

## The Bodhisattva Practice of Patient Endurance

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
Friday, 13 April 2012 14:59

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Practicing the bodhisattva way, one of the most important qualities we need to nurture is patient endurance—the capacity to bear with unpleasant and trying circumstances. Patient endurance gives us the power to rise above difficult situations and overcome our inner afflictions rather than be overcome by them. Our world is filled with many different kinds of people; when trying to carry out a good cause, we will encounter both those who support us and those who will give us a hard time. If our patient endurance is not strong enough, we will not be able to move forward on our path, be it that of charitable work or spiritual cultivation. In our cultivation, the Buddha has given us the Six Paramitas to practice—giving, moral discipline, patient endurance, diligence, meditative concentration, and wisdom—and they are tools that will enable us to safely ride over the tumultuous waves of our afflictions. But if we have not developed patient endurance, it will actually be hard to practice the other paramitas. To truly practice giving and moral discipline, we will need the capacity to endure challenging conditions. To be diligent and have meditative concentration and wisdom, we will also need the stabilizing force that patient endurance provides us.

There is a very good example of this from our Tzu Chi relief effort for the Turkey earthquake in 1999. When we heard news that an earthquake of magnitude 7.6 on the Richter scale had struck Turkey, we promptly sent a relief mission to Turkey and solicited donations on the streets for the relief project. At the time, there were some among the public who felt strongly that Tzu Chi should concentrate its charitable work on Taiwan's needy and not divert its attention to disasters in other countries. When Tzu Chi volunteers went on the streets to solicit donations, they frequently met with verbal abuse.

There were people who angrily pounded on the donation box our volunteers were holding or lunged to grab the signs out of their hands. How did our volunteers face such people? They skillfully took a step back and made a respectful bow, just as if the people had dropped a donation in the box rather than hurled hateful words at them. The volunteers treated them with the same cordial and respectful attitude with which they treated others. Still with kind smiles on their faces, in a warm, gentle manner they bowed to the angry people and said, "Thank you." Their sincere and humble ways did not miraculously dissolve the people's anger, but it did help to defuse the volatile situation.

When our volunteers solicited funds on the streets, there were times when store owners came out and demanded that they go find someplace else to stand. The volunteers quickly apologized and moved elsewhere, their manner understanding and sincere. On one occasion, their ways moved a store owner who had witnessed this type of interaction and he quickly invited the group involved to come and stand outside his store, even setting up a beach umbrella so the volunteers could stay out of the sun. In this world, there are both generous people and people who will make things difficult for us.

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When I heard about what our volunteers encountered, I said to them, "I'm so sorry you had to endure so much in order to help me solicit donations." They told me, "No worries, Master, it is a wonderful chance for us to practice the bodhisattva spirit." I asked them, "You're not mad that you were treated so terribly?" They replied, "No, not at all. It's no big deal." They were able to face it lightheartedly because they saw it as just a matter of course when you're trying to do a good deed. They know that in this world, not everyone will agree with what you are doing. Some will support you, some will oppose you.

Indeed, to help others, we cannot be bogged down by the obstacles and difficulties we encounter; no matter how mean people are to us, we need to keep going. Otherwise, what will happen to the people who need our aid? If we think of what they are suffering, we won't have the heart to let them continue suffering. We can then put up with all kinds of bad treatment during the course of bringing aid. Keeping our minds on our goal, we won't be affected by how people treat us or be provoked into an altercation. We will become tolerant and understanding, and be able to face the people with a warm, humble, and respectful heart.

Is this not what our volunteers have done? They didn't become angry or react in a negative way when people threw verbal abuse their way. They were still able to be genuinely respectful, understanding and courteous, and they didn't have to consciously tell themselves to be forbearing. It was all very natural and easy for them to be so tolerant. This is patient endurance at its truest.

By being so tolerant, they simultaneously lived out the other five paramitas also. Giving—they continued to give of themselves to raise funds for the disaster relief. Moral discipline—they did not lose their kind, courteous, and respectful manner to retort with angry words. Diligence—they still stood on the street for hours in the rain or beating sun to solicit donations. Meditative concentration—they were unperturbed in the face of provocation; their minds remained steady, calm, and peacefully composed. Wisdom—their minds were not disturbed by their encounter because of their insight into human behavior, and they were able to deal with the situation skillfully.

In this way, developing the capacity to bear with unpleasant, trying situations is essential in our practice of the bodhisattva way. Though it is not easy, especially to be so patient that we do not even feel that we are exercising tolerance, it can be done, as Tzu Chi volunteers have shown us. We can all learn to practice as they do. In our everyday life and especially in the course of Tzu Chi's activities, we have ample opportunities to train ourselves in patient endurance. If we are earnest in our sincerity to practice the bodhisattva spirit, we can take everything as training and face all with a humble, respectful, and expansive heart. Then we can endure anything and everything, and with this strength, we will be able to do good for the world.

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks  
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