

Seizing the Present Moment

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[[Master's Teachings](#)] Time is something that I talk about frequently, especially in terms of how it just keeps on passing by, non-stop. The Buddha spoke about time in three periods: the past, the present, and the future.

Take the present moment as a reference point. A moment is essentially a very brief instant, such as the time it takes to snap our fingers. By the time we have completed the action of snapping our fingers, this present moment has already become the past. The future is the instant right after we snap our fingers. This example shows us how we are constantly experiencing the three periods. One moment after another, time passes by continuously; we ought to have this awareness.

The notion of three periods can also be applied to lifetimes: past lives, current life, and future lives. In this sense, time has a set frame: it begins with one's birth and ends with one's death. When our body dies, our current life ends. After that, we begin our future life. When we combine all our lives together, our existence actually goes on for eons. So, we can either look at time as a moment that is tiny, or an eon, which is immense.

I like to think of time in terms of the current moment. Regardless of the existence of past, present, and future, we can make a moment last forever when we hold on to the thought that arose at that moment. For instance, the moment I gave rise to the thought of relieving people's suffering led to the establishment of Tzu Chi 50 years ago. The existence of Tzu Chi at this moment is the continuation of that moment when it was established. The future of Tzu Chi hinges on its development at the present. We should ask ourselves, how we will shape Tzu Chi's future. The answer depends on the way we carry on Tzu Chi's spirit by engaging in spiritual cultivation.

In cultivating spiritually, we must cherish time and be precise about how we use it. As living bodhisattvas, we cultivate ourselves by seizing each and every moment to do good and by holding on to our initial aspiration. Since the world is filled with so much suffering, we have to sincerely pray for those who suffer and diligently learn the Buddha's teachings. The more teachings we have in our heart, the more ways we will have to deal with and help all the living beings in the world, despite how difficult some of them might be. This will also help us guide others toward kindness and inspire them to become living bodhisattvas. This is how we cherish and make good use of our time.

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks
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