

Confucius Teachings On Building A Happy Life (24)

- a foundation for Mahayana Buddhism practice

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2/15-2/23 2005*

There is no student who can't be educated

Good afternoon my friends! This morning we mentioned the student whom I taught the year before last. He made great improvement in his grades and was a very good class monitor. During the graduation ceremony, when I presented him with the last gift, he burst into tears. I was standing on the stage and thought to myself that since I have been exposed to people from all walks of life and taught graduating classes before, I wouldn't shed tears of sadness again. I have already given myself the expectation that in this life, I will only shed tears from being moved, because weeping tears of sadness is of no help to ourselves or others. I thought to myself that if he still cried when we exited the school gate later, I would comfort him. When everyone was ready to leave, I took them to the gate. Halfway to the entrance, I snuck a glance back and saw him weeping still. I asked everyone to stop and walked towards him. I thought of holding his hand with my left hand and patting his shoulder with my right hand while asking him not to cry anymore. When I held his hand and was about to pat his shoulder with my right hand, he grabbed my hands and desperately said, "Thank you teacher, thank you, thank you!" At that moment, I felt as if I had been shocked by electricity. It turns out that males can stir up emotion in one another too. I was so deeply touched by the student's utmost sincerity that tears welled up in my eyes. But I couldn't lose control of myself because I still had to take the students out of the school. I then took two deep breaths, brought them out, and said goodbye.

When I headed back to the school alone, I suddenly had a deep feeling: it wasn't me who had taught this student, but him who had taught me a very important lesson since I had become a teacher. He taught me that there is no student who can't be educated. A child whose behavior was considered poor by the school made such significant improvement in just a few months, simply because we gave him love and care. It confirms that "primordially, people have an inherent good nature." We must ask ourselves whether we have this sincere heart. The feelings I received from this student made me realize one point: when a child can feel that there is someone in his life who truly loves and cares for him, he would neither turn bad nor commit suicide. My friends, what's the suicide rate of children now? Higher and higher! This is a result, what is the cause? Children feel empty, they feel nobody cares for them.

So, "I will always make turns widely so as not to bump into anything."

We have mentioned that children are now involved in car racing. Instead of letting the police continue to chase and arrest them, we should begin to take action from the foundation by managing the family well. Family is the root cause of stability or chaos in the entire society. I also promised myself to teach in one school and not change schools from then on. I've always had this thought since I started teaching. Why? Because as long as I could teach in that school

for twenty to thirty years for instance, all the students could surely find me. Is it possible to educate children in two years? We must spend a long time to guide and remind them. As long as they could deeply feel that their teacher never expected anything in return for his contribution in the past two years, whom would they look for when they face problems in the future? His dedicated teacher! He definitely wouldn't tread the wrong path, let alone commit suicide. This is because one would not feel hopeless so long as his heart could feel love.

However, "Man's plans are inferior to those made by Heaven." After teaching for two years, I realized that children's virtue is the foundation, so I quit my job in the hope that I could quickly delve deeply into the Chinese saints' and sages' teachings while I was still young. Owing to my resignation, I had the opportunity to promote sages' teachings in China. I also got to know many teachers in the process. We shared experiences and attitudes in educating children with each other. When we see children misbehaving, we must not just focus on getting angry, we should find out the reason and work on the cause.

When a person's intention is very respectful and prudent, the chances of him having an accident will decrease. And this attitude of respect and prudence shouldn't just be present when he is driving a car, this attitude should be implemented at all times and in all places. Ever since that time my hair was sticking up after riding the motorcycle taxi, what would I do before going on stage? As the saying goes, "Wisdom comes from experience." I was originally a person who disliked looking at myself in the mirror, but I have learned to be a little more cautious now.

Be cautious in solitude

"I will hold empty containers carefully as if they were full and enter an empty room as if someone is there."

Let's take a look from this action: "I will hold empty containers." For example, when holding an empty plate with no more food, of course it is lighter in weight, but why should we hold it as if it contains something? It implies that when what we hold is light, we tend to be more careless and negligent and very likely we would drop and break it. This phrase also requires us to be more cautious. Many high-tech products are very light but they may cost tens of thousands of dollars. So, when we or our children are not careful enough, with one wrong move, one month's salary could be lost. We must pay close attention and remind ourselves of these small details.

Next, "Enter an empty room as if someone is there." It means when we go to a place where no one is around, we must act as if someone is next to us. The *Doctrine of the Mean* mentions that we must have the attitude of "being cautious in solitude." We should absolutely not be frivolous or negligent in dealing with matters when no one sees us. This is very important! This also tells us that we must be consistent in our conduct and speech; we must never say one thing and do another. A teacher happened to tell his students not to spit everywhere. One day, when he saw nobody was around, he spat out a mouthful of phlegm, thinking that nothing would happen. Suddenly, a voice from afar said, "Teacher, why did you spit?" That teacher immediately had goosebumps all over his body and was too ashamed to face the student. There was a teacher who was very fierce and often scolded his students. One day, the school arranged for him to give a presentation for the school faculty and visiting teachers from other schools. Since the students had gotten used to being scolded, they always kept their distance from the teacher. He was usually very fierce, but that day his expression

unexpectedly became very gentle and amiable. During his presentation, I saw the audience and students looking very uncomfortable. Isn't it too tiring to act like this? It is too tiring! Yes, most people would probably feel it is too tiring to conduct themselves consistently. In fact, when we behave consistently in life, we will feel more and more relaxed and others would also respect us even more.

Children often talk very loudly when no one is around. Like when we go to some tourist attractions, such as hiking, many children would scream and shout. When going hiking in nature with students I would ask them, "Who are the hosts of this mountain?" Who? Of course, they are the trees, animals, and plants because they have been residing up here for years. "Then, who are you?" You are the guest who occasionally goes to their home for a walk. "Do guests yell while in someone's house?" Yes or no? It would be an embarrassment to do so. You would surely be laughed at by the animals on this mountain for being an uncultivated person. We must respect all beings, so we can't scream when we go hiking as we will affect the peace of many animals. Furthermore, when a person's voice is too loud, the sound waves may shake the stones. If one of the rocks happened to be relatively loose, your booming voice may cause it to fall. In ancient times, it was said that Lady Meng Jiang's cries caused a part of the Great Wall to collapse. This is a bit exaggerated but it is possible that the sound wave energy of the human voice can shake the rocks to fall down. So, "Enter an empty room as if someone is there." We must be cautious.

Nowadays, when children go to other people's houses, many of them would look around while the host has gone to the kitchen to do something. Is it correct to do so? This is improper because it is disrespectful to the host. We especially can't just arbitrarily walk into the host's bedroom. We must remind children of these matters. Otherwise, let's say he goes into many rooms. When the host finds that something is missing, who will be the first suspect? I have a friend who went to his classmate's house to play when he was a child. Then, a sum of money disappeared from the room of his friend's father. The next day, his classmate pointed at him and said that he had stolen the money. All the classmates gave him a bad label. At this time, it would be useless for you to argue and refute because there's no way for you to prove your innocence, since you did enter his father's room for a while. We must always stay vigilant to avoid any unnecessary suspicions and misunderstandings. "Entering an empty room as if someone is there" can help prevent such occurrences.

Avoiding possible suspicion

The General Etiquette Essentials for Daily Life states, "Don't bend down to fix your shoes when you pass through a melon field; don't raise your hands to adjust your hat when you walk under a plum tree." This means that when we walk through someone's melon field, don't crouch down to tie your shoelace, because when the owner sees you squatting there from afar, what would it look like? Like you're stealing his melons. If you put your hat on under someone's plum tree, it may look like you are picking his plums. Such possible suspicion must be avoided too. The later part of *Dizigui* states, "Before passing through a door, ask who is there. Before entering a hall, I must call out." When you're in someone's house, don't go in and explore the place. If you see no one is there, you must first call out to check if anyone is inside. We must be cautious with these norms of advancing and withdrawing. This is "Entering an empty room as if someone is there." Next, "I must avoid doing things in a hurry, as acting in haste will lead to many mistakes."

The word "haste" here implies "disorderliness." How do we tackle this problem? We must

use moderation. Being slow can avoid regrets, retreating can avoid misfortunes. By being methodical at all times, we would not make mistakes easily. We should also know when to proceed and retreat. Don't fight to show off your abilities when you should back off, you'll avoid trouble this way. This phrase, "Avoid doing things in a hurry" also needs to be combined with many teachings on the aspect of "cautiousness" so that you can accomplish a task well. As aforementioned, "I will always place my hat and clothes away in their proper places; I will not carelessly throw them around for that will get them dirty." This is the habit of returning a thing to its original place. "Whatever is moved must be returned to its original place; everything has its own place." By placing a thing in a fixed position, you won't get confused when you need it. Even after you've taken it, you must return it to the original position.

For instance, after using the shower head, what should you do? You must return the diverter back to the faucet position. Otherwise, when someone uses the washroom a few hours later and turns on the tap, you would hear him screaming because his body is drenched. Thus, many things should be taken seriously until the end. When we have finished using something, we must properly check it so as not to create troubles later for yourself and others. We mentioned "making a cautious start" before, we also must "make a cautious ending." We must check to make sure that everything we've used is returned to its initial position. Then we won't have any problem finding the items whenever we or others want to use them. For instance, when we need to leave our home for a week, we must go around and check the gas and power supplies in our house. Otherwise, if the faucet isn't properly turned off, we won't know how much water would be wasted when we return home. We must return everything that we've used to its original position so as not to cause unnecessary waste.

I remember once there was a temporary power failure. So I pressed the buttons on the electric water heater to test the water. Then I forgot to press it back, I didn't return it to its original position. Later, I went out to give my lecture for over three hours. When I returned home, the power supply had been restored, and because I had pressed the button down, water was flowing non-stop. When I saw that scene, my heart ached. Due to my minor negligence, I had wasted so much water for our future generations. "Cautiousness" means "I must avoid doing things in a hurry, as acting in haste will lead to many mistakes." Whatever buttons we've pressed must be returned to their original position so as to avoid waste or even a crisis where the electric cable catches fire. This is "I must avoid doing things in a hurry, as acting in haste will lead to many mistakes." When we can often use some tools to help us remember, we will be able to avoid forgetting a lot of things. Whatever matters we've promised others, we must quickly record them on the calendar. Every day when we get up, we should look at it and tick those things that have been done. If they're still undone, we should remind ourselves once again and do them quickly. If children have this attitude from childhood, they will be very prudent and responsible.

My friends, do any of you have a child in the first grade now? If he is, let's say he calls you and says, "Mom, I forgot to bring my language workbook. I finished writing it yesterday. The teacher will be checking our homework in the next class. Please bring it quickly for me." My friends, what would you do? You're the mother or father. "Mom, what are you still thinking about? Get it for me quickly." Many parents would send it over. Even though this is only a small action, the right or wrong move may make a world of difference to the child's mentality. Uncle Lu once told me that the first time his daughter forgot to bring her workbook, she called home to request her father to bring it over. Uncle Lu said, "It's your fault if you didn't bring it. You must be responsible for your own actions. You deserve the

punishment." He then hung up the phone! My friends, would you have the heart to hang up?

Strictness and gentleness must be used accordingly when educating children. When it's necessary for you to act sternly and with principles, you should remain unaffected. Later, when Uncle Lu's daughter returned home from school, how was her appearance? How do you know? She didn't look so good. When the daughter gets home, should he continue scolding her? Yes or no? Teach her one more lesson! It will be too much if you do that. Since it was already very austere of him to hang up the phone, he should be more accommodating now. So, Uncle Lu asked her, "Were you scolded and punished by the teacher?" She nodded her head yes. Uncle Lu said, "Dad will teach you a method which will prevent you from being punished again for not bringing your workbook." The little girl initially was a bit lost, but suddenly her spirit rose when her father said that. He immediately told her, "You can use a contact book to record whatever should be brought for the class tomorrow. When you pack your schoolbag before going to bed, you can tick off those items which you've already put inside your bag. After everything is in the bag, you can then sleep with ease." When children make mistakes, it's often a good time to educate them. If you only get angry, you'll lose this opportunity. By training children since young to use a notebook to constantly remind them of the things to bring, they won't easily forget. If they're still looking for something when they're about to go out, many things will be messed up.

Of course, when we demand our children to practice this teaching: "I must avoid doing things in a hurry, as acting in haste will lead to many mistakes," we ourselves must first set a good example for them. I remember I often rode in my father's car when I was only a teen. My father had a very familiar phrase when he was driving, "Why rush? It won't make five minute's difference." Even though my father said it softly, it made a great impact on me. Later, when I learned to drive, these words would ring in my head whenever I wanted to drive fast. My father never honks the horn because he thinks it's unnecessary to be in a hurry. When I drive, I also don't honk the horn. Of course, there are some situations where you need to honk. When you totally can't see the opposite car coming, you must first give them a bit of warning. You should give way to others whenever you can.

Direction trumps speed

Next phrase: "I must neither be afraid of difficulty nor be perfunctory."

There's a very important teaching in the *Doctrine of the Mean* in *The Four Books*, which states, "If another man can succeed by one effort, I will use a hundred efforts; if another man can succeed by ten efforts, I will exert a thousand efforts." In other words, when others can understand something by doing it once, even if we are relatively dull, we can understand it by doing it a hundred times. When others can succeed by doing it ten times, even if we have to do it a thousand times before we understand it, we must still persevere with it. If people can adhere to such an attitude when facing matters, "though dull, they will surely become wise." Even though our initial foundation is somewhat dull, we can definitely uncover our great wisdom. "Though dull, we can surely become wise; though weak, we can surely become strong." When we deal with things in this way, we won't defeat or scare ourselves away in many occasions. Teacher Yang often said that she would always encourage herself. Mencius said, "What kind of man was Shun? What kind of man am I? He who exerts himself will also become such as Shun was." So, she said that she can certainly do it! Because who will accompany you for the longest period? It is yourself! It's utterly important to constantly improve and encourage ourselves.

During the two years I was a teacher, I also came to realize that virtue is the foundation of a child's life. So I quit my job to delve deeply into the study of sage teachings while I was still young. My father said, "Education requires a long-term plan. You must think carefully because doing this job is very difficult." Later, I explained my analysis to my father, "Throughout history, people who made truly vital contributions were definitely not those with enormous wealth or great power. Let's see, was Confucius rich and powerful? No, he wasn't. He relied on his sincere heart. My teacher, Professor Chin Kung, also neither has money nor power. But owing to a sincere heart, he promoted the proper Dharma as well as the saints' and sages' wisdom to the whole world. We can deduce that success and failure are definitely not caused by external factors, but the root lies in a sincere heart. When we have this understanding, we won't shrink back so easily." Later, my father mentioned that education really requires as long as a hundred years to see the effects. I continued to tell my father, "Our generation does not harbor the thoughts of seeing sages' teachings blossom and bear fruits in our generation. In this life, as long as sages' teachings don't end before my very eyes, then I would be very comforted."

Later, I went to Australia to pursue my studies. I happened to give rise to two thoughts: first, I hoped to have a very good teacher of sages' teachings; second, I hoped to have an elder to guide me because my virtue is too weak and I have many bad habits. When I attended the lectures in Australia, where was Teacher Yang? She was on stage telling us *Moral Education Stories*. And Uncle Lu was sitting right beside me, separated by not even one chair in between. So my friends, what is the root cause of the environment and interpersonal relationships that you bring upon yourself? It's within your heart. Our heart can elicit a response, while our external world is its elicited response. If our heart is filled with a lot of opposition and strife, what will happen to our interpersonal relationships? There will be endless conflicts. On the contrary, if we constantly harbor thoughts of making contributions, we will naturally attract many people to help us. Don't be afraid of difficulties, as long as you have a sincere mind, you'll continuously receive much support and help.

Later, in September of the year before last, Teacher Yang brought me to Haikou. After being there for a week, we went to Qufu, Shandong. Since we're promoting sage teachings, we must first pay respect to Confucius. Confucius was a great sage who made the most significant contributions to sage teachings. On this trip to Qufu, Shandong, Teacher Yang lamented when seeing much destruction at The Three Historical Sites of Confucius. All the tombstones praising Confucius had been almost completely smashed. Teacher Yang told me that when she saw this scene, she felt even more deeply the seriousness of the decay of sages' teachings. We can't afford to be indifferent anymore. As a result, she decided to set up a global sages' teachings website in Beijing called "Mahavaipulya* Cultural Network for Public Welfare." (*A Sanskrit word meaning vast, boundless, and universal.) Then she asked me to go back alone. When I first went to Haikou, my father specifically reminded me to get close to Teacher Yang and seriously learn from her. But Heaven had a different arrangement for me. After going there for a week, what did I have to do? I had to do everything by myself, with no one to turn to for help. When she asked me to go back alone, one of Confucius' teachings suddenly arose in my mind: "A virtuous man must have broadmindedness and vigorous endurance. His responsibility is heavy and his course is long. He considers benevolence his to sustain--isn't this heavy? Only with death does his course stop--isn't this a long way?" Actually, in doing a lot of things, don't think of too many troubles in the beginning. "Not everything will follow our wishes, only hope to live without regrets." So long as the direction is right, you just need to try your very best to accomplish it.

After returning to Haikou by myself, I started to give lectures everywhere. I asked Teacher Yang how I should learn. She replied to me very concisely, "Your only goal now is to first give 300 lectures." When many people asked me how they should learn, I would also give them the same reply because this was how Teacher Yang trained me. For the first lecture I gave in Haikou, I had to face over 300 teachers. Can you tell that I get nervous easily? Can you? You see I'm so thin, how can I not be nervous? Thin people have a weak stomach and intestines. I remember when I sat for the college entrance exams, I was so anxious that I couldn't fall asleep. I took two sedatives but they weren't effective. Actually, they weren't ineffective, they kicked in the next morning. During the exams I felt confused and disoriented. Later, because of delving deeply into the classics, I learned that, "knowing the truth will ease one's mind." Many things can't be forced, I thus slowly adjusted my character. The day before I gave the lecture, I quickly made three prostrations before Confucius' image and requested the ancient saints and sages to help me have a good night's sleep so that I would feel refreshed the following day to give my speech. My request was answered as I slept like a log till dawn. From then on, I gave lectures unceasingly. Whenever there was an opportunity, I would go for it. Because it is moral education that is most lacking in a family, group, or school nowadays. Owing to this endless training, I was able to improve my abilities.

In August, the theme I talked about in Haikou was: "Forty-five thousand years ago, how did China's distant ancestors teach their descendants?" This talk in mid-July took eight hours, and I gave this talk almost ten times. In mid-November when I went to Hong Kong to record it, I spoke on the same topic for forty hours, while for the first lecture three months before that I only talked for eight hours. Exactly five times longer. People have great potential, you just need to be willing to accept the practice and challenges. My first lecture the year before last was October 11th. Last year on July 13th, another five-day course was held in Haikou. A few friends hadn't seen me for exactly a year. When I saw their very familiar faces during the lecture, I requested them to tell me whether there was any difference between my first talk and this one a year later. The teacher immediately said, "A world of difference!" He didn't hold back.

Indeed, people have very great potential, so do not worry. Furthermore, when you really bring forth this determination and aspiration, much help will naturally come to you. I went to look for a place to be our education center in Haikou. The first time I went to a woman's house in Shantou, I chatted with her for two hours. Shantou people place heavy emphasis on filial piety. So when she heard that we wanted to promote sage teachings, she was elated and immediately agreed to let us use the venue at no charge. As a result, on my way home that night, I was moved to tears. Indeed, we must believe in the truth that: "The Way of Heaven is impartial; it often favors kind-hearted people who accord with the law of nature." I've never engaged with local officials there, it's all been local friends helping with everything. When we have a sincere heart, we can awaken everyone's true heart.

As a result, within a few months there was rapid development. Later, on March 15th last year, a teacher from Shenzhen invited me to give a lecture there; we went and I started giving the talk on the same day. After March, I spent a week each in Shenzhen and Haikou, and had to fly back and forth between these two places. In mid-July last year, in view of the coming summer holiday, Teacher Yang said that because teachers were freer to study during this time, we should organize four large-scale teacher seminars, each lasting five days. The first seminar was held in Haikou on July 13th. On July 11th, eight stars appeared in the sky above

Haikou; it felt as if those stars were hung on your house's rooftop, very near. I didn't see it. The next day, our center's teacher showed me the report. It said all the astronomers could not find the origin of these eight stars, because they disappeared after a few hours. When I saw this report, eight words emerged in my mind at once. What were they? "Filial piety, fraternal love, loyalty, trustworthiness, propriety, righteousness, integrity, and sense of shame." Let's think about it, what problems do today's families, societies, and nations face? They lack these virtues in their education. As long as these values can spread, I believe that we can recreate a prosperous age for the Chinese.

Spirit of Zi Gong

The five-day seminar in mid-July was held in a very high-end hotel. Why did we go to such a high-end hotel? Because I had to make a trip back to Taiwan at the end of June, so local friends treated me to dinner the previous day. While we were dining in the restaurant, the owner happened to come and had dinner with us. I was talking about *Zhu Bolu's Maxims on Family Management*, and the owner was very pleased as he listened to it. He said, "Next time when you come here to give lectures, please notify me, I really want to participate." As Confucius said, "A virtuous man will never be alone, he will attract those who share the same pursuit." Since we talked happily he said, "Tonight, I will send you back, and tomorrow morning I will bring you to the airport."

This was only our first meeting.

On the way home, this entrepreneur said, "Teacher Tsai, when Confucius was giving lectures in the past, he had a very rich disciple, Zi Gong, to support him. Only then was he able to teach without any worries." What did he mean when he said this? I was deeply touched by his words. He continued, "There's a special meeting room upstairs in my hotel. It can accommodate hundreds of people and the air-conditioner is very powerful." Because Haikou is very hot and our center wasn't air-conditioned, I had been worrying whether everybody would be wiping their sweat with a handkerchief during the seminar. Upon hearing this, I immediately asked, "Can you lend the venue to us?" He said, "No problem." So I went back to Taiwan with peace of mind. The seminar lasted from July 13th to 17th. Afterward we went to settle the bill. The girl at the reception desk said, "All your bills have already been paid. You don't owe anything." We were shocked. "Didn't we consume meals and drinks for five days, how could that all be free?" Later, we came to understand that the owner's wife had been at the back listening to our lectures for five days. She had been deeply moved. She said, "My children are already teenagers and they did not learn these noble teachings in primary school." Since the attendees were all primary school teachers, she hoped that this lecture could run well so that more students could benefit from it. So she settled the bill for us every day.

We must verify the truth of life through our own experiences. Indeed, so long as you have a kind heart, a lot of positive strength will surely come to your aid. My friends, do you have such confidence? Why are your voices so soft? Do you have confidence in this truth? Yes! (*audience's answer) As the Buddhist sutra states, "Faith is the origin of Dao and the mother of all merits and virtues; it nurtures all good roots." Faith determines the success and failure of all matters. If you don't believe that your children primordially have an inherent good nature, it will be very difficult for you to educate them. Likewise, if you don't believe that your husband primordially has an inherent good nature, you may have conflicts with him. If we don't believe in the saints' and sages' words that "Primordially, people have an inherent good nature," we will be separated from the classics too. Faith is extremely important.

We conducted classes successively in Shenzhen, Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Anhui Lujiang, Shantou, Xiamen, and three countries in Southeast Asia without having to spend a cent; because many people were very touched by the lectures and actively took out money to set up such courses. They also gave us money so that we could use it to print classics and promote the teachings. Originally, we only planned to run the course four times, but soon after the last time ended, people in all places started inviting us to give lectures. So what happened with the conditions? They were all in place.

When you intend to promote sages' teachings, you need not worry at all. We just have to seriously improve our abilities and let fate take its natural course. Moreover, you'll definitely be able to cope with all the arranged tasks. Heaven is very compassionate; when it knows you can only carry 20 kg, it will only give you 20 kg, but you must train your physical strength every day. When you can carry 50 kg, it will give you 50 kg; it won't crush you to death. You see I'm so thin, yet I'm still fine. Indeed, when I look back, it's absolutely true. I wasn't appointed as a homeroom teacher in the first year due to my insufficient experience. Instead, I was assigned to teach multiple subjects to students of four different grades. In the second year, I lead a sixth-grade graduating class, which was a bit more difficult. Later, I led the most problematic class in the school. The degree of difficulty gradually increased. After leading this class, I went to Haikou where I was gradually tempered. As long as you intend to promote sage teachings, don't worry about your skills, because Heaven will arrange everything to suit your capacities. Alright, we'll stop here today. Thank you for listening.