

Cherishing the Opportunity to Learn the Dharma

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

We're very blessed for being able to learn Buddhism. Nevertheless, because we often do not realize this we don't really cherish having the opportunity to learn the Buddha's teachings.

Dharma can help us understand ourselves better, what habits we have, how we conduct ourselves, and the manner of our speech. When we learn the Buddha's teachings, we'll come to know what habits are good and what habits are bad, what kind of conduct is better, and how we should talk to others. Following the teachings can help us improve ourselves.

Yet when an opportunity comes for us to listen to Dharma talks or read Dharma books, we often let the opportunity slip by as we may feel that we already know the teachings because we have read or heard them before. It seems there is nothing new; therefore, we don't make the effort to learn the Dharma.

In fact, having the opportunity to learn the Buddha's teachings and cultivate ourselves is very precious. We have to overcome many difficulties in order to do this. The sutras tell us of six difficulties.

The first and foremost difficulty is being born as a human being. There are five realms that living beings can be born into: the human realm, the heaven realm, the hell realm, the hungry ghost realm, and the animal realm. Among the five realms, only the conditions in the human realm are suitable for cultivation. If we are born in the realm of heaven, it would be hard for us to focus on learning the Dharma. Because heaven is a place full of happiness and joy, we would lose ourselves in pleasure. Moreover, once our blessings are used up, we would face the danger of falling into the lower realms of animals, hungry ghosts, or hell. Should we be born in hell, we would undergo a lot of suffering. If we are born as an animal or a hungry ghost, life in those realms would also be difficult, with little chance of us coming in contact with the Buddha's teachings.

The second difficulty is for us to encounter the Dharma. There are close to 7 billion people in this world, not all of whom are Buddhists. There are various religions that people can practice, and among those who know about Buddhism only a small number of people actually take the Dharma seriously and want to learn more about it. So, if we really think about it, the chance of us learning Buddhism is quite small.

The third difficulty is having six healthy sense organs. Now that we have the human body, we also need eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and brain. Without functioning ears, we won't be able to hear Dharma talks. Without a healthy brain, we won't be able to process and understand Buddhist teachings. It is because we have healthy sense organs that we are able to learn the Dharma.

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Another difficulty is being with the Sangha or Buddhist monastics. When we aspire to learn the Dharma, we'll want to be close to the Sangha. The Sangha can guide us, help us think in a wholesome way, give us the right perspective on life, and help us strengthen our faith in the Buddha's teachings.

The fifth difficulty is developing true faith in the Dharma. In life, we all have a tendency to get caught up in pursuing a career, and in seeking wealth or fame. In the course of doing this we may do things that harm others, thereby forming bad relations with people. Some people even use their knowledge to do bad things for personal gain and profit. Others are unable to get rid of their afflictions despite their advanced educations and accumulated knowledge. As a result, we do wrong things and bring a lot of sufferings onto ourselves. The Buddha's teachings, however, can help us develop wisdom, help us get rid of our afflictions, help us be altruistic, and help us to understand the meaning and value of life so that we may walk on the right path.

Lastly, there is the difficulty of finding wholesome friends. We need good and upright people around to encourage us to cultivate and better ourselves. They can serve as an example for us. Their good conduct, character, and temperament can teach us a lot about life's values.

We are very fortunate to have overcome all six of these difficulties. We are all human beings, have encountered the Dharma, have come to know the Sangha, have healthy bodies, and faith in the Dharma. For members of Tzu Chi, all the Tzu Chi volunteers are our wholesome friends. It is a very precious thing for these good karmic conditions to have come together.

Therefore, when the opportunity arises for us to learn the Dharma, we should remember all of the difficulties that we have already overcome and really cherish the condition.

It's very important that we form the habit of listening to Dharma talks and reading Dharma books in our daily life. It can help us reinforce the impact of the teachings. Because we are very forgetful, we often do not remember the Dharma for long. Dharma is like the morning dew. It is there in the morning, but when the sun comes out the dew evaporates and disappears. Our mind is like this. With our mind in contact with the Dharma, we'll remember the teachings; out of contact, we tend to forget them, just like the evaporation of the dew. This is why we need to learn the Dharma every day to remind ourselves of the Buddha's teachings so that we can apply them to our daily life and transform our habits. So, even if it is a teaching that we have read or heard before, we must not grow tired of reading or hearing the same Dharma over and over again. We should continue to read and listen to the teachings until spiritual joy arises from our heart and we develop a longing for the Dharma, for then it will enter our heart and help us transform our unwholesome habits.

It is important that we seize our chance in this lifetime to learn the Dharma as diligently as we can. With the understanding of Dharma, we will learn to do good deeds and better ourselves. Then we can be reborn as humans, reencounter the Dharma, continue our cultivation, and eventually liberate ourselves from suffering.

※ [Wholesome Friends](#)

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