

To Emulate the Buddha is to Cherish Time

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

People often say, “I should have...”, “I could have...”, or “I would have...” to express their sense of regret. By the time those thoughts are formed, it is already too late as we cannot go back in time for a do-over, just as it is too late to repair a boat in the middle of the lake. Before sailing, the boat needs to be mended, repaired, and maintained regularly. Likewise, we must be mindful in choosing what we do with our time, cherish each day, and live our life to the fullest. There is a simple story to illustrate this in the Agama Sutra.

One day at the Buddha’s abode in Rajagriha, the Buddha reminded his disciples that everything is impermanent, and like the passing of one second, impermanence comes fast and cannot be stopped.

“Don’t count on being young and healthy; we may be young and healthy now, but that is impermanent; time will keep passing. When we think we are young and healthy, we are not in a hurry to cultivate, and as we begin to procrastinate, we lose both precious time and opportunities to develop our wisdom-life. We have to let go of such thinking by cultivating diligently toward liberation.”

As the Buddha talked about the principle of liberation, Papiyan the Demon began to grow worried, for he considered all the unenlightened beings in the Three Realms to be his offspring. Papiyan planned to disrupt the Buddha’s teaching by transforming himself into a young scholar who was interested in the Buddha’s Dharma, and he joined the Sangha to listen to the Buddha’s Dharma talk.

After the Buddha finished talking about seizing each minute for cultivation, the young scholar got up and proclaimed: “The day and the night will always be there, because right after the night comes the day, and after the day passes comes nightfall. Daytime and nighttime will forever remain, and life also remains. All of us are still young and healthy, and we are all alive.”

Upon hearing the young scholar’s remarks, the Buddha knew this was the demon coming to create trouble, so he responded, “We lose part of our life with the passing of each day and night. Life is full of suffering, especially in old age. All young people will become old one day, and he who is alive will experience sufferings. Life goes by truly fast, and you, Papiyan the Demon, must stop using your false words to confuse others!”

Papiyan heard the Buddha calling him out so directly that he felt very regretful and afraid, and disappeared.

This story from the sutra shows that the Buddha never misses a moment to teach his disciples about impermanence. If we, like the young scholar, think that we are educated, young, and in good health, we might easily grow to believe we have plenty of time on our hands. That is why

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we must be vigilant about being mindful every moment of our life, and never leave things for tomorrow. For tomorrow is a word packed with such hope that it sounds like we will always have time then, but in fact, the time tomorrow belongs to tomorrow, and time wasted is truly lost forever. That is why we mustn't procrastinate.

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks
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