

Guidance to Volunteers: The Strength to Rise Above All Obstacles

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Saturday, 24 August 2013 10:01



[[Master's Teachings](#)]

For the first time in six months, Dharma Master Cheng Yen's schedule finally allowed her to travel to different Tzu Chi offices around Taiwan to see the current work of Tzu Chi volunteers and talk with them in-depth to give guidance, encouragement, and direction. Though the volunteers normally keep up to date with her latest thoughts and direction by attending her daily Morning Volunteer Assembly via videoconferencing or by watching an excerpt of this daily talk on Da Ai TV's program, "Life Wisdom", this trip allowed Master a chance to speak more directly to them about her hopes for them as her disciples:

"Learning the Buddha's way, we need to be bodhisattvas working continually for the good of living beings, and take the Buddha's teachings deep into our hearts, so we can have Dharma in our heart and actions. That means living our lives with Dharma and having the heart of a Buddha."

"To mindfully cultivate ourselves, we have to seize every second to cultivate our mind and our actions. Each second is the one and only, and is not repeatable. This very second is when we must cultivate. Furthermore, each of our thoughts determines the course of our life. In an instant, a wholesome thought and a decision to walk the right path could set the course of our life."

"In my case, the decision to leave family life and pursue a different path was determined by the thought that flashed through my mind one day at the market as I took out money to pay for groceries—sometime before that, I had asked a Dharma Master, 'What kind of woman is the happiest?', to which she replied, 'Happiest is she who carries the shopping basket'. That day in the market, as coins fell from my purse and clinked as they hit the ground, I suddenly realized, 'They say the woman with the shopping basket is happiest because she holds the purse strings and has the power to make decisions on how money is spent in the home. But, to be a woman who toils away her entire life just for one family—I don't want a life like that. Why take care of just my own family? I should take care of all people in need and do things to benefit all the world.' In that second, that thought and decision set the course for my life. So, we should hurry and seize the present moment, and seize the flashing thought in our mind to make it the thought that changes our life from this moment on."

Master stressed to the volunteers:

"How many people can we influence, how many people's hearts can be purified so that our society can become more peaceful? This is our responsibility as Tzu Chi volunteers with the bodhisattva mission."

Regarding the difficulties the volunteers faced in inspiring people and guiding them, Master said:

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“What draws people toward the Buddha and makes them happily listen to and receive his teachings? In the sutras, it’s said that the Buddha has 32 attributes of beauty and dignity and eighty other fine physical characteristics that give him a distinctive appearance. Because of this beauty and dignity, when people see him, they like him and want to become his disciple and follow him. How did the Buddha come to attain such a wonderful appearance? The sutras say that one blessing is created by the doing of one hundred good deeds, and one hundred blessings in turn give rise to one attribute of beauty and dignity. Given this, how long do we need to cultivate to attain all 32 attributes and develop the kind of beauty and dignity that the Buddha has? It will require the doing of many, many good deeds, and only those done unconditionally with genuine sincerity count as good deeds.”

Going further, Master told them that to be able to lead others, one needs to have blessings as well as wisdom. “Blessings” encompass the merit from doing good, positive karma, and favorable karmic affinities with others. Master touched on how Tzu Chi work enables us to grow in blessings and wisdom if we have the right mindset, and how blessings and wisdom are relevant and important :

“In Tzu Chi, our cultivation is amongst people. By working to benefit people, we’re cultivating blessings. By learning to give of ourselves, we’re cultivating wisdom.”

“If we have a broad heart and a wholesome mind, we will naturally accumulate blessings as we do good and develop the kind of beauty and dignity that will make people happy to see us and wish to join us in our work. If we have wisdom, we’ll have no problem in guiding people and inspiring them to walk the path with us.”

After Master returned to Hualien, she reflected on what she had seen and heard on her trip and further clarified some concepts for Tzu Chi volunteers. She explained more about wisdom:

“Intelligence is not the same as wisdom. Wisdom is to be able to see everything clearly and not lose sight of what’s truly important when faced with difficult people or issues, so that people issues do not bog you down and you do not have unwholesome thoughts that blind you and take you off the right path. Because of that, you can approach everything without afflictions arising and deal with issues in a way that is wholesome, harmonious, and well-rounded, causing no conflict yet taking care of the matter appropriately as needed. That’s wisdom.”

Master also stressed the importance of holding on to our original aspiration and how that is in fact what will give us “protection” and strength:

“Though the world and people are so complicated, if we have the Dharma in our hearts and always hold to that pure heart we had in the moment we made our vow, in which we are very willing to give of ourselves, then whenever there are obstacles, we can find a way to rise above them. The real problem is when our aspiration to cultivate is not firm. Then we will easily have all sorts of bad thoughts and lose the pure heart of wanting to cultivate that we originally had.”

“That’s all because we didn’t protect this pure heart—as I keep saying, one thought can set the course of our entire lives and one tiny wrong thought can take us off the right track, so we must

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hold to our aspiration and pure heart with our every thought. Then, we won't so easily get affected by all sorts of situations and lose our aspiration to cultivate and serve as a bodhisattva."

"Cultivation takes place amongst people. The Buddha's ultimate purpose in teaching us and what he truly wanted to tell us is that we should go amongst people to help them. Only then will we start to see all the Dharma that is everywhere. That's because the true, profound lessons of life are ours to learn as we interact with people."

In all the different meetings she has with Tzu Chi volunteers, Master always reminds them to never forget the original aspiration they had in joining Tzu Chi and never lose that heart. With that aspiration always in mind, they can navigate any difficult path and gain wisdom from every experience.

Master reminds us that by diligently learning the Dharma, taking it to heart and living it out by changing how we act and behave, we will be able to protect our heart of aspiration.

Written by the Jing Si Abode English Editorial Team
Based on Dharma Master Cheng Yen's conversations with volunteers in Chinese