

How to Cultivate Ourselves

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

When members of the Buddhist Japanese humanitarian organization Rissho Kosei Kai visited Tzu Chi and met Dharma Master Cheng Yen, a young woman in the group spoke about how, while she was visiting, she was struck by the way Tzu Chi volunteers all aspire to have the same spirit as their teacher, [Dharma Master Cheng Yen](#). This had inspired her to make the resolution to cultivate herself and aspire to the same spirit as the founder of her organization, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano. However, she could foresee this would not be easy for her because her personality is rather strong-willed and stubborn. Therefore, she asked the Master for her advice on how one can cultivate oneself and stay committed to self-cultivation.

With kindness and understanding, the Master replied to the young woman:

"What you describe as your personality is really a kind of habit which built up over time to become the way you usually are. Actually, the Buddha has told us that in truth, every person has the same potential for the kind of boundless compassion and wisdom that the Buddha has. What keeps us from actualizing these is just our habits.

Our habits are such that when we want to change for the better, and even though we sincerely want to, in the heat of the moment, our habit will resurface and we won't act the way we'd promised ourselves to act.

Or it could happen that there is a habit we want to change. It's actually not hard to change it. But, due to the thoughts and feelings we have, we cannot do it. The great obstacle is in our mind. It is due to the way we think about it. If we can change our way of thinking just a little bit, everything will be very easy.

It is possible to train ourselves and work on overcoming our habits. Ultimately, only we ourselves can turn our minds around and change our way of thinking to remove the obstacle.

Many Tzu Chi volunteers also go through this. For the majority of them, what starts them in changing themselves is helping people in need. When they do that, they see firsthand the kind of life that other people lead. Seeing others' hardships, they naturally start to reflect on their own life conditions and think more deeply about life. As they do this, they can begin to let go of some of their attachments. When people remove their obstacles and open their hearts, they will be capable of all kinds of selfless deeds.

In Tzu Chi, volunteers are united in a common mission: to emulate the Buddha's spirit and take on my mission as their own. Because of their karmic affinities with me, they understand my mission. So when there is a good cause I want to carry forward, they will understand and embrace it, working together to accomplish it. Also, they sincerely believe the Buddha's teaching that everyone has the Buddha nature and can have the same heart as the Buddha.

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Because of this, they will work on changing their state of mind and developing the same kind of love and compassion that the Buddha has. This is the common heart and mission that gives them great strength."

Written by the Jing Si Abode English Editorial Team
Based on Dharma Master Cheng Yen's talks and conversations with visitors