

An Open Heart, Liberated From Suffering

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

On the path of Buddhist practice, our ultimate goal is to attain Buddhahood. Yet the Buddha tells us that to become a Buddha, we must first journey upon the Bodhisattva Path. If we do not walk the Bodhisattva Path, our hearts will always remain very different from that of a Buddha. It is therefore important to learn to serve as a bodhisattva.

As we set out to practice bodhisattva ways, our mind must first be turned toward the mission to relieve others of suffering. Such a mindset and internal orientation is of foremost importance.

Living beings experience many different kinds of suffering. There is the suffering due to external conditions, such as the suffering that comes with poverty, disaster, or illness. Yet, there is also psychological suffering, which arises as we react to what we see, hear, sense or feel in our day to day life. All of these can cause us to suffer.

But while we try to help others out of suffering, do we not also experience the same suffering ourselves? If we have not yet learned the way to rise above our suffering, how then can we help others to do so?

In our lives, the conditions that cause suffering are often things that we can do little to change. How then can we liberate ourselves from our suffering? The key lies in the internal processes that enable us to rise above suffering. It takes a kind of transformation of perspective, mindset, or heart. This in fact is at the heart of spiritual cultivation, growth, and awakening.

For example, the conditions of our life often cannot be changed. The people around us may have habits and personalities that create problems for us or cause us pain and difficulty. The affairs we must deal with in daily life are not things we can escape from or alter. But most often, the reason these people and issues bother us is due to our own personality and our ways of seeing or thinking. We all have the Buddha nature within us, and this true nature is one of great compassion, love, and tenderness. But over the course of time, we have developed a personality or ego that is very willful and set in its ways. That is why we are so displeased by certain things or react in the way we do. In fact, with our hardened personality, we hurt others; at the same time, we also hurt ourselves. The practice is to tame this willful personality and to gradually touch our true nature, our Buddha nature. When we understand to practice in this way, we will begin to see everything and everyone around us as chances for us to practice and as opportunities for spiritual growth. Then, a sense of gratitude will fill our hearts and we will approach everything in a whole different way.

As we gradually overcome our willful personality and touch our Buddha nature full of love, tenderness, and compassion, we become more effective and capable of helping others. Because we are more open, people will find us more pleasant and will be more willing to take the words we say to heart. That is why we must first tame our own willful selves if we are to help

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others to open their hearts and untie their inner knots and afflictions. It is in this spirit that the Buddha was also referred to as "The Tamer".

Helping others out of their suffering therefore requires that we first help ourselves out of our own suffering by taming the willful part of ourselves that in fact creates our suffering. This is an essential aspect of walking the Bodhisattva Path. When we understand this and practice so, we will embrace everything as an opportunity for our spiritual training.

Compiled into English by the Jing Si Abode English Editorial Team