

# Confucius Teachings On Building A Happy Life (23)

## - a foundation for Mahayana Buddhism practice

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### The Etiquette of Proper Personal Grooming

Good morning my friends! Yesterday we stopped at this phrase: "I will always walk with a composed bearing and stand with an upright stance; I will always give a deep bow to show my reverent salute. Do not step on doorsills, or lean on one leg; do not sit with legs apart, and do not rock legs while sitting down."

"Stand with an upright stance." Let's review a little. For ladies, you can stand like this. Your right hand can be placed on top of your left hand. You can lower your hands a bit if you're wearing a skirt; if you're wearing pants, you can slightly raise your hands. This is for ladies. You can also stand straight like this and let your arms hang naturally at your side. Anyway, our movements must look elegant. Men must have the spirit of a great man. Feet should be shoulder-width apart. Face forward. This is the standing posture for men.

Yesterday, we demonstrated sitting and said that our ancestors have taught us to "Stand like the pine trees, lie down like a bow, walk like the wind, and sit like a clock." Yesterday, I first showed you the sitting position for ladies: legs together, right hand placed on top of left hand, both hands placed on the left lap. This is the sitting posture for ladies.

Today, we'll demonstrate the sitting posture for men. Men can sit with both legs slightly apart and place both hands naturally on one's lap. My friends, are you familiar with this pose? Who posed like this in the family photo thirty years ago? This is the posture of a father. It is very dignified. When I was giving a lecture in Shantou, I sat like this but the photographer kept asking me to put my feet together. I didn't know what to do, and slowly put my feet closer together, but not too close. When men sit like this how do you feel? They would seem petty in demeanor. Alright, this is the sitting posture for men.

While sitting, we must also pay attention to some details, mentioned in this phrase: "Do not step on doorsills or lean on one leg; do not sit with legs apart, and do not rock legs while sitting down." "Do not step on doorsills" implies that whether we're standing or sitting, we must not step on things. For example, in ancient times if you stepped on a doorsill, your posture would be unsightly and people would think that you were very frivolous. Moreover, what would happen if you stepped on it repeatedly over time? It would break easily! So, this is also an attitude of cherishing things.

Nowadays, while sitting on a chair, many children would step on the crossbars of the chair or table. This must be promptly corrected. Like in our classics class, the students seem to be sitting properly, but when we look under the table, we see all sorts of strange poses. While reciting *Dizigui*, some were swinging their legs, or stepping on the chair's or table's crossbars. Sometimes a student's chair would suddenly collapse halfway through class. Why did this happen? He had stepped on and broke the chair's crossbar. We have to quickly rectify many children's behaviors, only then will they naturally develop good habits. If they've already made it a habit to step on things while sitting, you have to tirelessly remind them.

"Do not lean on one leg" means standing askew or leaning on something; either posture is bad. When even his stance is so frivolous, would you dare to let him handle important tasks? Surely when one is so negligent in small matters, it's impossible that one would suddenly become very prudent in big matters. As the saying goes, "Don't stop doing the good deed just because it is insignificant; don't commit the bad deed just because it is small." a person's ability to do big things is nurtured from small things, and his bad behaviors are attributed to neglecting the details of everyday life.

Next, "Do not sit with legs apart." In the text, the wicker scoop with a wide opening signifies one's improper sitting posture. We must not sit with our legs sprawled out just like a wicker scoop with its wide opening. I'm not going to demonstrate this. When you sit with two legs wide open, it will look very inelegant. If ladies were to sit like this, they would invite criticism from others; it's not good when others gossip about us. "Do not rock legs while sitting down" means shaking the legs when one sits down. Some people not only rock their legs horizontally but also vertically. We used to join a meeting where some of the managers next to us kept shaking their legs from the beginning to the end until we felt a little dizzy. If during a class, the person in front of you does the same, you may feel very uncomfortable. This habit must be changed.

Why do people behave like this? Why must a person rock his legs while talking? How is his inner state? Restless! When his mind is unsettled, he is actually merely coping with you when talking to you. Many things are important, such as his children's education or the relationship with his wife, yet he has not been able to solve them and they are always on his mind; when facing the work that needs to be done everyday, he thus cannot fully concentrate on the tasks at the present moment. Feeling anxious, he would start rocking his body.

It's true that people today are living rather complicated lives because it takes supreme effort to calm down the mind. Firstly, we must grow our wisdom and secondly, we must stay vigilant in our external behavior. By constantly watching if there is any inappropriateness in our language or bodily actions, we can gradually internalize and maintain these respectful and courteous attitudes. So, "Do not step on doorills or lean on one leg; do not sit with legs apart and do not rock legs while sitting down."

This passage also mentions, "I will always give a deep bow to show my reverent salute." When bowing, we must bend down. This is called 90-degree bowing. There was a friend who came to class the first day and gave others a nod when he saw them greeting each other. After the class ended on the fifth day, he wanted to give us teachers three very formal bows, he said that his previous bows were considered invalid since they were not done out of inner respect. Whether or not our bow comes from our inner heart, we know it and others can sense it too. In fact, propriety isn't a superficial act, but must be "sincerely harbored within and then it will naturally exhibit outwards." This part teaches us to maintain a dignified manner.

## **Cultivate Cautious Manner in Daily Life**

Let's recite the next phrase once:

"I will lift up curtains slowly without making noise, and I will always make turns widely so as not to bump into anything. I will hold empty containers carefully as if they were full and enter an empty room as if someone is there. I must avoid doing things in a hurry as acting in haste will lead to many mistakes. And I must neither be afraid of difficulty nor be perfunctory. I must stay away from rowdy places, and I must not ask about things that are heretical or unusual."

This paragraph basically helps us to develop a careful yet bold attitude. We often say that one should be courageous and prudent, we must try to be gentle and respectful in our actions. But don't be afraid of difficulties when facing some challenges. When we are very careful with our work, naturally nothing unfavorable will happen. So, boldness and cautiousness are nurtured in the subtleties of our everyday life.

Let's see the first line: "I will lift up curtains slowly without making noise." When we open a curtain, we must do it gently and quietly. Since humans live and work in groups, we must have the sensitivity to observe if our deeds and actions bring troubles and afflictions to others. For example, someone next to you was sleeping and you made a noise while drawing back the curtain. Perhaps he hadn't been sleeping well for two or three days and could finally fall asleep but your action might have woken him again.

Or if you pull back a chair very loudly in the library, a place for reading where everyone is very quiet, you may startle others with this sudden noise. Even though this phrase merely mentions drawing a curtain, it also tells us we must be cognizant of whether our every deed and speech will make others feel restless. Are we making too loud a noise? When we can always be considerate of others, our heart will become softer and gentler. Then, we are truly implementing kindness.

In daily life, when else will our extremely loud voice cause others distress? When? For example, we're staying together these few days; if you walk very loudly at night, you will surely disturb others. Let's say we wake up at night to go to the bathroom, if we open the door loudly, we may wake many people. I remember when I was in Australia, Uncle Lu even told me that when we get up at night to use the toilet, we must make sure our movements are light. We must ensure the lid is shut when we flush the toilet. Otherwise, the loud flushing sound will disturb many people.

How can you tell if a person is wise and knowledgeable? We say that being considerate of others is the first level of knowledge; this is not done through words, but by practice, bit by bit. Apart from not walking and closing the door loudly, we must also avoid making too much noise when eating together with everyone. If you eat very loudly, people will feel very uncomfortable while having their meals. Why do people make so much noise when eating? Their mouths aren't closed. I've also mentioned to many friends that we must close our mouths while eating because not only are we representing ourselves, but also our company, a group, and even the Chinese people when we go out traveling. You have to constantly remind yourself of your behavior.

In a previous lesson, we mentioned that there was a sentence in Chinese characters written inside Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. What were those words? "Please don't talk loudly!" For whom it was written? Our infamous reputation spreads far and wide; how did we end up like this? Today, when the Chinese talk loudly in public areas, it means that they're doing the same at home. A person's moral conduct is definitely nurtured in the family, and is certainly determined when no one sees it. That's why the Chinese place great emphasis on being watchful over oneself when alone. When dwelling in solitude, our movements and speech must also be light and gentle. When this habit becomes natural, we will be able to behave elegantly as such in public.

When we see many children shouting and running hither and thither in the airport, we should also promptly stop them. You can then relate the story of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris to them and tell them that we can't tarnish our reputation worldwide. You see, there're so many foreigners in the airport! When they see us misbehaving, they would wonder how come the Taiwanese and Chinese children are educated to act like this! That would be very bad on us! When we have this sensitivity, we may gradually have a broader understanding of this phrase in every detail of our life. For example, when you come home at midnight, you'll

quietly get out the key to open the door. When we drive home in the middle of the night, we would quickly turn off the engine too, because your sensitivity to sound has already increased. This is how the power of observation is formed.

For this phrase, "I will lift up curtains slowly without making noise," other than not letting sound affect others, we're also cherishing things. Because when we use things gently, they won't easily break. In contrast, if we usually use things very roughly and forcefully, their original five to ten years' lifespan may be reduced to less than a year. From this concept of cherishing things, we must also constantly remind ourselves not to be overly clumsy.

For example, if we put on clothes very roughly, they will get torn easily. It is crucial to remind children to cherish the little things. When your movements are very light and gentle, you won't wreck things by tearing, dropping, or knocking them down. I was often injured too when I was little; if it wasn't scratches it was broken teeth, so I often had multiple wounds. I still remember I once slipped and had several teeth broken when I ran to the kitchen. It wasn't until I started learning assiduously and reading some classics in college that this type of situation gradually lessened. Now I rarely get cut or scratched. Why do people have so many injuries? The main reason is in the mind: carelessness gives rise to reckless behavior.

## **The Root for Children's Proper Behaviors and Habits**

A person who wants to cultivate himself must begin from the foundation of rectifying his mind. To do this, he must strive hard to learn from every aspect of life. So, "I will lift up curtains slowly without making noise, and I will always make turns widely so as not to bump into anything." Children often do this in school. They don't watch where they are going and carelessly hit the corner of the table. How does it feel running into the edge of the table? Very painful! They are guaranteed to get bruises and injuries. From this phrase, we can also further tell students to watch out for their own safety at all times. If we carefully observe, the rate of children dying from accidents is now on the rise because they don't have the sensitivity to danger. As adults, teachers, and parents, we must always remind children to exercise carefulness before it's too late.

For example, many youngsters today love to race cars. This is being insensitive to one's own safety. Let's think about it, why do youngsters race cars? Why? Indeed, we can't remain frustrated at the effect, we must find the reason so that we can improve the situation. It's inner feelings of emptiness! When one doesn't know his objectives and duties in life, he would very likely spend his time in idleness and go astray in the end. Why does he feel empty? Because he feels that he's worthless. If we further tried to understand these children's family backgrounds, we would find many of them lack parental love and attention. We teachers have a deep understanding: the more you care for a child, the greater his progress would be.

I remember a class I was teaching two years ago. This class was the noisiest and most difficult to handle in school. It happened that this class's previous teacher had taught for forty years and felt that this class was really too unmanageable. This was a sixth grade class, and this teacher retired after the first semester, so a substitute teacher was needed the second semester. I happened to return from Australia and a classmate of my Teacher Training College called me and said, "Our school has one class which is very difficult to handle. Would you like to come and teach this class?" Had he not mentioned that the class was the most problematic, I might not have considered it. When he said that it was the worst class to manage, I immediately agreed. As the saying goes, "How can you catch a tiger cub if you don't enter the tiger's lair?" *Dizigui* also says, "I must not be afraid of difficulty." As teachers,

we hope to improve our abilities sooner, so that our future students can obtain greater benefits. If I could successfully teach such an unmanageable class, then I would definitely make substantial progress. So I jumped at the opportunity.

The teacher introduced the background of each student to me. The first three students that he introduced were either taken care of by the grandmother or the parents had already divorced. As he went on, I could feel that family problems today are very serious. Perhaps a quarter are children of single-parent families. Some weren't from single-parent families, but they didn't necessarily receive their parents' care. I once called a parent and he said, "Teacher, I have been extremely busy making a living every day. I leave the house earlier than my son in the morning and at night, I come home later than him, so I don't know what he has been doing." His son had been polluted by the internet, but his parents were still in the dark. Why do parents work so hard to earn money? For what reason? Isn't it purely for having a better family and next generation? You see, they're so immersed in making money that they have forgotten their real intention. So, while I was listening to him, I felt very sad.

When this teacher had finished introducing the seventeen girls' and nineteen boys' backgrounds, he said that out of nineteen male students, only four or five of them were more well-behaved; the rest were hard to manage. My friends, what if you heard this? Would you feel a little nervous? There was only a little more than four months left for me to teach the class. At that moment, I had an idea: when children make mistakes, it's a good opportunity for us to teach them. You must seize the opportunity and never lose your temper in that moment. When we have this attitude, we can naturally and gladly accept such opportunities.

Now if we teachers don't have this mental state, when students make mistakes we will fly into a rage, "How could you do this again, I've told you so many times!" When we use such an attitude, what would the students think? He would think that the teacher is very fierce, and since he had already been scolded, his faults had been written off. He would just avoid letting the teacher see his mistakes the next time. He wouldn't introspect his mistakes and correct them. So, we teachers must grasp many golden opportunities to educate children.

## **The Moment Children Make Mistakes Is the Best Teaching Opportunity**

Where did I acquire this attitude? I'm very fortunate to have encountered so many virtuous elders and teachers in the past few years. Why was I able to meet these elders and teachers? Being able to meet them is a result, what are the causes? Is it because I've been praying a lot? It's attributed to a respectful attitude and our sincere hope to benefit students and society in the teaching field. There's a saying which goes, "When one has a good aspiration, heavenly beings will surely bless and support him." When we have wholesome intentions, we'll certainly be loved by heavenly beings and assisted by many virtuous elders.

At that time, I was still taking classes in a cram school and wasn't a formal teacher yet. It happened that an elementary school classmate of mine came to tell me that he now had a girlfriend. This classmate is very honest; he didn't have his first girlfriend until his twenties. As we've been friends for almost twenty years, he told me that he wanted to bring his girlfriend to my house. So I agreed to meet her. In the process of talking to his girlfriend, she kept citing what her former teacher had said. If she were a kindergarten or primary school student this would not be surprising to hear. Let's think about this: a three or four-year-old child would often quote his parents by saying, "My dad said" or "My mom said." So, before kindergarten, he respects his parents more than anyone else. At this time, by teaching him important attitudes for how to conduct himself and handle matters, he will benefit for a lifetime.

After attending primary school, the child's speech would change to: "My teacher said." When he enters junior high school and high school, he would say, "My classmate said." You see, throughout a person's life, the people who have the greatest impact on a person will change with age. After entering society we must not say, "So and so singer said." We may cite the words of our spiritual advisors. Or if we could quickly delve deeply into the sages' classics, we could even cite Mencius and Confucius. By reminding ourselves of their virtuous teachings, we can constantly grow our wisdom.

His girlfriend was already in her twenties, yet still always mentioned her teacher. This surprised me because it was as if the teacher's status was on par with her parents'. The more I listened to her, the more I was touched. Thus I made a request to get acquainted with her primary school teacher. She was elated too and said that she'd let her teacher know. That night, I felt my request was too abrupt because her teacher might not be free to see me. I gave her a call and said, "I think we can just forget about the meetup and make it another day when your teacher has more time." But she said that her teacher wanted to meet me and said that people like me must quickly join the academic world to serve society. Her teacher had been teaching for over thirty years. We can understand from his words that he was not only involved in nurturing talented people, but always hoped that more talented people could serve in the field of education. He was also more than willing to promote the younger generation.

That weekend, my classmate and his girlfriend drove to pick me and her teacher up. It turns out that her teacher's house was only a half kilometer away from mine. The affinities of life are very unpredictable; it's certainly not dependent on external distance, but on one's heart. By sharing sheer determination and the same goal in life, even if we had been separated by thousands of miles, we still would have met. As the Chinese idiom goes, "Affinities bring people together no matter how far apart they are."

The distance between people isn't on the outside but is in one's heart. Why do I say so? Because of wanting to promote sage teachings, I went to Australia and met Teacher Yang as a result. You see, we must travel thousands of miles to meet each other. The main reason still lies in our intention. When I resolved to learn how to educate children, I could meet such good teachers to guide me.

Even though we live so near, we had not met each other. Since we've been connected finally, I also treasured the opportunity to learn from this Teacher Chen. When he got into the car, he sat in front and we sat in the back. He turned around, and the first sentence he spoke made a deep impression on me. He said, "My students have taught me a great deal in the past decades of my teaching career." with over thirty years of teaching experience, he uttered one truth: "Both teachers and students benefit from each other."

It's mentioned in the scroll of "Records on the Subject of Education" in The Book of Rites,

"When we start to learn, we will know our deficiencies; when we start to teach, we realize that we are often stuck. Knowing deficiency, we will introspect ourselves. And after being stuck, we will then determine to work harder."

For example, when we are explaining some truths in class, and see the students staring blankly, about to doze off, it means that they can't understand what we said. At this time, we must strive for self-improvement by studying how to guide them and giving some examples to let them understand; or when students ask us many questions but we don't know the answers, we'll be motivated to search for more information and seriously learn from the elders and the wise. In this way, we can keep improving ourselves.

Many friends said to me, "Teacher Tsai, I also want to promote sage teachings but I'm afraid my ability is limited." My friends, don't fear that your abilities are not enough. If we wait until we are ready, it would be too late because the families and society would have become chaotic by then. At that time, you wouldn't have the chance even if you wanted to.

We must hold fast to this mindset: "Learn while doing and do while learning." Since our generation has suffered the loss of sage teachings, we must not let the next generations have the same regrets.

When parents and friends come to ask us some questions, we must not be nervous. If we know, we can answer them sincerely. What if you don't know? For me, I would tell them that I will go and ask Teacher Yang. If Teacher Yang doesn't know, what would she say? "I will go and ask our Venerable Master, Professor Chin Kung." What else are you afraid of? When you don't know how to solve someone's problems, but will take the initiative to help him find the answer, would he look down on you? No! He would respect you even more. He would also be very thankful to you because you've always been helping him. Don't worry about it. Indeed, only through teaching can both teachers and students grow together.

The first sentence Teacher Chen said really shocked me. He continued, "The moment children make mistakes is when we should teach them. We can't be emotional and get angry." Since I hadn't started teaching, and he had already imprinted these proper attitudes on me, I've never lost my temper after becoming a teacher. I've never flown into a rage when my students made mistakes. Actually, this very important method is stated in *The Book of Rites*, "Forbidding something before it happens is called prevention." This is a preventive measure. Before children make a mistake, we must tell them the proper concepts. When we have yet to engage in teaching and already have these right concepts, this is "making a cautious start" and is also a preventive attitude. When this teacher finished introducing all the students to me, this sentence appeared in my mind and I faced the students of this class with pure delight.

There were "Four Heavenly Kings" in this class but they were neither Andy Lau nor Jackie Cheung Hok-yau; four of them often had to report to the disciplinary office. Actually, after we really connect with children who are generally regarded as ill-mannered, we see they are actually very kind-hearted. It's just that they have been neglected. When you treat him very well and faithfully, he would surely respond in the same manner. There was a student among them who looked very fierce, without any smile at all, so I called him over. Only by connecting and communicating more with students can we become close. I said to him, "You look so fierce. Is it because I've offended you?" He said no. I then asked him, "When did you start having this kind of expression?" He replied, "In the first semester of fifth grade." You see, he knew when he started to become so frosty looking. As parents and teachers, we must always be able to feel a child's inner state. Otherwise, you won't be able to give him timely guidance.

Later, I said to him, "Since you look so unfriendly, people will easily misunderstand you and think you dislike them. So you must relax your facial expression." After hearing it, he agreed to do so. But did he change his countenance? We must exercise patience when educating a child. You mustn't tell him, "The teacher has already told you, why haven't you changed?" Is it possible for him to change instantly? Impossible! Later, I would create some opportunities for him to practice.

For example, the school needed to place some hall monitors to stand along the corridors and around the school. When the younger students run in the corridors, these older students would go and ask them to stop racing around, as it's too dangerous and they may even run into others. They have to jot down the students' names and remind them not to do it again. When a person becomes a policeman or a teacher, he would be extra cautious with his behavior. So I sent him to be a hall monitor and his behavior naturally began to improve. That's because he was afraid that his misbehavior would be caught by the little first grade students, causing him to lose face.

After the class ended, I also heard his classmates mention that this student has helped his mother sell clothes at the market. My friends, if you heard this news, what would you think? It's rare that a sixth-grade boy was willing to help his mother sell clothes. As long as a

child is filial, he would definitely be receptive to guidance and discipline. So I gave him further care and attention. During class, when this student gave a good answer in mathematics, I would praise him on the spot by saying, "Look at how quick he is, he could think from that perspective." Dear teachers and friends, don't underestimate our sincere praise, because it will be imprinted in the child's mind. As a result, this student received the fifth highest score in class during the second monthly exam. He suddenly went from one of the "Four Heavenly Kings" to placing fifth.

During this process, I also appointed him as the class monitor. I thought he might never have led a class before, so when I proposed this position to him, he was very scared and refused to accept it. Later, I suggested to him to assume the responsibility for only one week. From whom did I learn this method of appointing the student as class monitor? From my primary school teacher. Because a class monitor represents someone who excels in both studies and morality. Such a good method must be inherited and passed on. He reluctantly agreed. After holding that position for a week, he persevered with the role until the end of the semester. Thus a person's potential can be developed through practice.

I studied sage teachings together with many teachers in Haikou. After one or two months, I said to these teachers, "In the next lesson, could you speak for 10-15 minutes on stage?" How did these teachers respond? They kept pushing each other forward and refused to take on the challenge. I said, "Please, just ten minutes will do!" They reluctantly agreed. When they went up on stage, they talked fluently and endlessly until I had to signal to them that time was up and they could come down. Why? When a person has a responsibility to shoulder, he would make rapid progress. Furthermore, due to their earnestness in learning and teaching the students, they couldn't help but express their feelings and touching experiences on stage because true affection makes for a great speech or article.

Becoming class monitor had stimulated this student's sense of responsibility and capacity to handle tasks. Since he had placed fifth in class, I also showed him encouragement. We must often practice "giving" by treating others to meals or giving gifts. I invited him and some other classmates who had contributed to the class and school to have a meal together. His mother rode a motorcycle to pick him up when we were already at the school gate. His mother said to me, "Teacher, my son has been studying in school for five and a half years, but no teacher has ever noticed his potential." I couldn't bear to hear such words from a parent, because every child is the flesh of their parents' heart. I believe the past five and a half years were a torment to his parents. It's not that children cannot be educated!

His mother said a few words with emotion and I immediately turned them around. I said, "Mrs. Wu, your son is very intelligent and he performs well in his studies. He also has exceptional leadership quality and talents. He's also very responsible in his work. Last time, I delegated some tasks to him and he handled them very carefully." I gave some recent examples to his mother because we must be specific when we praise others. Only then would the other party believe it. If you only said that the son was very good, his mother might also be very skeptical. So, I stood there for several minutes, just commending the many positive points of this student. Even though I was talking to his mother, I was actually telling this student. I believe that my utterly sincere praise would stay in his heart for a lifetime.

Later, when the semester ended, as per the school's rule, we teachers personally sent off all the class's students at the school gate. After presenting many gifts to all the students, there was one more left. What to do? This gift couldn't be given in vain, it could be an opportunity to educate the students. I said, "Let's award this final present to the student who has made the greatest progress in his studies and morality this semester. I'll leave it to you to recommend someone." What happened then? This class monitor was elected and the gift was presented to him. After receiving the gift, he returned to his seat and broke down in tears. Because we teachers stand on the podium, we can clearly see every action of the students



below. I didn't know this until I became a teacher. When I was a student, I thought the teachers didn't see what we students were doing down there. I was really deceiving myself and others. Alright, we will stop here today and continue next time.