

Confucius Teaching on Building A Happy Life (2)

- a foundation for Mahayana Buddhism practice

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How do we avoid regrets in life?

Hello my friends! Only when we have good judgment, can we then make the right decisions. Is one born with good judgment? No, one can only develop good judgment to make right decisions by learning. The ability to make judgments rests on one's common sense and wisdom. Without rationality and wisdom, he is most likely to do things out of impulse. When being impulsive, he would regret afterwards. You see, regrets always happen after one makes wrong judgments and decisions. When do we need to be sensible? When? How long does it take to learn to be sensible? As a saying goes, "We live and learn." However, in order to make the right life decisions, one has to learn to be sensible, the earlier the better.

Where does one's sense come from? Many people nowadays read a lot, are they sensible? There is a type of illness called 'depression'. Many depressed people read a lot. Yet, the more they read, the more... [Audience replied](#), depressed they become. How do you know? Therefore, in this modern era, even choosing what to read, we also need judgment. In this information explosion age, many children have read the wrong books. There was a child only 5 or 6 years old, who used to ask his Mom for a baby brother. After reading a psychology book, he told his mother, you must not have another child, for you would love me less. Is reading a good thing? [Audience](#): No good. Please do not tell people, "Teacher Tsai said reading is no good." We must complete the concept: Only by reading the right materials then it is beneficial. Reading the wrong materials will contaminate your mind.

How long will it take to clear one's mind once it's contaminated?

My friends, a cup of clear water only needs one second to allow a drop of ink to permeate it. But how many seconds will it take to recover its original clear state? How many seconds? Probably 10 times or even 100 times longer. Similarly, if a child's mind is contaminated, it will take us more time to cleanse it. I sometimes chatted with my colleagues and often heard comments like, "Some talk shows are so funny that I laughed so much and almost fell on the ground." I would tell them, "Those hosts were probing other's privacy and making a joke out of it. Do you think they are right?" They said, "Of course not." But you found it amusing and laughed so hard. While you laughed, your son who was next to you laughed with you. Did he know if it is right or wrong? He would think, it must be right since my dad thinks it is funny. Instilled by what he has seen and heard, a child would have frivolous speech to others and tend to take advantage of others. When you realized that he spoke with no manners, it would be too tiring to correct him. Watching TV is like this, so is reading.

Is material reward effective for educating children?

Recently, a bestselling book named *Rich Dad Poor Dad*, Some of you must have read it. A parent came to me with great joy after reading it. She said to me, "This book is really effective, it made my lazy daughter diligent instantly." Isn't this 'miracle drug' effective? Really effective! She said to her daughter, "Daughter, if you help me mop the floor, I will give you 2RMB. And I will give you 2RMB for hanging clothes, 3RMB for washing dishes." Her daughter used to be very listless. Suddenly she becomes energetic and is not afraid of hard work. Isn't it effective? Miracle drugs are usually very effective. For example: Flu with running nose. It takes only a short time to see the effect after taking medicine or being given a shot. Isn't it effective? People today love miracle drugs. Thus, it is easy to fall into the trap of a con artist. For instance, a couple, having a bad relationship for ten or twenty years, would believe that their relationship will improve after doing something instructed by him. People are eager to take some miracle pills, without considering "three feet of ice does not result from one day's chill". Are they sensible? This parent came to me again after a week or two. She did not look good. She said, "Teacher Tsai, something is wrong." I asked her, "What's wrong?" She said, "I told my daughter that I am tired today, please help hang the clothes out, Mom will give you 2 RMB. She said to me: Today I am tired too, I do not want to make money today." She raised her vigilance instantly and thinking that this miracle pill has revealed its side effect. Dear parents, Is the family a place to talk about self-interest? No! You have brought 'utilitarianism' into the most peaceful and warm place. ([*Utilitarianism is a theory that promotes actions to maximize happiness for most affected individuals. Its consequences may vary.](#)) Family is a place to teach giving, gratitude as well as to recognize duty and to fulfill filial piety.

Are you betting the future happiness of your children?

We must possess sensible judgment in order to prevent improper knowledge from polluting our children's minds. Okay, let's take a look again! What kind of books and teachings can truly build a sensible mind? Let's investigate further: If a psychologist wrote a book at 40 years old and wrote another book at 60 years old, which book would you read, my friends? His work of 60 years old? Why? More experienced! Well, there are good experiences and bad experiences. Should we learn if it is a bad experience? Many friends might say, probably he gained more wisdom by his sixties. We must contemplate, this statement contains an uncertain word 'probably'. Is it true that the longer you live, the wiser you get? Not necessarily. Since society is like a big dyeing vat, are people purer in their twenties or forties? Is a pure or sophisticated mind closer to wisdom? Many things cannot be approached with an ambiguous attitude. You must be very clear in order to bet correctly. You cannot relive your life if you place the wrong bet. So, we must be rigorously cautious. If you only think that he may be right, you are making your life bet on him. Even betting the future happiness of your children based on his words, it is too dangerous! We must not easily believe in someone's words before it is testified as wisdom, as the Truth.

Filial piety transcends time and space

The Chinese culture, which has been corroborated by human beings for thousands of years, is indeed a genuine Truth. And the wisdom of Chinese sages transcends time and space. Let's take a look, Four, five thousand years ago, people needed to fulfill their filial duties; Five thousand years later, do we need to be filial? Yes. You see, it transcends time. Chinese

need filial piety, what about other countries? What would people of other countries feel when they hear of the education of filial piety? “People at birth are innately good.” They will be very joyful upon hearing it. We held a **Dizigui** class in Australia. Since our culture stresses on etiquette, the guests are seated in the front rows. Many sentences in **Dizihui** were written based on the ancients’ virtuous actions, such as ‘We should always greet parents in the morning and make sure they rest well at night’, Emperor Wen of Zhou Dynasty (B.C.E.1213-1117) had fulfilled it; ‘In the winter, I will keep my parents warm, in the summer I will keep them cool’, this was implemented by Huang Hsiang of the Eastern Han Dynasty (A.D.25-220). We would tirelessly elaborate on these stories during the class. From the back seats, we could see those Australians keep nodding. We were quite curious and wondered ‘what they were thinking of while nodding?’ After class, we sat down and had an informal conversation with them. These Australian friends said, “Humans should act like this.” Therefore, filial piety transcends both time and space. During our short life span, only such Truth is worthy for us to pursue and to delve into.

Can we predict if one will have a happy life or not?

When being genuinely rational, we can then make the right decisions. My friends, among all decisions, one of them is most important: To choose your thoughts, your perspectives. At this moment, what is your state of thought? Why is one’s thinking so important? Because your thoughts dictate your behavior, behavior forms your habits, habits shape your personality and personality determines your destiny. With this logic, what reveals to us whether one will have a happy life or not? His thinking. I often asked my friends, Are you a descendant of Emperors Yan and Huang (*B.C.E. 2717-2599 [united tribes and started Chinese civilization](#))? How come no answers? My dear friends, do you know that you are right in front of the ancestral shrine of all Chinese clans now? They are waiting for your answers and about to shed their tears. Are you the descendants of Emperors Yan and Huang? Yes. Good! Even so, if a child is brought up in America, with both parents Chinese, when he grows up, we can guarantee that his lineage is pure Chinese. What about his thinking? Okay! Is thinking or lineage more important? Lineage will not affect your life, while thinking will affect your every word and action. That’s why we must stress substance over form.

If the world is like a piece of farmland, what can we do when it has grown crooked crops?

Let us do some examination now, is our thinking like the descendants of Emperors Yan and Huang, or others? My friends, do you have an answer yet? In today’s society, frequent conflicts are observed among people. Are there conflicts between parents and children? Yes, many cases can be seen in the news, conflicts between parents and children, between siblings... Many courthouses are getting bigger and bigger. Why? Because conflicts have increased so much, the divorce rate alone has climbed rapidly, that they can hardly be processed in the old facilities. Not only the conflicts among people, we also see conflicts between groups. We have seen many groups attacking and criticizing each other. What about conflicts between nations? If we did not see wars when watching news, we would be so relieved. There are wars almost everyday. My friends, these conflicts are effects, we sigh over these effects everyday, will it help? It will not help. If the world is like a

piece of farmland, now it has grown crooked crops; should you lash out and curse at those crops? Would the crops grow better by your curses? Not only would they not grow better, but might die at once. Those who are awakened fear the causes, which means they will find out the cause; while deluded ones would only fear effects. When we worry about if we will be healthy or if our children will be filial or not, worry this and that, it would not help at all. We must find the root cause of the conflicts between people and those between countries. Only by working on the root cause can we then solve its problems. The root cause of all is our thinking.

What are people's thinking in general nowadays?

Nowadays our thinking in general is self-centered. When being self-centered, who do you think of first? Yourself. So, you compete with others and do things that seemingly benefit yourself but harm others. What will competition escalate into? Fights. Fights escalate into wars, and wars escalate into the end of the world. When we see wars, can we tell them 'Stop killing each other'? Can it be resolved by telling them? Why are there wars? What is the root cause? Because people's thinking and attitude will extend into behaviors.

What is self-centered? Some people may not understand it. Let me explain it in a more direct way. It is selfish. My friends, if you have a piece of very fine chocolate, whom would you think of first? We have mentioned the importance of honesty and credibility, tell me, whom would you think of first? I received three answers in one of my classes. A young man in his thirties sitting in the front row said, "Eat it immediately." Isn't he honest? A lady in her forties sitting two rows behind the young man said, "Save it for my children." An elder in his sixties sitting at the back said, "Let parents have it first." Which one has more cultural upbringing? Which one? The person in his thirties, forties, or sixties? The sixties? But the sixties may be illiterate. The thirties may be a college graduate. A highly educated person does not mean that he has a cultural upbringing. It does not dictate that he knows how to conduct himself properly.

I often ask children, "Is a college graduate cultured?" They immediately say, "Yes". I ask again, "Is one cultured if being unfilial?" They say, "No". "Is an unfilial college graduate cultured?" They do not know how to answer. Is one's cultural upbringing righteous or not? It is often revealed from his one thought. The first thought of the thirties is himself, that is selfish. The forties thought of her children, is it right? Today, many people may answer in excitement, "Right!" If traveling back 200 years ago, you must not say something like that. People would laugh at you and think that you have no wisdom. When you let your children have good things first, you have demonstrated to them a wrong role model. Who would they think is the most important? "I am the most important!" You are nurturing their selfishness. But, if we gave this chocolate to the children's grandparents, they would be deeply moved when seeing their grandparents' smiles. You have planted the seed in him to be a proper child.

What kind of life is worse than death?

Let's contemplate from this case: A selfish person cannot be considered as the descendants of Emperors Yan and Huang. Selfishness is mostly the consequence of capitalism and

utilitarianism. My friends, what is the percentage of those who have been influenced? Well, this number is still on the increase. Should we let the number grow? If it keeps growing, the conflicts will keep increasing. Will the conflicts stop? No! So, what would be the root resolution? People's thinking! We often think, "Wars will not happen to me, I probably won't see the end of the world either." What is the end of the world to many people? It probably is when the Earth is destroyed by a few nuclear bombs. In fact, living a life that is worse than death would probably be more miserable than the end of the world. What kind of life is worse than death? Have you ever had this kind of experience? It looks like you haven't. Well, you all are very fortunate. Some parents with children carrying on misdeeds outside would live in fear and worry; that is a life far more miserable than death. When morality has degenerated, that is truly the end of the world.

In Sichuan, China, a thirteen year old child cooked a meal for his father. His father died after eating the meal. A postmortem was not conducted since the family is poor. After a while, his mother also died after he cooked her a meal. He buried his mother with his father. When he went to the tomb for a commemoration, he appeared very impatient and threw the offerings in the garbage after the ritual. His aunt felt goosebumps all over her body. She wondered why this child had not even the slightest respect to his parents. This child went to the aunt and asked, "Didn't my parents have life insurance?" Upon hearing this, his aunt was alarmed and reported it to the police at once. The police investigation showed that he indeed killed his parents. Why did he do it? For the insurance payout! It was a mere 10,000 RMB, not much, yet two lives were taken. These were not ordinary lives but his very own parents. Why did he want the insurance benefit? To buy a cell phone.

We would have known how to prevent it only if we knew the principle of cause and effect.

Dear friends, is the power of desire strong? Very strong! Desire makes one lose his mind. The difference between teaching children to increase their desires versus virtues are huge. If we teach our children to be filial and to fulfill their own duty, they will regard studying as their responsibility so as to assure their parents. This is nurturing their virtues. If you said to him, "If you achieve top three in class, I'll buy you McDonald's. If you achieve top three in junior high school, I'll buy you a digital camera and if you pass the college entrance exam, I'll buy you a computer." When we lead children in this way, we are breeding their desires. They only think of desires instead of seeing their own duty.

A child told his parents after passing the high school entrance exam, "Dad, Mom, you should buy me some designer clothes." His parents were very puzzled and asked, "Why?" He said, "Because I have saved you a lot of money by passing this exam." He thought that he contributed greatly by passing this exam, so his parents would not need to spend a fortune to buy him a high school pass and that they should reward him with some designer clothes. After hearing this, his parents shook their heads just like many of you. We would have known how to prevent it if we knew the principle of cause and effect. Why do children have this kind of attitude? Because we use material rewards to teach and to interact with them. They will become selfish after learning to be materialistic.

How did Emperor Shun harmonize his family, further bringing peace to the nation?

If we do not want to see moral demise, we should start the actions from ourselves. Many people may think it is useless no matter how much effort I pay since society has degenerated nowadays. Would this kind of thinking help your family or society? It would not. Is this thinking sensible? Not sensible. We must not underestimate our own power. One's sincerity and genuine virtues can awaken the true nature of those around him. In ancient times, Emperor Shun (*about B.C.E.2128-2025, his mother died, father remarried) was a well-cultivated filial child. He did his best to uphold filial piety even though his parents were very fierce to him. For he knew well that 'when parents do not love me, my filial piety is then sacred.' Our relationship with parents is not a business transaction. We must not respond with the same attitude as theirs just because they yelled at me today. We should remember parents' grace of raising us and think of paying it back at all times. We must not expect our parents to be good to us because filial piety is our duty. Due to his righteous and filial attitude, Emperor Shun transformed his entire family.

The reason he could harmonize his family was because he cultivated virtues in himself. Due to his virtues, people of his neighborhood and associates were all deeply moved and were willing to follow and emulate him, even hoped to live under his governance. He had brought harmony to his family, and further, governed a state. At that time, Emperor Yao was also deeply moved. He believed his people would be happy if leaving his country in the hands of a person like Shun. Therefore, Emperor Shun had brought peace to the whole country. So when we genuinely cultivate physically and mentally, it will be a great influence on our families and society.

There are two national jewels in Singapore. One is the former Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew. and the other is a 106-year-old lady, Teresa Hsu Chih. She is very loving to others and filial to parents. She alone looks after almost 30 elderly people who are 20 or 30 years younger than her. Her genuine love has moved not only the Singaporeans but countless people around the world. You see, it is not that difficult to contribute to society and the world. All we need is to improve the cultivation of our virtues.

Is Confucius the ancestor of Chinese, Japanese, or Korean?

Our ancestors taught us: The rise and fall of the world rests upon each of us. This attitude is very important. If more and more people adopt this attitude, the world will start to transform. Where do we start? In the 1970s, a British historian, Arnold J. Toynbee once stated, to solve the social problems of the 21st century, only the doctrines of Confucius, Mencius, and Mahayana Buddhism will work. This statement makes great sense. It was not said by a Chinese person. Allow me to ask, "Where can we find the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius?" In China! Are you sure? China was indeed a land of etiquette. However, where do we see people greet each other with 90 degree bows today? Japan? How come the answer has changed? In Korea! That's why I really worry about one thing. Probably in fifty years, there will be a litigation case at the International Court of Justice: Is Confucius the ancestor of Korean or Chinese people? What would the result be? The judge might say, "We must emphasize on substance over form." Let's take a look at who actually practices Confucian

teachings, Korean or Chinese? We would have a tearless grief by then. Confucius said, “To know shame is akin to courage.” We must cherish such great ancestors and their teachings. We must transform ourselves.

Why do Doctrines of Confucius, Mencius, and Mahayana Buddhism solve the problems of the 21st century”?

Why did Professor Toynbee make such a statement? In 1988, 75 Nobel Prize laureates issued a joint declaration in Paris, which stated: In order for human beings of the 21st century to survive, we must travel back 2000 years and learn the wisdom of Confucius. My friends, what are the backgrounds of these Nobel Prize laureates? They are the top achievers of each profession. Why did they declare in unison that to solve the social problems of the future, we must rely on the doctrines of Confucius & Mencius? In fact, we will come up with an answer when we calm our minds. Let’s analyze it. What is the core of Confucianism? Benevolence. What is the core of Mahayana Buddhism? Compassion. Benevolence and compassion. As a matter of fact, sages of the West had also given the solution. What did God and Jesus teach? Universal love. Since sages have taught us, why are we still suffering from bad consequences? As a proverb goes, “Disadvantage will fall upon us if we do not heed the elders’ (*ancients’) advice. When our thinking returns to that of sage teachings, things will get better.

When we embrace benevolence in our heart, we will help each other, and a Great-Concord-World will be realized if we further love each other. A Great-Concord-World is not something for hanging up high on the wall. Let’s think about it, if one truly embraces filial piety in his heart, will he respect other people’s parents? He will. In *The Classic of Filial Piety*, it mentions ‘To teach filial piety is to teach one to respect all parents of the world’. When one is taught and practices genuine filial piety, he will respect all parents of the world. Think about it, if you have a filial heart, would you remain seated when an elderly lady gets on the bus? Would you? You would get up right away and think that she is an elder, somebody’s parent, and has worked hard for her whole life, I should let her sit. When spotting an elder crossing a dangerous road, you would spontaneously help him. Embracing filial piety and benevolence in heart, one will naturally help and love others. When everyone regards cultivating virtues as a duty, a harmonious society will be realized gradually. Whether we will live in an apocalyptic world or a Great-Concord-World seems to be very complex, but if we do a comprehensive examination to find out its evolution and cause & effect, we will realize that the root cause simply lies on the ‘one thought’ of our minds.

Why do many youngsters ruin their credits before entering society?

Nowadays, people often talk about career planning. My friends, how do you manage your life? How would you like your children to manage their lives? When a child is selfish and focuses on materialistic pleasure, what kind of life is he establishing? Let’s analyze it. He would be very happy to have whatever he wants like toys, food... because following children’s personalities has become the social norm. My friends, what personality of theirs are you following when you do so? The problem is that it is human nature to love leisure and hate work. As the saying goes, “With no education, there would be anomalies.” Many bad karmic habits will then arise. Chinese ancients have deep insight towards this issue and

place importance on not fostering children's bad habits when educating them. If a child is extravagant, lazy, and disrespectful, will he manage his life well? He will not. Once these bad habits have formed, it is very difficult to bring him back to the right track. As a saying goes, "It is easy to change from a thrifty life to an extravagant one but vice versa, that is difficult." If we give our children whatever they want for the sake of giving them a happy childhood, wait until they get used to spending money, it will be very difficult for them to change.

Many people in their teens and twenties have not yet started working, yet they spend money faster than those who make money. How many credit cards do they have? I don't have experience on this. Can you give me some information? Many cards! They simply apply for more once exceeding a credit limit. In the past, Chinese people regarded having debts as very shameful. But young people today spend money by all means without thinking of consequences. Many youngsters have ruined their credit before entering society. Once getting used to extravagance, one will become a.....**Audience:** slave to materials. How do you know? Really wise! So his goal of making money is neither for fulfilling filial duty to his parents nor taking care of his wife and children; it is for satisfying his own materialistic desires.

How do we help our children plan their career?

In reality, how much money do we need for food and clothing in one day? Is it a lot? Not much! Yet, once contaminated by the extravagant habits, one will not be able to resist the temptations. Under the pressure of returning debt, he must work hard and defeat others. He may harm others at work to benefit himself. He sees everyone as his opponent or even enemy and feels like he lives on a battlefield. What would happen in his old age? We all envy the good welfare of the elderly in the West very much, but we must understand, those elderly, though free from the worry of materials, lack in spiritual life. When their children come to visit them and bring them many days of joy, they would tell other residents, "My son has not forgotten me." This kind of joy really saddens us. From the Chinese perspective, when should we enjoy our fortune? Senior age. If one's life as a senior is so lacking in spirit, that is not a happy life.

Okay! What kind of career planning is the correct one? Let's see, if a child embraces benevolence in his heart, he is cultivating and accumulating his fortune. So, we must guide children to cultivate and accumulate fortune from a young age; create fortune in their adulthood with their virtues and wisdom; and only enjoy fortune in their senior age. This is truly a blessed life. Let's take a look again, why is a young child able to cultivate fortune? Don't underestimate the young children and think, "How can they cultivate fortune?" Well, as the saying goes, "The field of fortune is cultivated by the mind." When a child is very considerate, thinks of others in his every thought, his heart has cultivated a great field of fortune for his whole life. With such an attitude, he will surely contribute what he learns to the society. He is creating fortune which he will definitely enjoy in his senior age. Okay, this is it for today, thank you everyone.