard the Dharma will give rise to wisdom. One who has wisdom will thoroughly pacify the afflictions. One who has no afflictions, Māra will not trouble.

In a sutra, it is explained in detail in this way,

There are five benefits of hearing the holy Dharma. One will hear what one has not heard before; one will become well trained with what one has heard; one will dispel one's doubts; one will be able to distinguish between right and wrong views; and one will be able to comprehend, with wisdom, the profound words and their meaning.

If I were to explain all the five benefits cited here, the explanation would be too lengthy. Therefore, I will clarify only the first one briefly. "One will hear what one has not heard before" means that one will be able to hear about the five aggregates, the eighteen elements, the twelve sources, the two truths, the four truths, samsara and liberation, the paths of the three yanas, the faults that can be abandoned by these paths, and both the temporary and the permanent results. One will hear all of these for the first time, never having heard them before.

Another sutra gives one more set of four benefits resulting from hearing the Dharma in the following way. First, it is said that, "By hearing one

will understand the Dharma.” This is because by hearing the doctrine, one will understand that the Dharma consists of the three higher trainings taught by the Buddha; and that the paths which are expounded by other masters are not the genuine Dharma. Second, having listened to the Dharma, one will adopt the right discipline, based on which one will abstain from negative deeds. That is why it is said, “By hearing, one abandons negativity.” Third, “By hearing one will abandon all the purposeless things.” This is because by listening to the Dharma, one will obtain the higher training of the mind and thus abandon the gross afflictions. Through this, one will know that all the sensual pleasures which worldly beings are attached to are purposeless. Fourth, by hearing the Dharma one obtains the higher training in wisdom by means of which the subtle afflictions are abandoned. This is why it is said that, “Through hearing one attains nirvana.”

After discussing at length the benefits of listening to the Dharma, Ācārya Vasubandhu states that the purpose of hearing the holy Dharma is limitless, and that the aspects he mentioned merely reflect a small portion of it. Why is there no limit to the purpose of hearing the Dharma? It is because all the paths and the results of the three yānas arise based on the foundation of listening to the Dharma.

ON THE FAULTS OF NOT STUDYING THE DHARMA

The sutras describe many disadvantages of not hearing the teachings. The temporary disadvantages are mentioned in statements such as the following:

Although human beings have two feet, they are not different
from cattle,
They are foolish, and this foolishness has to be overcome.

Also,

Those on this earth devoid of the wealth of hearing
Should be considered blind.

And,

Even though they do not have the hump and the dewlap,
Human beings are like cows with upper teeth.

In this way, those deprived of hearing the Dharma are pitied by the learned ones. In the *Vinaya Sutra* it is said that, “Those who are like lions do not revere those who are like wolves.” This has the same meaning as the other quotations above.

The permanent disadvantage of not hearing the teachings is that one is not able to obtain liberation, the pacification of afflictions and suffering. This is because, as it says in the *Treasury of Abhidharma (Abhidharmakośa)*,

Without perfect analysis of phenomena it is impossible to totally uproot the afflictions. Due to afflictions, worldly beings wander in the ocean of cyclic existence. Therefore our teacher taught the Dharma for that purpose.

In the *Great Compassion Lotus Sutra (Mahākaruṇāpūṇḍarīkasūtra)* it is said,

Ānanda, many sentient beings may become completely degenerate, due to not hearing a Dharma Jewel treasure of this kind.

In particular, the dialectical schools and monastic universities produce scholars of the Buddhist doctrine who possess many good qualities. Without such schools, the Dharma cannot be studied and taught in this way, and there would be no more great scholars. Without scholars well-versed in the Dharma, the Buddha’s doctrine will vanish, even though there may be many scriptures. This is explained in Sakya Paṇḍita’s *Clarifying the Sage’s Intent (Thub pa dgongs gsal)*.²

TAKING HOLD OF A RARE OPPORTUNITY

In one sutra it is stated,

The coming of a buddha into this world is extremely rare,
The human body is obtained with great difficulty.

Alas! Having devotion and the opportunity to listen to the
 Dharma
 Are truly difficult to come by, even in a hundred eons.

It is appropriate to encourage people to listen to the Dharma by explaining that it is extremely difficult to obtain the complete causes and conditions for hearing the teachings. In the *Compendium of Instructions* (*Śikṣasamuccaya*), Śāntideva taught five verses encouraging people to listen respectfully to the Dharma. These verses offer two means of encouragement. First, one encourages people by explaining the disadvantages of not hearing the Dharma: without hearing the teachings of the Buddha one will not be able to pacify the mental afflictions. As a consequence, one will experience unbearable sufferings, such as being burnt in the ravines of hell and so forth. Terrible pain would have to be experienced over and over again. In this way, one should enjoin beings to be delighted to listen to the Dharma, keeping these dangers in mind. The second method is to encourage people by showing the advantages of hearing the Dharma. If, having listened to the Buddha's doctrine, one diligently pursues the practice of meditation, one will avoid all negative deeds, which are the causes of the suffering of the lower realms. As a result, one will obtain, life after life, the happiness of humans and gods through rebirth in the higher realms. Having discarded the afflictions, one will obtain the never-declining bliss of liberation, the inexhaustible bliss of the bodhisattvas, and all of the incomparable perfections of a buddha.

Therefore, if today one listens to this meaningful and rarely obtained jewel-like Dharma, all the devas, humans, nāgas, siddhas, gandharvas, yakṣas, garuḍas, asuras, kinnaras and piśacas will be filled with joy, devotion, and faith. For that very reason, all of them are asked to attend the teachings, in this way.

In a Vinaya treatise it is said,

O, you devas, nāgas, asuras, kinnaras, Śakra and so forth,
 Who performed great deeds for the sublime doctrine!
 Come here to listen to this exposition of the holy Dharma
 Which was taught by the Buddha.
 It is the cause of happiness and
 Truly pacifies the afflictions.

Further it says,

Therefore show your devotion and your respect
 For the Buddha's teachings,
 This precious treasury of vast and excellent qualities
 Which fulfills the benefit of others.
 Since nothing superior can be heard,
 Tame your senses, like those of a well-trained horse,
 And listen to the words of the supreme sage,

In brief, knowing that the Buddha's doctrine is very difficult to find, that it has a vast purpose, and that it is not going to remain for long, it is appropriate for all those who have devotion, to exert themselves in the study and practice of the Dharma.

PRESERVING WHAT IS MOST PRECIOUS

When the Victorious One's doctrine is at the brink of extinction, it is said to be particularly essential and greatly meritorious to uphold and preserve the holy teachings. In the *Sutra of Avalokiteśvara (Avalokanasūtra)* it is stated,

To uphold, day and night,
 The holy Dharma taught by the Protector of the World
 When it is on the brink of extinction,
 Is far more meritorious than to revere
 Millions and millions of buddhas,
 For as many eons as there are grains of sand in the River
 Ganges.

It is said that if someone hinders just once the teaching of, or the listening to, the Mahayana Dharma, that person will remain in lower transmigrations for a long time. As it is said in *The Way of the Bodhisattva (Bodhicaryāvatāra)*,

Whoever, even for a single moment,
 Creates obstacles to a bodhisattva's meritorious deed,
 Reduces the welfare of sentient beings,
 And will therefore endlessly roam the lower realms.

In the *Sutra on the Samadhi of the Miraculous Display of Definitive Pacification* (*Prāśāntaviniścaya-prātihāryasamādhisūtra*) it is said,

Someone who creates an obstacle to a bodhisattva's virtuous act of giving a handful of food to an animal, performs a greater non-virtue than someone who kills all sentient beings and snatches their possessions. This is because the former creates an obstacle to a virtuous deed that would cause the future appearance of a buddha.

In the *Sutra that Teaches the Nonarising of All Phenomena* (*Sarvadharmāpravṛtti-nirdeśasūtra*), the Tathāgata Sublime-like-Mount-Sumeru relates the following story,

There once was a bhikṣu named Cāritramati. He was endowed with moral discipline and the five clairvoyances, and resided together with his followers in seclusion, exerting himself in practice. At the same time, there was a bhikṣu called Viśuddhacāritra, who wandered around the cities and towns, and to the palace of the king, giving teachings. Hearing about this, bhikṣu Cāritramati instructed him thus, "Since the Buddha praised seclusion you should not go to town. Instead, practice meditation in an isolated place." Despite these instructions, Cāritramati still saw him go into town, associating with ordinary people, and thus started to look down on him with disrespect, "This bhikṣu has no discipline and is interested in worldly distractions." This remark stopped Viśuddhacāritra from giving further teachings. By the power of that negative deed, bhikṣu Cāritramati was reborn in the Avīci hell where he suffered unceasing pain for as many as ninety-nine thousand million eons. The bhikṣu Viśuddhacāritra during that time, was myself, and the teacher Cāritramati was Buddha Akṣobhya.

When people get together to discuss setting up a philosophical institute, or to physically or financially support the study and practice of the Dharma, all those involved share a common motivation. For this reason, they will all gain the same merit as those who are directly carrying out the work. Conversely, Vasubandhu has stated,

Since in war, and so forth, people join for a common purpose,
All involved acquire the same nonvirtue as the actual killer.

Many sutras and śāstras state that by requesting the spiritual masters to give teachings one will acquire the same merit as one would have obtained by entreating the buddhas to turn the Wheel of Dharma, as formulated in the seven-limb practice. Also, if one encourages others to listen to the Dharma, one will obtain a root of virtue equal to the merit acquired by those who teach them. If, without jealousy, one rejoices in others' teaching and listening to the Dharma, and congratulates them on their actions, then one will obtain the merits of rejoicing.

It is said that many wonderful things will happen wherever the teachings of the Mahayana are given. In the *Ambrosia Utterance Sutra* (*Amṛtavyāharanaśūtra*), for instance, it is stated,

There will not be disease, epidemics, contagious sickness, and chaos in the country where these kind of sutras are upheld and propagated, nor where someone dwells and transmits the Dharma, nor where various teachings are written down.

In another sutra it is said,

There will not be starvation, war, harm created by evil spirits, and there will be abundant wealth and good harvests, in any place where the kings, and so forth, venerate the sutras. Those places will always be protected by the four guardian kings, by Indra, and Brahma.

Even if one acquires the wealth of the whole world, it could not be considered to be the best type of wealth. Hearing only one verse of the Buddhadharmā, however, is the most excellent wealth, because it can grant permanent happiness to oneself and to others. It is, of course, missing a great opportunity if one fails to gain one's own share of wealth, food, status, and so forth. However, it is even more unfortunate to miss the opportunity, either as an ordained person with few other duties and activities, or as a lay person, to gain one's own share of hearing, contemplation, and meditation. The reason for this is that one thus misses the opportunity of attaining perfect buddhahood, which spontaneously accomplishes one's own purpose and the purposes of others.

DO NOT BE CARELESS

When one has obtained human birth, has met with the Buddha's teachings, and has faith in the Dharma, then one has the rare opportunity to practice the Dharma, which is difficult to obtain. When these conditions are united we actually have the opportunity to abandon samsara. Yet, despite one's having all these opportunities, why is it that one does not have the thought that one must attain liberation and buddhahood? Why does one not think that in order to achieve this, one must hear the Dharma, contemplate, and meditate? We should carefully check ourselves to find the reasons for this.

One reason given by householders is that they have too many other things to do, and that they therefore have no time to practice the Dharma. It is precisely for this purpose that the Buddha has taught the shorter sutras. He taught these particularly for those lay persons who due to their many activities do not have much time for studies, and for those monastics who engage mainly in the practice of meditation. So they should study whatever the Buddha has particularly taught for them.

One should at the very least try to know and to understand the following, with clear ascertainment:

1. What is the cause of attaining buddhahood?
2. What is the path which enables one to attain enlightenment?
3. What are the characteristics of the resultant state of buddhahood?
4. What are the practices beginners should mainly engage in?
5. What are the indispensable key points of the Dharma, and how they should be practiced?

After understanding all these, one should practice as much as one possibly can. Otherwise, if one wastes this perfect opportunity to practice the essential Dharma, and if one consequently departs to the next birth, naked and empty-handed, one will certainly experience intense regret. In the *Great Compassion Lotus Sutra (Mahākaruṇāpūṇḍarikasūtra)* sutra it says,

Ānanda! Do not be careless, otherwise you will definitely regret it later.

Another reason given for not practicing the Dharma is that one regards it as not that important and that one has no choice but to carry out one's worldly activities. In this way, one thinks that it is alright if one does not practice the Dharma, despite its benefits. However, this evaluation is mistaken, because most worldly activities cause oneself and others to suffer, in this life and in future lives. Even if such activities are of benefit, this benefit is trivial and does not last very long. The Buddha's teachings, on the other hand, only bring benefit; they will never harm. And the benefits one receives from the Buddha's teachings are permanent.

Ārya Nāgārjuna wrote,

Even if a fire breaks out and burns your head and clothing,
Do not pause to extinguish it!
Rather, exert effort to stop future rebirth.
There is no purpose superior to this.

This means that, generally speaking, if a fire breaks out and one's head and clothes are smoldering, one stops whatever one is doing to extinguish that fire. The wise, however, would ignore even such fire and, disregarding their own bodies and possessions, exert every effort instead to abandon samsara, because there is no greater task than that of striving for liberation.

SETTING PRIORITIES AND DEALING WITH OBSTACLES

Only few people assert that understanding the Dharma is of value. Parents and relatives who love and care for us sometimes object to our performance of Dharma activities. Recognizing that this can be an obstacle to our practice, we need to find ways to deal with this efficiently. The best method is to maintain an unwavering and steadfast faith in the Dharma. Śāntideva said,

You take birth alone, and you die alone.
Since others will never take your share of suffering,
What benefit can one expect from relatives
Who cause obstacles to virtuous deeds?

In this way, friends and relatives cannot be of ultimate benefit. As Mañjuśrī said,

Neither parents, nor friends and relatives
 Can be a refuge for you.
 They discard you
 And go wherever they wish.

Therefore it is said that since friends and relatives can be an obstacle to one's Dharma practice, we should not be dependent on them.

Lay householders are not only engrossed in activities that benefit only this life, they also do not engage in hearing, contemplation and meditation. Imitating each other, they are content with their worldly activities. We should think carefully about this. We shouldn't simply follow what others are doing. There are many different kinds of examples, both good and bad. But since many people indulge in extremely dreadful actions, we should take great care to follow the right examples. In the sutras it is stated that one should take vows like the tathāgatas of the past did, and that one should perform dedication, just as Mañjuśrī did. To act after one has carefully examined one's course of action is the way of the wise. Performing actions based on what others say and imitating them is the way of the fool. Therefore, one should investigate with proper reasoning what one deems as good, come to a clear decision, and wisely chose the right examples to follow.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONFIDENCE AND DETERMINATION

If one thinks, with a disheartened mind, "A person like myself cannot engage in study," then this thought will bar the door to studying. Śāntideva said,

Discarding effort due to a disheartened mind,
 There cannot be any liberation.

As asserted by Śāntideva, one cannot progress if a disheartened mind prevents one from making an effort. Therefore, it is said in a sutra that with enthusiasm, effort, and conscientiousness, one will be able to accomplish every activity. Thus we should be assertive, confident, and efficient in relation to the task of study.

It is said in the *Sutra Requested by Subāhu* (*Subāhupariṣcchāsūtra*),

One should think that, “If even fleas and flies can awaken to unsurpassable enlightenment, why should I, a human being, diminish my effort to obtain awakening, even at the cost of my life?”

This quotation instructs us that, if they exert themselves, even animals can eventually obtain enlightenment, and that therefore, belonging to the human race, knowing to differentiate benefit from harm, and being conscientious, one has no reason not to be determined to attain enlightenment. As it is said in *The Way of the Bodhisattva (Bodhicaryāvatāra)*,

There is nothing that does not become easier
When one becomes accustomed to it.

Whatever the subject of study might be, when one becomes accustomed to it, it will become easier, and it will produce delight in one’s mind. And with such delight, one will accomplish any task with ease.

Of course, we will not immediately understand everything, and it is possible that despite some efforts certain topics will still not be clear to us. But this should not be the cause for one to withdraw, thinking that one has engaged in purposeless effort. The study of the Dharma is different from other studies. In the case of other studies, one will gain the result only when one has understood the subject. But in the case of the Dharma, even if one has understood it well, its study will ensure one’s future understanding and will place latencies in the continuum of the mind for the attainment of buddhahood. In this way, it will be of immeasurable benefit. Therefore, Vasubandhu said,

Even if one does not comprehend the meaning, one should still listen respectfully to the Buddha’s teachings, because merely by listening with devotion will generate immense merit and enhance one’s wisdom. One need not mention how much more that gain would be, if one also understands the meaning.

In one of the sutras it is said,

Whoever listens to and takes hold of the meaning of a single verse of my teaching will, without doubt, gain the state of awakening.

And,

There is not a single being who, having listened to this Dharma, will not attain enlightenment.

There are individuals who seek results just by listening and performing minimal practices. This kind of attitude in the initial stage will cause one to quickly discard the task. Therefore, no matter what troubles one encounters when engaging in hearing and contemplation, one should put on the armor of determination from the beginning, thinking that one will make the action purposeful by forbearing all hardships. It is said in the *Compendium of Instructions (Śikṣasamuccaya)*,

One should search for knowledge with patience.

In yet another sutra it is said,

In order to hold the holy Dharma, one should patiently tolerate scolding, slandering and harsh and reprimanding words.

In terms of time, one should hear the Dharma from this time forward, until enlightenment is attained. In the *Sutra of the Teaching by Akṣayamati (Akṣayamatīnirdeśa-sūtra)* it is said,

The Four Insatiabes will procure an accumulation of wisdom for bodhisattvas.

The four insatiabes are: being insatiable in hearing; being insatiable in expounding the teachings; being insatiable in investigation; being insatiable in knowledge. These four insatiabes are the active sources of the bodhisattvas' accumulation of wisdom. In the *Ornament of Clear Realization (Abhisamayālaṅkāra)*, in the context of the third bodhisattva bhūmi, Maitreya states,

An insatiable desire for hearing.

Searching for the Dharma, without ever thinking that the Dharma one has already heard is sufficient, is the extraordinary quality which adorns the exalted bodhisattvas. It is described in many sutras that, at the time Lord Buddha manifested as a bodhisattva, merely for a single or even half a verse of the Dharma, he practiced austerities such as sacrificing his own body, his own kingdom, and so on, for many countless eons in pursuit of the treasury that is the holy Dharma.

Therefore, Master Pawo prayed that he would not become discouraged, even if he had to cross a trench of fire for the sake of listening to the Dharma. As it is said in the *Seventy Verses of Aspiration* (*smon lam bdun cu pa*),

Even if I have to cross over a blazing fire of endlessly flowing
lava
To listen to a single line of the teaching,
May I not remain idle
But be inspired to proceed.

GIVING UP ATTACHMENT

The main reason one has no interest in practicing the Dharma is attachment to this life. One should abandon that attachment through recollecting death. A human lifespan is short and the time of death is uncertain. When one becomes subject to death, the wealth and possessions amassed with great hardship will not follow one, and neither will one's relatives and friends, nor one's name and fame, and so forth. But the non-virtues accumulated in the process and the negative deeds carried out on behalf of others will come with one, and they will lead one to the lower realms. Contemplating in this way will make the thought of death be clearly present in one's mind, and this will eliminate all difficulties in engaging in Dharma practice.

On top of that, one must forego clinging to samsara as a whole. If one is attached to any aspect of it, then no matter what activities of hearing and contemplation one may perform, they will not become the path that leads to liberation. Instead, they will become causes of samsara. Therefore, one should shun attachment by bringing to mind the disadvantages and faults of samsara.

Further, if one is attached to one's own purpose, then even if one does engage in Dharma practice, that practice will be the path of the Lesser Vehicle and it will not enable one to attain full enlightenment. Therefore, with loving-kindness, compassion, and bodhicitta, one should shun attachment to one's own purpose.

In brief, having relinquished these three attachments, one should make every effort to attain enlightenment for all sentient beings. For that very purpose one must ensure that one is motivated with the Mahayana resolve for awakening when listening to the holy Dharma. In order to encourage beings to listen to the Dharma with the Mahayana motivation, it is stated in a sutra,

A bodhisattva who listens to any sutra will acquire the respective kind of benefit.

Therefore it is certain that one will acquire great benefit.

In *Clarifying the Meditative Stabilizations* (*snyoms 'jug rab gsal*) it says,

Having gained certainty in the fact that worldly activities are devoid of essence, one should strive to learn the meaning of the teachings.

The *Lotus Sutra* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra*) states,

By having shunned all attachments, listen to this kind of doctrine, for it is very hard to find the inclination and opportunity to listen to the Dharma.

Finally, if someone should ask, “What is the method for not wasting what one has learned?” it is to put into practice whatever one has studied. In the *Sutra Requested by Ākāśakośa* (*nam mka' mdzod kyis zhus pa'i mdo*) it is said,

No virtue or non-virtue accumulated will go astray; no offering made to the tathāgatas will be in vain; no thought motivated by bodhicitta will be wasted; no hearing accumulated for the practice will be lost.

As it is stated by Rendawa,

In order to make meaningful the Dharma you have studied,
You, Zhönu Lodrö, should go to the remote forest.

By hearing the Dharma, one will understand what needs to be understood, one will abandon what needs to be abandoned, and one will cultivate what needs to be cultivated; so it is certain that one will obtain what is to be obtained. These are the reasons which indicate that study is meaningful. Therefore, we should exert ourselves in the pursuit of our Dharma studies.

Even these days there are still many people in various countries who follow the Buddhadharma, inspired by the idea to find definite release from samsara. Following the example of our sublime teacher, the King of the Śākya, they leave their homes and renounce the worldly life to practice the paths of liberation and omniscience, devoting themselves to hearing, contemplation, and meditation. These individuals are a field of merit for those who rejoice in their activities and pay homage to them. Therefore, it is not really necessary for me to encourage these people to listen to the Dharma and to practice.

Nevertheless, I have carefully taken a few quotations from the scriptures in order to encourage those who have renounced the world and taken vows, but who have not studied or contemplated much, and in particular those lay householders, who, although they have faith in the Three Jewels, do not have knowledge of the Buddha's teachings, and are not engaging in Dharma practice; or, even if they are engaging in Dharma practice, are doing so incorrectly. With this teaching, I wish to tell them that first of all it is very important to listen to and study the Dharma. By listening well to the Dharma, they will gain understanding. As a result of this, they will experience delight in engaging in the practice, and thereby, all their purposes will be fulfilled. In this way, I have presented a few quotations from the sutras and śāstras so that devotees can more readily understand them.

Śubham!

Sarvadā Kalyānā Bhavatu.

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ngag lam 'bras slob bshad chen mo: bla ma'i rnam thar skor, pod KA). The last volume is entitled *Supplement to the Lamdré Collection, vol. 43 (lam 'bras kha skong, pod NGI)*.

12. *Rje btsun sa kya pa'i bka' srol ltar rgyud 'chad nyan byed pa la nye bar mkho ba'i gsung rab rnam*. Kathmandu: Sachen International, 2010.
13. Skyabs rje mkhan chen a pad rin po che. *Bzang spyod smon lam gyi 'grel ba phyogs sbrigs*. Dehradun: Sakya College, 2013; and *Thub pa dgongs gsal gyi bka' 'grel* (pod 2). Dehradun: Sakya College.
14. *Mkhan chen a pad rin po che mchog gi gsung 'bum* (pod 4). Kan su'u rig gnas dpe skrun khang, 2014.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING THE BUDDHADHARMA

1. Noble beings (Skt. *ārya*) are those who have achieved high levels of accomplishment and liberation through the practice of the Dharma.
2. Refer to Sakya Paṇḍita (translated by David P. Jackson). *Clarifying the Sage's Intent*. In: Institute of Tibetan Classics. *Stages of the Buddha's Teachings: Three Key Texts*, volume 10 in the Library of Tibetan Classics. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2015, p. 397.

2. PITH INSTRUCTIONS OF NGÜLCHU THOGMÉ

1. Although Gyalsé Tokmé is not explicitly mentioned here, the translator inserted his name whenever the Tibetan remains ambiguous since Khenchen Appey Rinpoche stated at the beginning that his teachings were based on instructions by this master.
2. According to the Mahayana teachings, buddhas manifest in innumerable forms to help suffering beings throughout all universes. Every buddha's body, speech, and mind displays qualities that indicate their inner qualities. The qualities of the body are traditionally listed as one-hundred-twelve physical faculties, namely the thirty-two excellent signs and eighty minor marks. These include, for example, the impression of a thousand-spoked wheel on the sole of the feet and the palm of the hands, a golden skin, and a crown-protrusion. The sixty qualities of the buddha's speech include purity, clarity, and majesty. The mind is described as possessing twenty-one uncontaminated exalted wisdoms, such as the four immeasurables, the eight meditative liberations, the ten powers, etc.
3. The three great stupas in Nepal are the *Jarung Kashor* stupa in Boudhanath, the *Pagpa Shingkün* stupa in Swayambunath, and *Takmo Lüdjin* stupa in Namobuddha.
4. The four stupas ascribed to Aśoka are located in Lalitpur, Patan.