

# On the Ignorance of the Learned

by *Dodrupchen Jikmé Tenpé Nyima*

In general, the precious teaching collections of the Omniscient Guide are to be learnt; they are the fundamental scriptures with which we should be acquainted. For bodhisattvas, studying these texts brings with it an increase in the causes of all-seeing wisdom and a mastery of the methods for bringing those of diverse inclinations to spiritual maturity.

Nevertheless, there are some these days who pursue study and yet the more they learn, the more arrogant they become. They think: “Now I have studied widely. I know the scriptural approach. I am learned in the various collections.” And when they see others who have not amassed comparable learning, regard them with contempt, thinking: “These people are fools, dullards, simpletons, befuddled and uneducated.” Even when reading texts by fellow scholars, they lack due reverence and devotion for the sacred Dharma, and no sooner have they opened the covers of the book than they are wondering, “What have we here? How is this written?” Unstable in their understanding, as if their intelligence were laid out on a bed of reeds, they point their fingers accusingly and gesticulate like drunkards. Encountering a particular claim, they think: “This doesn’t accord with the Pramāṇa texts on logic and epistemology.” Confronted with another assertion, they think: “This doesn’t fit with what is taught in the Abhidharma.” Reading of some further proposition: “Oh, this can be refuted by such and such a line of thinking.” Critiquing a text in this way, they reach the end with no clear idea of what it contains or maintains, no notion of what it asserts or posits.

Such scholars think: “When others debate with my own system, they will say such-and-such, so I must reply as follows...But then the opponent might counter with such-and-such a response, so what would be the best reply?” Constantly preoccupied with such thoughts, they feel no pleasure during the day, while sleep evades them at night. Even if sleep should come to them, as they are consumed by these matters even in their dreams, their minds will be perturbed from the very first moment of waking. Dismissing the works of the profound path, such as the progressive stages of meditation on *bodhicitta* and compassion, as too easy to understand, they prefer works of sophistry, and when they come across them think, “Oh, now this I must study!” Opening up a volume, they immediately muster all their intellect and inquire: “What is the meaning of this? Now this is a mere illustration. Is this a refutation? Is this a valid proof? Does this follow logically from the premise? Is there a logical contradiction here?” Scribbling notation about such hair-splitting points, they pass the best part of the afternoon, with pulse racing and breath uneven.

From the very moment you focus on such topics as the ‘conceptual isolate’ (*ldog pa*) of “buddha” or the ‘universal substance’ (*rdzas spyi*) of sentient beings, all faith and

renunciation diminish and disappear. Eventually, at the time of death, all that you have studied will be exposed as nothing more than dry and empty words; all the analysis and research as amounting to nothing more than hollow ideas; and all that you have read garnering little more than false suppositions—all on the basis of squandered opportunities. It will be plainly obvious that all this analysis and categorising into matter, consciousness and anomalous factors has been nothing more than casting stones in the dark.

If you really thought about it, you would see that the path of logic is intended to dispel incorrect patterns of thought. Yet once such patterns have been dispelled, it is necessary to set out upon the genuine path, and, having set out upon this path, to make manifest the wisdom of perfect liberation.

To be learned in the Dharma does not mean merely to have heard a lot of teachings. “The one who, on the basis of learning, feels disenchantment for the three realms—such a person is truly learned,” says the Abhidharma. One ought, therefore, to examine any pretensions of learning based on knowing a few words about this or that.

*The Sūtra Requested by Bhadramāyākāra* teaches that the essence of being learned is to practise whatever Dharma one has heard and to benefit others by explaining it to them well. So we must be wary of presuming to uphold the lifestyle of the learned while following only a limited, superficial approach to logical reasoning that does not espouse genuinely purposeful objectives.

Although my own education resembles nothing more than the watery traces of a silkworm upon a lotus, I have some experience in these matters, and so I, the crazy beggar Jigme, offer this mad talk for those who might be in a similar position.

| Translated by Adam Pearcey, 2014. With many thanks to Alak Zenkar Rinpoche, who kindly explained some difficult phrases. And with apologies to William Hazlitt.



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