

The Joy of Being Content

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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In life, we have a lot of afflictions, and we would like to get rid of them. But how do we get rid of our afflictions? We can get rid of them by being content. Contentment will lead us to spiritual richness.

If we are content, we'll be satisfied and happy with what we have. When people have a lot of desires, even if they should possess the whole world, they still won't feel they have enough.

I know a businessperson who is very successful; he had expanded his business abroad. Once he came to visit me. I asked him, "Your business is already very successful, why don't you spare some time to do charity work and help people in need? Besides donating money, you can personally participate in caring for the poor and experience the joy of helping people." He replied, "But my staff want me to invest more money in the business so that it will expand." I told him, "Desire is a limitless thing. If you keep on expanding the business, there will never be an end." He finally told me that he was too deeply involved at that time; things were beyond his control, and it was too late to turn back.

Out of the desire to accumulate wealth, he expanded his business. Because of this, he has to work very hard to meet his responsibilities; he has many things to manage and worry about. He has to face considerable psychological stress as he worries about whether things will go smoothly. All of this brings many afflictions and burdens onto himself. If he understood the impermanent nature of life, and realized material wealth is only temporary, he would not overly pursue wealth and would become content with what he already has.

Take a look at our recycling volunteers. Some of them live a simple life, yet they are very happy. One of our recycling volunteers has a home so small that she has to set up her kitchen in a narrow alleyway outside her home. She has put a counter and a gas stove outside, next to her window. Directly across the alley from the stove, there's a rack where she keeps her kitchen utensils. She has arranged a makeshift cover over this 'kitchen' to shield it from the rain. To make a meal, she has to squeeze herself into this tiny space. She says, "Although my kitchen is very small, at least I have a place to cook and have food to eat. Compared to poor people who have no house to live in, I'm very satisfied with what I have." See how content and at peace she is.

The Buddhist sutras tell us that people with many desires suffer much because they are constantly seeking self-benefit and gain. Those with few desires will not suffer like this. When we give rise to desire, we act in order to seek things, such as wealth, fame, and delicious food. When we cannot get what we want, afflictions arise and we suffer. We might get into arguments with people over what we want. We might tire ourselves out scheming to get what we want. Our efforts to fulfill our desires bring us much affliction.

If we want to get rid of our afflictions, we have to know their source—our desires. When we reduce our desires, our mind can be at peace, like the travelling monks of the past who lived a

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very simple life. In the ancient times, Buddhist monastics would travel around the country visiting various temples to learn the Dharma. Their clothing and an alms bowl were all they would carry with them. That was all they needed to make their journey. That was how at ease and free they were.

When we already have life's basic necessities, we should beware of getting tempted by desires. The more we pursue our desires, the more afflictions we'll bring onto ourselves. With fewer desires, we would be able to sleep soundly at night without any worries. Our heart would be at peace.

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks
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