

The Art of Cultivating the Mind

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Friday, 20 June 2014 17:06



How can you tell how cultured someone is? We can tell from how a person deals with his circumstances. If he loses his temper when things do not go the way he had wished for, it means his cultivation is not sufficient. He has to work harder on cultivating a gentle and broad mind, so that his actions and speech may be as soothing as the spring breeze.

If a person's mind is tainted by greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance, and doubt, this person cannot stay pure and diligent on the path of Buddhism. Cultivation is the art of properly repenting and cleansing the impurities in our minds. Actually, habitual tendencies and thoughts are intangible and invisible, so how do they taint our minds? If we can constantly remind ourselves to not be greedy, to not be angry, to not be egotistic, to not be arrogant, then we can maintain a heart of compassion and treat everyone with gentle love. If a heart is always filled with love so gentle and kind, how could it be tainted?

The essential key is how we cultivate this good habit, good thinking. If everyone can be mindful in each step-not overstepping rules or making mistakes-we will constantly learn to benefit the people and be in harmony with the others. Mutual love and respect is the cultivation of a good habit.

Being calculative and holding grudges is also a habit; it's a bad habit that we have to eliminate quickly. Some people say, this person is really nice, but this person just likes to hold grudges. This is a very apparent habitual attitude. We often hear about people like this: he has a good heart but has a bad temper or he gets impulsive very easily. Holding grudges and having a bad temper, what kind of impression does that leave? When you lose your temper, you ruin your image.

Fury is like fire

When one loses his temper, his thoughts are confused, his expression is ugly, and his words are violent. "Losing your temper is a momentary insanity." Many people have a habit of losing their temper easily. Whenever something does not go according to their wishes or when they misunderstand or misconstrue others' actions and speech, they create conflict with others.

Some will say, "it is inevitable that humans lose their temper! As long as we have a good heart, what is wrong with an occasional temper tantrum?" But if you have a good heart, why should you tarnish your own image?

In an ancient Chinese idiom, "Hair of fury rises to heaven," describes how the hair of an angry person is all pointed upwards. Like the chickens fighting, their feathers are sticking out upright. It is the same way when a person loses his temper. We can draw a sketch of a person, whose hair is sticking out, eyebrows are standing, eyes are wide open and staring, and his teeth baring. Is this a good look? Why should we make ourselves look so despicable? And when we

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lose our temper, we lose control of our actions and speech. It makes everything worse.

How can we tell how well cultivated a person is? We can tell from the way he deals with circumstances and issues that arise. So if we lose our temper when things go against our will, it means we are not cultivated enough. We must work harder to cultivate a gentle and broad heart, so that all of our speech and actions are as refreshing and soothing as the spring breeze.

A soft and modest heart allows us to treat everyone with a gentle voice and demeanor. There is one way that we can check if our heart is modest enough. When we made a mistake in our speech or action, can we readily say, "Sorry, that was my fault!" It is just a few simple words, but many find it hard to say them because they are not willing to confess their mistakes or they know that they are at fault but find it demeaning to apologize to other people. These attitudes accumulate and make us stubborn.

There is a saying: "a fury of ignorance will burn a forest of merits." I wish that all of you will mindfully cultivate a heart of kindness, strengthen your patience, and not let your work in cultivation be wasted in a moment of fury.

If you were keeping score or being greedy, and cannot hold in your temper, this complicate issues, it means you have not properly cared for your heart and mind. Cultivation is constantly reflecting and repenting immediately when you err. If we do not confess our mistakes, it is an even bigger mistake. When this habit accumulates, we will obstruct ourselves. So the path of cultivation is to mindfully care for your heart and be vigilant in your actions. All in all, everyone must be mindful in every second of every day!

Master Cheng Yen's teaching on July 9, 1998
*Excerpt from Master's Journal 1998 Fall

Translated by Hui Ying Chin
Edited by Dennis Lee