



[[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. (The repentance practice is introduced [here](#) .)*

Our planet today is already in disequilibrium. Living in such circumstances, being vigilant and on guard is not enough; we need to be diligent in spiritual practice as well. What does it mean to be diligent? It means being wholeheartedly committed to the practice, without letting distractions or inner impurities arise and without turning away from our practice. We need to carefully look after our heart, so that it stays very clean and pure. This is difficult to achieve, however, because we often give rise to afflictions. When this happens, our mind very quickly turns into a petty, mundane mind.

It is these afflictions which cause us to lose touch with our true mind, our Buddha nature. In Buddhism, we say that the essence of the Buddha, living beings, and true mind are in fact of the same substance. We have the same capacity for enlightened understanding and insight as the Buddha; but with the arising of an unwholesome thought, we have tainted our mind. Our work now is to return to this pure, untainted true mind of enlightened wisdom.

Yet, we find that it is not easy to return to a pure mind, for our afflictions have become very entrenched. Since beginningless time, we have been engaging in wrong actions, which reinforce our greed and afflictions and cause them to grow. The impurities in our mind have been building up for an immeasurably long time. We say "beginningless time" because this duration of time is so long that it is incalculable. It is also hard to say when it began because for each person the starting point was different, for we each have different afflictions.

While we do not know when we began accumulating afflictions, we now have the opportunity to stop this pattern. We can do this by repenting from the bottom of our hearts. It isn't only the obvious wrongs that we must repent for; we also need to repent for even very subtle wrongs, such as the arising of an unwholesome thought.

For example, an unwholesome thought may have entered our mind the moment we saw someone. His or her actions may have caused anger to rise up in our hearts even though outwardly no one could tell we were angry. Yet, because an angry thought had arisen, we must quickly catch ourselves and repent. We shouldn't think that it doesn't matter because we didn't act on it. We still need to have feelings of repentance.

Examples of things to repent for

Attachment and greed

We need to repent for our attachments. We have greed and craving because of attachment. Our love of something has already created an attachment, so that we desire and crave it. Without it, we feel very unhappy. We can't let go and are compelled to seek it. Over time, this becomes a habit for us. What we desire could be fame, profit, or power. Looking about our world, we can see that so many problems and man-made calamities originate from greed. People fight for power, profit, and fame. This is why society is full of turmoil and without peace.

Instead of understanding the true meaning of life, we run after fame, profit, and power. This is because we are ignorant about life and don't understand the law of karma. We need to repent for such ignorance so that we don't continue in delusion. In truth, when we are fighting for personal gains, we are not happy. We also don't realize that the best kind of life is one in a peaceful and stable society, which is only possible if we work for the common good instead of our own self-interest. So, we confuse what creates a good life. This is all due to ignorance and we should sincerely repent.

Doubt and worldly cleverness

We need to repent for the five spiritual illnesses we have: greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance, and doubt. When we have doubt, we will question the existence of the Buddha, whether such a person really existed. We also won't believe in what the sages and saints teach. Because we don't believe in their wise teachings, we become deluded about life's principles and wander down the wrong path in life. Hence, we have to be very careful.

When learning Buddhism, we must be mindful to be pure in heart and mind. If our heart and mind are not pure, we would misinterpret the teachings. Instead of gaining wisdom, we would slip into a worldly mind. Then with our cleverness, we would make use of the teachings for our own ends, instead of truly learning the teaching and taking it to heart. For instance, we may preach to others while we ourselves don't follow the principles and instead, skirt the rules in order to gain profit or fame. We need to look out for such a state of mind and be careful not to fall into it. If we find ourselves doing this, we must quickly repent.

Stinginess

Stinginess is something we need to repent for. Sometimes in society we see people who are reluctant to donate to charity. They have the means to help others, but they do not do so. They have the capacity to do good, but instead of creating positive karma, they create negative karma in their pursuit of self-interest. What a pity this is. Such people will bring this negative karma into their future life and have to face its retribution.

Indulgence in sensory pleasures

Our indulgence in sensory pleasures is also something we need to repent for. All around us, we see people pursuing and relishing pleasure and comfort. When we see this, we need to reflect on ourselves. Are we doing the same? If yes, we are wasting away our precious life as we indulge in pleasure.

Inability to tolerate humiliation or defamation

In life, we may have unpleasant encounters where people defame us or humiliate us. When this happens, we need to look at it from the perspective of karma and realize that such negative circumstances are the result of our past negative karma. In such cases, we need to practice forbearance. If we react angrily, we will just create more negative karma. And, as we know, when people treat us badly and we retaliate, it does not help to resolve the situation. It only makes matters worse. If we can realize how karma works and learn to look at situations with such an understanding, we can develop the ability to tolerate humiliation and defamation.

Not understanding karmic affinities

Usually, when we encounter negative circumstances or have run-ins with people, we react by blaming others or feeling a lot of anger and resentment. Little do we realize that our current experiences come about as a result of our [karmic affinities](#).

In the past, due to various aspects of our personality, we have offended or hurt others, thus forming negative karmic affinities with them. These negative karmic affinities are the cause of the unpleasant situations we find ourselves in today. Since we were the ones that formed the negative karmic affinities in the first place, what we really need to do is reflect on ourselves and repent. Instead of blaming others for our bad experiences or troubles, we should look inward and strive to change ourselves.

This is the way to create a better future for ourselves. The circumstances we encounter were created in the past. Nevertheless, at the present moment, we have the chance to create new karma and gradually transform negative karmic affinities into positive ones. With this understanding, we can work on the parts of our personality that offend or hurt others, and by doing so, we can begin to heal relations with others and create better ones.

This all begins with repenting for our negative personality traits and habits. It is when we self-reflect, feel remorse, and sincerely repent that we become motivated to change.

Our attitude toward work

In today's society, most people have come to equate "the good life" with leisure, comfort, enjoying oneself and not having to work too hard. When I see this, it saddens me that people have lost touch with the true value of life. What gives our life meaning and value is being of service and making a positive contribution to our society.

When people work only because they must to support their livelihood, they find work very tiring. But for those who work in the spirit of contributing something good for others, working is a very happy thing. They understand the value of work and it naturally gives them a sense of purpose and fulfillment. These people "live to work" while those who work only to earn a living "work to live".

Thanks to our body, we can do many things. This is very precious. We need to make the most of this and use our body for meaningful purposes. Work is really about doing something constructive with our lives. If we only work to earn a living, however, we will just drag ourselves through each and every day. We should really reflect and see whether our mindset is one of

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"working to live" or "living to work". With just a change in our attitude toward work, we can discover great happiness.

Moved by the Eight Winds

In life, to do the right things, we need to have a calm, collected mind in order to clearly perceive what is right. Yet, in life, there are eight winds that can blow away our calmness and influence our mind. The eight winds are: gain, loss, disgrace, honor, praise, ridicule, suffering, and joy. When these eight winds come, we need to remain calm and unswayed. Otherwise, we may end up doing wrong things.

Reflections

In the course of our day to day life, we in fact do many wrong things, but if we can become aware of these and repent, there is great hope for us. We can start afresh and, in doing so, we create a better life for ourselves.

Living in this world, we interact with people every day. In these interactions, we need to be very mindful of our manner, attitude, tone of voice, gestures and actions. On the other hand, when on the receiving end of others' manner, attitude, tone of voice, etc., the practice is to keep a positive mind and a heart of simple goodness. With such a heart and mind, we will interpret things in a wholesome way and not react negatively or badly. It is important that we not to jump to conclusions or perceive things in a negative way.

When dealing with others, we also need to be tactful and considerate. We should try not to harm or hurt anyone in our dealings. All it takes to accomplish this is a change in our mindset.

We need to be very mindful in learning to repent for our unwholesome thoughts. To repent is to cleanse our heart, to clean away the impurities and leave only the essence behind. It's like extracting a diamond from diamond ore; we have to wash away the mud and other materials in the ore so that we can obtain the valuable diamond inside.

Similarly, we all have the Buddha nature in our heart. This Buddha nature is like the diamond in the rock. When we clean away our ignorance, the shiny, crystal clear Buddha nature will appear.

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