

## Bringing Out Our Potential: The Bull with One Horn

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

Each and every one of us has the great potential to attain enlightenment. Yet, people are easily influenced by their surroundings. At times, they aspire to help others, but when they encounter obstacles, they lose faith in themselves and give up on their goal. Hence, they don't make progress in their spiritual cultivation. If we always have faith in ourselves, utilize our potential, and persist in walking the Bodhisattva Path, we can take care of our heart and remain firmly on track. Our potential comes from having faith in ourselves. And with this faith comes strength for cultivation.

The Buddha once told this story: There was a farmer living in a small village. He had a cow that gave birth to a calf which later grew up with only one horn. Having always thought this calf was very precious, he did not mind its missing horn. He doted on it by caring for it affectionately, feeding it personally, bathing it daily, and speaking to it softly.

As the farmer talked to the calf like a human being, the calf began to understand him and could even converse with him too. It soon grew to be a strong bull and harbored deep gratitude to the farmer.

In a nearby village, there was another farmer who also owned a bull and was very proud of its strength. One day, he came to the village and proudly announced, "I have a very strong bull which can pull 100 carts at one go." Upon hearing this, the bull with one horn felt it could achieve the same feat.

The farmer from the nearby village continued, "I challenge everyone here. If your bull wins, I'll give you 1,000 taels of gold!"

The bull with one horn thought to itself, "I want to win this bet as a way of reciprocating the kindness my owner has shown to me. Besides, I want to test my strength too."

Thus, it went to the farmer and said, "There's a farmer outside boasting about his bull. I have a lot of strength! Have faith in me and tell that farmer I will compete with his bull." Having faith in his bull, the farmer announced his decision to take up the challenge.

On the day of the contest, everyone from both villages went to watch. Both bulls were brought onto the field. The farmer from the nearby village again told everyone how very strong his bull was and about its ability to pull 100 carts. The owner of the one-horn bull, however, told everyone that his bull was born with the abnormality of having only one horn.

The bull with one horn began to feel inferior and no longer thought it could win. Having been loved by the farmer, it had never paid attention to its single horn. Yet, upon hearing its owner commenting on its deformity, it lost confidence and the will to compete.

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When the contest began, the other bull showed great strength by successfully pulling 100 carts. Next, it was the turn of the bull with one horn, who could not move the carts at all. Hence the farmer lost 1,000 taels of gold and was very upset.

The bull then said, "I'm very sorry, master. But I was hurt by your words when you pointed out to everyone that I have only one horn. I lost my confidence completely."

"But you're very strong," said the farmer.

"Yes! That's why I thought I would win. Master, if you go and challenge that farmer for another round, I will win back the gold. I hope that before the contest you'll praise me," answered the bull.

Having restored the faith in his bull, the farmer arranged for another challenge, this time betting 2,000 taels of gold. The contest was held in the same spot and again drew the attention of everyone from both villages.

Before the contest started, the farmer praised his one-horn bull by listing out its good qualities. Motivated by his words, the bull managed to pull 102 carts faster than the other bull, hence winning his master 2,000 taels of gold.

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The Buddha said that the essence of the heart, the Buddha, and living beings are the same. By constantly reminding and encouraging ourselves to stay focused on spiritual cultivation, we will strengthen the faith we have in ourselves and keep on bringing out our potential. Eventually, we'll be able to attain enlightenment just like the Buddha.

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks

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