

## THOUGHTS ON HOW TO BE A GOOD STUDENT/LISTENER

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*Participating in Dharma class is not like being in a regular classroom. We are assembled to hear and benefit from the Dharma. This is a practice to be cultivated. Although we are only students, the subject of our presentations is the Dharma, so we listen with respect both for the Dharma and for the level of understanding that our student-presenters bring to their presentations. We cultivate deep listening and mindful speaking. The teachings below may offer you some helpful insights and inspiration!*

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Please **arrive early** for class so that you have enough time to find a seat and establish yourself in a peaceful state of mind.

Please **turn off your cell phone** or leave it in your car.

Please listen to the presentation with **an open mind and a receptive heart**. If we listen only with our intellect, comparing and judging what is said to what we already think we know or what we have heard others say, we may miss the chance to truly receive the message that is being transmitted.

**The Dharma is like rain.** Let it penetrate deeply into our consciousness, watering the seeds of wisdom and compassion that are already there. Absorb the talk openly, like the earth receiving a refreshing spring rain. The talk might be just the condition our tree needs to flower and bear the fruits of understanding and love.

Out of respect for the teachings and the presenter, we are asked to **sit calmly and quietly** on a chair or a cushion during the presentation. If we feel tired during the talk, we can mindfully shift our position and practice deep breathing and gently massage our head or legs or arms for one or two minutes to bring fresh oxygen to our brain and the areas of fatigue in our body.

Please **refrain from talking**, or making disturbing noises during the presentation. If it is absolutely necessary to leave the room during the presentation, please do so with a minimum of disturbance to others.

Adapted from Thich Nhat Hanh's Plum Village web site ([www.plumvillage.org](http://www.plumvillage.org))

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Listening is a lamp that dispels the darkness of ignorance.

Listening is the best wealth that cannot be stolen by thieves.

Listening is a weapon that destroys our enemy of confusion.

Listening is our best friend from whom we receive our best advice.

Listening is a relative or friend who remains loyal even when we are impoverished.

Listening is a harmless medicine that cures the disease of delusion.

Listening is the supreme opponent that destroys great faults.

Listening is the best treasure because it is the foundation of all fame and resources.

Listening is the best gift that we can offer our friends.

Listening is the best means of pleasing many people.

From *Stories of Rebirth*, by Aryasura

Vasubandhu, who wrote the text *Abhidharmakosha*, recited it every day. A pigeon, sitting on the roof above, was able to hear Vasubandhu reciting this. After the pigeon died, Vasubandhu checked with his psychic powers to see where this pigeon had been reborn and saw that it had been born as a human being to a family in the same area. He went down into the valley and, finding this child, asking the family whether he could have the child. The family offered the child to him and he took him back to his place. This child later became a monk named Acharya Sthiramati who wrote four commentaries on the *Abhidharmakosha* text that he had heard when he was a pigeon. Because that text was so easy for him to understand, he became learned in that subject and wrote four commentaries in that life. On the other hand, when he heard Madhyamika teachings, he found them hard to understand because he had not heard those teachings much in his past life. This shows how hearing the teachings of Buddha now makes a huge difference, even if we have not heard them in past lives. Even just hearing the teachings of Buddha – leave aside understanding them – makes a huge difference in our next lives. So that is a short story. From such stories, you can understand that by listening to Dharma, just by listening to the teachings of the Buddha, you can achieve a good rebirth in the next life.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche



If you wish to benefit yourself and others  
you should not be satisfied with what you have learnt.  
You should take as your example those Bodhisattvas on the third spiritual ground  
who are still not satisfied that they have heard enough.

Je Tsongkhapa to the First Panchen lama, in a dream



You should listen to Dharma with exceptional faith and respect, not seeing the Teacher as faulty or being displeased with him. When you listen to Dharma you should view the Teacher as Buddha.

Sutra on the Essence of Grounds

*Four reliances: that is,*

*reliance on the Dhamma not (merely) reliance on the person;*  
*reliance on the meaning not (merely) reliance on the phrasing;*  
*reliance on the suttas whose meaning is already drawn out not (merely) reliance*  
*on those suttas whose meaning is to be drawn out (interpreted);*  
*reliance on extraordinary-knowledge not (merely) reliance on (intellectual)*  
*discrimination.*

Four Reliances Sutra

In general, when listening to Dharma teachings, **we should give up the six obstacles of pride, lack of faith, lack of application, outer distraction, closed mindedness and depression.**

It is said that no water stays on the “point” of pride. If one approaches the teachings thinking that one knows more than the teacher, or that the teachings are too simple to be bothered with, or with the idea that one is already a very developed person and does not need such things then one will be unable to absorb any of the instructions given and will attain no benefit, because pride cuts one off from any outside influence.

Secondly, lack of faith also cuts one off from the benefit of the teachings. Without faith in the teachings one is receiving, one is unable to approach them properly.

Thirdly, even if one hears and understands the teachings, but has no intention of practicing them or of applying them, then the teachings are useless. Dharma teachings are not just something to be admired; they must be applied in order to free sentient beings from suffering.

If one becomes distracted when listening to the teachings by looking around and thinking of this or that and focusing on various things other than the teachings, one will not hear the teachings in the first place, and, again, the teachings will be useless. Similarly, if one becomes too absorbed in internal reveries, thus closing oneself off to outside influence when the teachings are being given then, once again, the teachings will be of no benefit.

Finally, if one becomes overly depressed or sad while the teachings are going on, one will just tend to get involved in these emotions and will not pay attention.

These six obstacles, commonly called the “six stains,” should be avoided when receiving Dharma teachings.

Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche



When we see the benefit of listening we gain more confidence in the Dhamma. We can never listen enough. Ariyans, those who have attained enlightenment, are called "those who have heard much" ; listening was for them the condition to develop understanding and even attain enlightenment. When we listen and consider the Dhamma *samma sati*, right mindfulness of the Eightfold Path, will arise when there are the right conditions for its arising.

From Listening to Dhamma, by Nina van Gorkom  
(<http://www.dhammastudy.com/listening.html>)



FOR FURTHER WONDERFUL TEACHINGS...

**Listening to Dhamma, two Dhamma talks by Bhante Gunaratana**  
[http://www.bhavanasociety.org/resource/listeningto\\_dhamma\\_part\\_1/](http://www.bhavanasociety.org/resource/listeningto_dhamma_part_1/)