

## The Cure for the Three Obstacles: Part III of the Repentance Series

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
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### [ [Master's Teachings](#) ]

**Editor's note:** *Deeply concerned about the state of our world today—a world facing the crises of climate change, environmental degradation, instability and unrest, and eroding of moral values—Dharma Master Cheng Yen has appealed to her followers to engage in the practice of repentance. Though the collective problems of today's world seem beyond the control of ordinary individuals, the Master tells us that each of us in fact contribute to the problem in many different ways; that is why we need to return to our own heart and mind, and deeply reflect.*

### [Part II](#)

*of the series provides important introductory information for this article.*

When our mind deviates from Right View, even slightly, we begin to create the three obstacles of affliction, unwholesome action, and karmic retribution. These obstruct our own spiritual growth. So, we have to take very good care of our heart and mind, to avoid giving rise to these three obstacles. But if we have already created them, how can we eliminate them? The Buddha provided a very wonderful teaching—practicing repentance.

Practicing repentance means to feel remorse for our wrongs, to acknowledge them, and to repent for them. If we did something wrong but have no remorse or even awareness of being wrong, we will continue to make the same mistake again and again. In life, there is no one who does not make mistakes or who does nothing wrong. If we repent, however, we can start anew.

Repentance cleanses us. In our daily life, when something gets dirty, we use water to clean it. Without water, we would not be able to clean away the dirt. To clean the impurities in our heart, however, we need the water of Dharma. The Dharma can cleanse the afflictions and ignorance in our mind; it can remove the source of the unwholesome actions which create negative karma.

Learning the Dharma enables us to eliminate the root cause of our negative karma. We need to take in the Dharma so deeply that it is in the marrow of our being. Normally, when we learn the Dharma, we do so only partially, with "leakages". For instance, we may be inspired by the Bodhisattva Way and engage in acts of kindness to help others, but we do not cultivate ourselves and work on transforming our unwholesome ways. This is an example of not fully taking in the Dharma and still having holes and leaks.

This is why we must genuinely work on our bad habits and unwholesome ways. To truly change and start anew, we will need to repent and clean our hearts. The way to do this is to openly acknowledge our faults and mistakes and sincerely repent. Having revealed our wrongdoing, we will be less prone to make the same mistake. If we cover up our wrongdoings and deny them, however, we will continue to make the same mistake again and again.

It is like when we have a splinter—we may not know we have it until we touch it and feel the

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pain. Having discovered the splinter, we need to quickly pull it out. It is the same when we discover our mistake or error. Instead of covering it up, which would be like leaving the splinter in our body, we need to openly acknowledge what we have done wrong. That is like pulling out the splinter. When we can openly repent, people will forgive us. It will also help us not to make the same mistake again; otherwise, we will easily fall back into our habitual wrong ways. This is the power of openly repenting, and why it is such an essential part of the practice.

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks  
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