

How to Give, for the Person Who Has Nothing

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Friday, 15 March 2013 15:56



[[Master's Teachings](#)]

Editor's Introduction: People who live in poverty not only suffer the physical hardships of going without basic life necessities, but can also experience a sense of despair, feeling that there is nothing they can do to improve their lot. When they understand the law of karma, they know that to beget good fortune, they need to plant the seeds by doing good and creating good karma. But, how do they do this when they are so poor that they have nothing? In the following, [Dharma Master Cheng Yen](#) tells a story about a man who came to the Buddha with this very dilemma.

One day, back in the Buddha's time, a destitute person came to the Jeta Grove where the Buddha and his monastic community were practicing. Seeing one of the monks, the man prostrated himself and asked the monk if it might be possible for him to see the Buddha. "Is something the matter?" the monk asked him. "Yes, there is a grave matter I need to see the Buddha about. It is a life or death issue." This was serious indeed, so the monk quickly helped arrange a meeting.

When this destitute man was brought to the Buddha, he prostrated himself and said, "Buddha, I'm in so much suffering." With compassion, the Buddha asked him, "What is the suffering that you experience?"

The man replied, "I have been poor my entire life. I was born into a poor family and have known only hardship and deprivation all my life. I see people making offerings to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. They say that in order to reap blessings, we need to sow blessings, and that if we wish to become rich, we need to plant the seeds by practicing giving. But, I am destitute and have nothing. How am I to practice giving?"

The Buddha smiled compassionately at the man and told him, "You don't need to be rich to give. Giving doesn't require money. Even in poverty, with no material possessions to your name, you can still give."

"How is this possible? What is considered 'giving' then?" the man asked.

"Let me teach you seven ways you can give without needing any money at all," the Buddha replied.

"The first way you can give is to smile. When you see people, be amiable and smile. Don't bemoan your fate and wail about being poor and miserable. Life is hard for you, but when you complain, you are negative and bitter, and people will keep away from you because your attitude makes you unpleasant to be around. So, don't do that. When you see people, be friendly, warm, and amiable. That is the first way you can give."

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"Secondly, when you see people, always say nice things to them. No matter what they say to you, don't say anything unkind. Always say good things about others, both in front of them and when they are not around to hear you. Speaking kindly and positively is another way you can give."

"Thirdly, keep a good, kind, and charitable heart. Don't think negatively of the people you encounter. Instead, you should see everyone as a good, decent person who is nice and approachable. Also remember that you are a good, decent person too, so be friendly in reaching out to other people. That is another way you can give."

"Fourthly, you can give with your sight. If you encounter people who have poor eyesight, you can help point out the way to them and guide them in the right direction. With your healthy eyes, you can be of help to people who cannot see well."

"Fifthly, you can give your labor and physical strength. There are some people who are not so healthy and strong, so they cannot take on physically taxing work. When you see them needing help, be it moving something heavy or doing physically demanding work, you can go and help them or even do it for them. That is a kind of giving also."

"The next way you can give is to show people respect. We need to have respect towards all people. The elderly deserve our respect, but we should also treat people of other ages respectfully and courteously. This is the giving of respect."

"Lastly, you can give by offering people your love and care, such as by supporting and helping children and people who are poor or physically impaired. Living in this world, we should have love toward all people, and even toward all living creatures."

"These are all ways you can give, without needing to have any money or possessions," the Buddha told him.

"Giving is that simple? These all count as giving?" the man responded.

"Yes, these all count as giving. It's very simple, but will you do it?" the Buddha asked him.

"It is so easy, of course I'll do it. These are ways I can do good without needing any money at all. I think this is probably what I failed to do in my past lives, and what you've said has made me see my failings in this life. I've always complained about my lot, so I didn't care about other people or respect them in my heart. I don't think I've ever done a good thing for others or said a kind word either. Now I see why that is wrong and what I should do. I will practice the seven ways of giving that you have shown me," the man answered the Buddha.

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Having compassion for him, the Buddha opened the man's eyes to the fact that though poor, he can still give and sow the seeds of blessings. All he has to do is follow the Buddha's teaching, and he can give and make his life rich.

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Also, after giving the man this teaching, the Buddha specifically asked him, "It's very simple, but will you do it?" Each of the seven ways the Buddha described is so doable; the key is whether he decides to follow them through.

It is the same for us—the practice is very easy to carry out; it just depends on whether we've made up our mind to do it. As the Buddha showed the destitute man, there are many ways we can give, and they are all things we can do in our daily life. We don't need money, and anyone can do them. Most importantly, in giving, our lives become rich. It is possible for all of us to create a rich life, if we just do these simple things.

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks
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