

Becoming a Disciple

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Monday, 30 January 2012 09:54



[[Master's Teachings](#)]

Editor's Introduction: In September 2011, medical personnel of different nationalities and ethnicities gathered from around the world for the annual conference of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association held in Hualien. Despite being of a different religion, a number of them expressed the wish to become a disciple of Dharma Master Cheng Yen. In a simple ceremony, called the Taking Refuge ceremony in Buddhism, Master accepted them as her disciples and explained to them her concept of religion and its true spirit, and how to live it out by walking the Tzu Chi path.

In Tzu Chi, we embrace people of all religions, for all religions teach love. When we have a correct understanding of the teachings of our religion, our hearts will be very broad and full of love for others, and we will know that living in this world, we need to love and care for one another.

Different religions may use different terms to speak about love; the essence of the spirit is the same. In Tzu Chi, we speak of "Da Ai" or "Great Love", which is love that is very big—all-embracing and without boundaries. This love is the spirit of religion.

Religion teaches us about life's direction and purpose. In Tzu Chi, we learn to use our lives for wholesome purposes, to be of benefit to humanity. As Buddhists or religious practitioners in Tzu Chi, we not only learn about Buddhism, but also continually learn how to truly be of benefit to humanity. This learning is never-ending.

Though members of Tzu Chi come from all religious backgrounds, we share a common purpose—to serve humanity with Great Love. Our goal is to truly relieve people's suffering, and for this, we give of ourselves without asking for anything in return.

Tzu Chi's Buddhist Origins

Tzu Chi comes from the Buddhist tradition, from Buddhist wisdom. This wisdom originated from Shakyamuni Buddha (Buddha means "Enlightened One" in Sanskrit), an enlightened person who lived over 2,500 years ago. His insight penetrated universal truths and the laws and principles governing life in this world.

The Buddha told us that we and all living creatures of the world are the same in essence. Though living creatures take different physical forms, the life in all of them is sacred. When people kill them, animals feel fear and pain just like you and me. We need to love them and respect their life, just as we love and respect our own. That is why in Buddhism we promote vegetarianism. Knowing that we human beings do not have to eat meat in order to sustain our lives, and that we can be healthy living off of the crops Mother Nature provides for us, we do not wish to inflict pain on other living creatures or take their lives. The spirit of love for all life motivates us to abstain from eating meat by practicing vegetarianism.

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Besides having love for our fellow creatures, we also need to love Mother Nature and Mother Earth. Our wellbeing is intimately connected to the wellbeing of Mother Earth. That is why in Tzu Chi we try to lead a simpler life that uses less of the Earth's resources. We strive not to be wasteful, to live frugally in a way that protects the environment. We know we need to take good care of Mother Earth, for her fate and ours are intertwined.

This kind of love and insight is what the Buddha teaches us.

Insight into Universal Laws

With his wisdom, the Buddha also explained to us that everything—be it the material things of this world, the human body, or the mind—is undergoing constant change; never permanent, fixed, or in stasis. All matter goes through phases of formation and growth, followed by deterioration and eventual destruction. The human body also goes through similar phases in the form of birth, aging, illness, and death. The mind is likewise ever-changing as thoughts constantly arise, abide, change, and disappear. This change is the reality underlying all things.

This principle can be explored on a very subtle, deep, and profound level, but the Buddha also explained to us very simply that this means we need to cherish the material resources we have, instead of wasting them as if there were no limit to their abundance.

He also taught us that as life is impermanent, we need to recognize what is life's true value and make the most of our lives for the good of others.

As for the mind, he guided us to understand that our thoughts determine our actions, so the thoughts in our mind can have tremendous ramifications. If we can have love in our hearts to respect and care for our fellow human beings as well as Mother Nature, then we can preserve Nature's equilibrium. Only when Nature is in balance can all living on Earth truly be safe and well.

Taking Refuge in the Three Treasures

In Buddhism, when we vow to become a Buddhist, we take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, which are called the Three Treasures.

Taking refuge in the Buddha is to believe in the enlightened understanding of the Buddha and vow to learn from him.

Taking refuge in the Dharma is to believe in the truth of the principles that the Buddha taught. The Buddha's teachings explore many truths of life, but if we should misinterpret these teachings, we can fall into superstition and end up with distorted views and beliefs. One way we can prevent this is by practicing love for others—giving of ourselves to relieve suffering and benefit all living beings. This is what the Buddha teaches us to do and it keeps us on the right track. As we learn more of the Dharma, we need to always look into our hearts and see if our

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hearts are becoming more open, broad, and loving. If not, our understanding of the Buddha's teaching is probably not correct.

Taking refuge in the Sangha is to follow the guidance of Buddhist monastics who continue the Buddha's legacy and show people how to walk on the path of enlightenment that the Buddha taught.

In taking refuge in the Three Treasures, we are bringing our hearts back to a state of goodness and we vow to change our bad habits. For instance, we may have a bad temper and easily become angry at others. From the moment of taking refuge onwards, we need to change and learn to become a better person.

Becoming a Disciple

If you wish to become my disciple, please emulate the heart of a Buddha and take my mission as your own mission.

I am a disciple of the Buddha and I strive to have the same heart as the Buddha—a heart of great compassion and selfless love. In becoming my disciple, I hope all of you will strive to have this kind of heart also, and to emulate the Buddha's spirit and have selfless Great Love.

Please also keep a very pure and upright heart, grounded in sincerity, integrity, good faith, and honesty. Do not seek fame, wealth, or self-gain. Be sincere towards others and do things with integrity and righteousness. This is the spirit we need to have in learning the Buddha's teachings and practicing them in our daily lives.

I also hope that in becoming my disciple, you will take my mission as your own mission. My mission is to share the wonderful wisdom of the Buddha with the world, so that people everywhere may walk together on the path of enlightenment.

At the same time, I hope you can help me to care for people who are in need. Wherever you live, if there are people suffering, please work to relieve their suffering.

May you walk this path and grow in wisdom and blessings. My sincere best wishes to you.

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks
Compiled into English by the Jing Si Abode English Editorial Team