

The Self-challenges and Inner-cultivation of a Bodhisattva

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

It's not easy to be a bodhisattva; this is because it takes a lot of self-cultivation to nurture the spirit of the Four Immeasurables: loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity.

When we vow to walk on the bodhisattva path and be a bodhisattva, we vow to cultivate a heart of loving-kindness. What is loving-kindness? Loving-kindness is the spirit of working for the benefits and wellbeing of all humanity in this world. We learn to reach out to total strangers and help them in their need. We learn to pray for the wellbeing of all people and actively do good deeds. This is how we nurture loving-kindness. When challenges appear, we must strengthen our vow, always keep the welfare of living beings in our heart, and not get discouraged in the bodhisattva work. This is the loving-kindness that we need to cultivate.

The second of the Four Immeasurables that we need to nurture is compassion. To cultivate compassion, we need to develop empathy and tolerance, and to form good affinities with others. To help the people in need, we should be able to feel whatever pain and suffering they're going through. When our loved ones fall ill or are in trouble, we will naturally try to do all we can to help them as we can feel their suffering and see their distress. Similarly, when we're helping the poor, ill, or those in hardship, we should imagine them as our own family members, and feel their pain and suffering just as if they are our loved ones. By taking their pain and suffering into our heart, we develop empathy.

To carry out acts of compassion, we need to nurture tolerance. If we are to carry out the Bodhisattva work of helping people, we cannot do it alone; we need other people to join us to make this possible. Yet, people have all sorts of personalities and different views. Some are even difficult to work with. How are we supposed to work with them to accomplish the work? We need to develop tolerance. For example, when someone raises their voice in speaking to us, instead of getting mad, we should learn to be understanding and perceive things in a positive way, "He's speaking loudly to me because he's concerned that I might not catch what he's saying if he speaks too softly. It takes a lot of energy to talk, and he's willing to spend his energy talking to me, I should be grateful for this." By being understanding, we broaden our heart and become more accepting.

When someone has an attitude and is unfriendly to us, we need to be kinder to them. They seem unfriendly because they don't have a smile on their face. Don't hold this against them. Instead we should return them a smile so that we can form good affinities with them. To help people in need, we need many people to join our effort. Therefore, we need to form good affinities with as many people as possible. Since we're aspiring to be a bodhisattva, we should constantly remind ourselves to be loving and compassionate.

The third of the Four Immeasurables that we need to develop is joy. A bodhisattva needs to nurture a heart of joy every day. We shouldn't lose our bodhisattva aspiration and get ourselves

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afflicted or angry due to the bad attitude or bad habits of one or two persons. We need to keep ourselves cheerful. To accomplish our bodhisattva work, we need many people to happily join our cause. Thus, we need to learn to interact and deal with all kinds people in a joyful way.

Moreover, in walking the bodhisattva path, there are bound to be challenges. We should expect challenges and be ready to tackle them. Part of our cultivation is to overcome difficulties, so how to face them with joy is something we need to learn. Traveling this bodhisattva path, everyone we encounter is like a living sutra for us to learn. Some people will give us an easy lesson while others will give us a hard one. No matter what kind of lessons they give us, they'll help us grow in wisdom-life. So, let us accept challenges and difficulties with joy. With joy in our heart, we'll be less affected by worries and afflictions, and we can keep our mind at peace.

The last of the Four Immeasurables that we need to nurture is equanimity in serving people. We often talk about helping people unconditionally, without asking for anything in return. We do this for people who are poor, for those in suffering, and for those in need. We help people who are strangers to us, and we feel grateful to them for giving us the opportunity to serve and nurture our compassion. But, what about those who are close to us, such as our family members and our fellow Tzu Chi volunteers? We pay more attention and give more love to the people in need than our families and our fellow Tzu Chi volunteers. We need to reflect on the love we give to others and learn to treat everyone equally. To give with equanimity is to give our love equally and impartially to all, whether they are the poor, the suffering, our loved ones, or our friends.

As a bodhisattva, the spirit of the Four Immeasurables - loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity - is something we need to cultivate in our heart every day of our life. If we can do this, we'll be able to bring these spirits into our environment and to the people around us.

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks
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