



### [ [Master's Teachings](#) ]

**Editor's note:** *Dharma Master Cheng Yen, with her deep compassion, keeps up to date with what is happening in the world every day, and the trend she is observing---environmental damage leading to climate change and more frequent, stronger disasters, the eroding of moral values, increasing violence, instability and unrest worldwide, etc.---greatly worries her. Drawing upon Buddhist wisdom, she has now asked her followers to engage in the practice of repentance and to deepen their practice of Buddhist principles in daily life through reflection and repentance. She has stressed that the Buddhist teachings are not abstract theories, but concrete and applicable principles that are medicine for our times. To Tzu Chi volunteers engaged in humanitarian works, she has emphasized that while they are doing good for the community, the inner work of purifying their hearts and minds is even more vital, for everything begins from the heart and mind. Our thoughts determine our actions, and our actions create the world we live in. Below is the first teaching in a series, drawn from Dharma Master Cheng Yen's talks to Tzu Chi volunteers about the practice of repentance.*

Looking around our world, we see so much chaos, unrest, misery and suffering. Why? The Buddha, with his enlightened wisdom, tells us that it is because living beings' hearts are full of impurities such as greed, hatred, and delusion. Yet the Buddha also says that all living beings have the Buddha nature—the capacity for the same enlightened understanding, wisdom, and insight as a Buddha.

In the stillness of a dark starry night, just before the breaking of dawn, Shakyamuni Buddha attained Enlightenment under a bodhi tree—penetrating all the laws governing the universe. But the great truth that the Buddha awakened to is that all living beings possess this same capacity for enlightenment. In fact, such awakening is living beings' true nature. It is our truest, most natural, and original state.

Yet, why is it that we remain our mundane selves and cannot have the Buddha's wisdom and enlightened understanding? It is because since beginningless time, we have accumulated many inner impurities. Our mind is like a mirror; the impurities like dust covering over the mirror. Under this layer of dust, the mirror can no longer reflect objects clearly. Our inner mirror, due to the inner impurities clouding it, can no longer show us life's true principles. As a result, we confuse right and wrong and do improper things, creating negative karma.

Each action we take has its impact on our community, our society, and our world, and this impact is cumulative. Together, the actions of every one of us have collective impact and bring about collective consequences—this is "collective karma". Our damage to the environment is an example of this—our activities have already brought about climate change which has upset Nature's balance and is causing many disasters. Meanwhile, moral values and ethics in society at large are also becoming eroded. It is not just one individual; the values of our entire society are changing, disintegrating. Looking mindfully, we can see the reality of this. Collectively, we

## Our World, Our Heart and Our Buddha Nature: Introducing the Repentance Practice

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have already built up a lot of negative collective karma.

What can we do to reverse this? We need to return to the source of what is causing it—our heart—and carefully reflect on our behavior. We need to wake up and change what we are doing. This is what I mean when I call on everyone to repent. Repenting is to recognize our errors and vow to do differently. Repentance cleanses our heart and mind, cleaning our inner mirror so that it can become clear and bright. Repenting and starting anew is the only way that we can turn around our current pattern of creating negative karma.

I often say that the Dharma is like water that can clean our hearts of impurities; practicing repentance is to use this water to clean our hearts and minds. This starts with learning the Dharma. Then, we must reflect on ourselves and work on our unwholesome habits and tendencies. Just saying "I repent" isn't enough—truly repenting and living the practice means changing our ways. When we truly repent, we open our hearts towards others and approach situations with greater love, understanding, tolerance, and forgiveness.

If we don't work on our unwholesome habits, we will continue to make mistakes and accumulate more impurities in our hearts, making it more and more difficult for us to awaken and return to our true enlightened nature, our Buddha nature.

In daily life, we should take care not to let the mirror of our mind accumulate any more dust. We need to realize the ways we create negative karma through our actions, our words, and our thoughts, and take better care of the actions of our body, speech and mind. If we can practice in this way, reflecting on ourselves and living out the principles of the Dharma, we will experience a great sense of spiritual joy, peace, and inner freedom. As the Buddha told us, the Buddha nature—the nature of awakening—is our true nature. We can begin to recover this true nature through practicing repentance.

It is my heartfelt wish that all people can begin practicing repentance. As we start to transform ourselves, we can begin to transform our world. With the planetary emergency we face, it is most urgent that we practice. Though humankind has already built up a lot of negative collective karma, if we can understand the law of karma and truly practice repentance to purify our hearts and minds, we can begin to turn things around.

*Times of crisis call for great awakening  
Alarming catastrophes necessitate great compassion  
Deluded times have need of great insight  
Chaos and disorder compel deep reflection  
In these momentous times, only repentance can change the tide\**

\*verses from the collection "Dharma as Water: Great Repentance", composed in Chinese by Wang Tuan-cheng based on Dharma Master Cheng Yen's teachings

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks  
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