

The Spiritual Food of Dharma

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Thursday, 24 February 2011 10:32



[[Master's Teachings](#)]

Every day we take in food to sustain our body. But while our physical body needs nourishment, so too does our soul. The "food" for our soul is Dharma. With Dharma, we grow in insight and wisdom and our soul becomes more awakened. While we have a physical life, spiritually we have what is called "wisdom-life". Most ordinary people focus on physical well-being, but for the sage what is most important is nourishing wisdom-life.

Dharma is the spiritual food that can enable our wisdom-life to grow. When we listen to the Dharma with mindfulness, spiritual joy will fill our hearts. This joy is very nourishing. When we keep the Dharma always in our hearts, we are watering the roots of wisdom, helping them to grow deeper.

Taking in the spiritual food of Dharma, we also gradually develop the ability to endure all things. The conditions of nature, for example, are things we need to learn to endure. The changing seasons bring differing weather, at times unbearably hot or freezing cold. Learning to peacefully adjust to these conditions and endure them is part of our practice.

The ability to endure is also important when interacting with people. For where there are people, there will be people issues arising due to personalities and differences in views. Gossip, disagreements, and even conflicts often happen. These can cause afflictions in us. If we have understanding of the Dharma, however, our minds will not become afflicted and we can patiently transcend all these difficulties. Eventually, we can even reach a state where we can peacefully endure everything without feeling that we are enduring anything at all.

This ability to endure things, be it nature's elements or human interactions, is very important. If our capacity to endure is not strong, we will likely give up on our cultivation when we encounter obstacles and challenges. However, this capacity will grow as we learn, reflect on, and practice the Dharma.

Spending time to learn the Dharma also enables us to develop insight, and with insight we will act in a more pure and wholesome way. When we do so, we naturally give off a sense of virtue which is like a wonderful fragrance. Because of this fragrance, when people encounter us, they will feel joy and their hearts will open to us. They will be more receptive to our words and be able to find benefit in them. Therefore, as our practice transforms and purifies us from within, we manifest this in our conduct. This fragrance of virtue arises naturally as the fruit of our practice.

Learning, reflecting on, and practicing the Dharma is the way to help our wisdom-life grow. Wisdom-life is eternal, unlike the physical life that lasts for only one lifetime. That is why the sage sees nourishing wisdom-life as more important than nourishing one's physical body. As we live our day to day life, we must not forget to take in the spiritual food of Dharma.

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks

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Compiled into English by the Jing Si Abode English Editorial Team