

Confucius Teachings On Building A Happy Life (25)

- a foundation for Mahayana Buddhism practice

*Validated by Master Chin Kung
The Speaker: Teacher Tsai LiXu
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Fight Fatigue With Responsibility

Hello my friends! Many friends ask me, "Teacher Tsai, do you feel tired?" These past few months, many teachers who have followed me to various places as I give lectures have seen that the more I lecture, the more energetic I am. A lot of worries are therefore unnecessary. I also told these friends that people aren't afraid of physical fatigue, but of mental fatigue. If we feel tired physically, we'll feel revived again after getting a seven-hour rest. When we know that a lot of things are imperative and ought be done yet we are unable to do them, this kind of mental fatigue will cause us stress and torment. When we can put in our best effort to do important matters, we actually feel very comforted.

I remember reading an article by Mencius in high school that states, "When Heaven is about to place a great responsibility on a man, it always first frustrates his will and spirit, exhausts his muscles and bones, exposes him to starvation and poverty, harasses him with troubles and setbacks so as to stimulate his spirit, toughen his nature, and enhance his abilities." What did I gain from this article back then? I told myself that I mustn't become a saint or a sage because it's so tiring and tormenting to have to endure so many tests. At that time, we only interpreted its literal meaning since our teacher didn't tell us about the beauty of moral integrity. But later, when I really started to promote sages' teachings, I suddenly had a different feeling for Mencius' words and wrote down this phrase: "Take the bitter with the sweet." Because, when we know that this matter is too important but are afraid that our ability is insufficient, we would gladly accept all the tests to quickly improve our abilities.

Having this attitude, we also established such a consensus with all the teachers we met. When I had to leave Haikou for Shenzhen to give lectures, my original classes had to be handed over to other teachers. When they received my instructions to take over the next classes, what would they think? They wouldn't dodge it! They would utter this sentence: "Taking on responsibility is the starting point for personal development." Even though I have left Haikou, the classes there have continued uninterrupted. Even on the first day of Lunar New Year the lessons are still on. The teachers said that we can't afford to delay acquiring wisdom. If we had slowed down by taking a day off, the children might have been greatly affected. So, they persevered and this class has run for over a year. In Haikou and Shenzhen, on top of their work at other schools or jobs, many teachers would volunteer to teach at our center at night and on weekends. After learning for over four months, they began following me to many places to give lectures. Through self-cultivation, we further manage a class, this is similar to

"harmonizing a family." Then we take good care of Haikou, which is like "governing a country." And if we further expand our lectures to Beijing, Shenzhen, and many different provinces, what are we doing? We are "realizing world peace." (*audience's answer) What are these four matters actually? They are one thing. As long as we bring forth our true heart, keep forging ahead, and surpassing our inadequacies, our influence and dedication will naturally meet with success.

"Do not be afraid of difficulty."

Transform Losses Into Lessons

When parents do everything that should be undertaken by children, this is depriving them of opportunities to learn through experience. We also mentioned before that Uncle Lu didn't bring the notebook for his daughter. Had he helped her then, the result would have been different. What kind of result would he expect? His daughter would be elated and say, "Dad, you are really great! My prayer was answered! You are truly Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva*!" (Buddhist Bodhisattva of Mercy.) What change in her thinking would there be? She would think that whenever she's in trouble, her parents, grandparents, and even the maid would be there to help. She has many supporters who can help her clean up a mess at any time. Nowadays, what impression do we have of the speech of youth in their early twenties? We'd be annoyed and driven mad! It's true! As a proverb says, "The emperor is not worried, but his underlings are worried to death." This means that all his parents and elders are so busy helping him, but he is still heedless. I encountered a child in Haikou whose parents had been helping him find a job through many connections. He merely reluctantly agreed and said, "Alright, for the sake of your 'face,' I'll give it a try." There was also a college student who had dropped out of school twice. When his friends asked, "What are you gonna do?" He replied, "I have no idea." You see, he was almost twenty years old, yet he had no sense of responsibility for himself. This is a result, what is the cause? He seldom takes full responsibility for what he has done.

When we help a child clean up his mistakes, he would think that in the future someone will always be there to help him. When he gets married in the future, you have to help him raise money; when he buys a house, you must also help him raise the funds. How long do you intend to help him? How would you feel about this kind of life? Very exhausted. Perhaps when you draw your last breath, you would still be thinking of buying something for your grandson. On October 19th last year, a couple published an article in the *Shenzhen Special Zone Daily*, advising young parents not to spoil their children. The authors didn't have a son until their old age, so they loved and cared for him in every possible way. When their son attended kindergarten, the teacher advised them to pay attention to their child's bad behavior. The parents even helped him explain and cover his mistakes. Along the way, they fulfilled his every wish. After he graduated from college and got a girlfriend, the girl requested that his parents move out before she agreed to marry him. What would the son do? Since he had been a little emperor from a young age, he was used to "giving an order from above and expecting none to disobey." Straightaway he ordered his parents to vacate the house. Realizing the

seriousness of this problem, the authors hoped to persuade more parents not to dote on their children through their painful experiences.

During the 1920s, there was an eleven-year-old child who accidentally broke someone's large window while he was playing football. He had to compensate that person twelve dollars and fifty cents. At that time, this amount of money could buy 125 egg-laying hens. It was rather a huge sum. His father said to him, "You have to take full responsibility for this incident. You must make money to pay off the debt." Would Chinese parents do this? Very difficult! According to statistics, the children in China have the most pocket money but they spend the least time doing housework. They don't have a sense of responsibility. Indeed, this little boy started to work at that time and returned the money to his father bit by bit. Later, his career was also very successful. He was Ronald Reagan, the former US president. You see, when you let your child endure hardships, you're developing his proper attitude and sense of responsibility, as well as boosting his working abilities. It's important to be rational rather than driven by emotion and becoming overprotective when raising children. "Do not be afraid of difficulty." When parents can be very courageous in facing many matters, their attitude will definitely affect their child.

A Happy Home Starts From Within

We often say that every family has their own set of problems. Have you found a solution to them? The divorce rate is very serious now. Marriage ending up in divorce may harm you and your children. We must have the courage to overcome all the setbacks in life and marriage. One day in Haikou, while I was on my way to class, a friend of mine called and told me that her colleague's husband had had an extramarital affair and asked me what she should do. My friends, have you ever received such a call? And a single man like me received it! Even though I'm unmarried, the solutions to the problems in life are guaranteed to be found in the classics. I said to her on the spot, "When things don't accord with our wishes, we must turn inwards and examine ourselves." When things happen in life, it's absolutely impossible that others are always at fault while we're the only one who is right. Is it possible? Impossible! Because one-handed clapping will not produce sounds. When spouses face such problems, they must first reflect: where did I go wrong? Of course, giving rise to this thought isn't easy, but if you don't, you definitely won't be able to calm yourself down. When we only focus on the other party's wrongs, we will surely be overwhelmed with emotional turmoil. Then we would very likely act irrationally and make matters become even worse.

I continued, "Let's say the other party is wrong by seven or eight points while we are wrong by one or two points, we must also settle our mind to think about where we've done wrong with these one or two points and further rectify them. This is the first vital attitude of 'self-reflecting whenever things don't go our way.'" Then I told her, "When there's no 'fire' raging between a couple, outsider's won't be able to come between them." My friends, what does this "fire" imply? It refers to conflicts, unforgiveness, and intolerance. If no problem arises initially in the family, can the "fire" from outside destroy the house? No! Don't blame the other party; it must be us who have faults in the first place. We should never rage at

others. This is the second important attitude. Thirdly, when your husband is right, you must treat him as your father; on ordinary days, treat him as a friend. When he is at fault, how should you regard him? Regarding him as a child is not enough, you must regard him as your son. When your son makes a mistake, would you tell him, "I will never forgive you"? Would you? No! Why? Well that's unfair of you, you won't do that to your son but you treat your husband like that? Why? Do you see the unfairness here?

All the obstacles and afflictions aren't coming from outside but arise within ourselves. Who is the one bothering you? Let's say you're walking on the street today and a stranger suddenly comes and slaps you. Before you know what is happening, he has already left. Rubbing your face, you would think, "What bad luck! Ah forget it." You would just walk away. It never rains but it pours; when you go home that day, your husband happens to have drunk a little alcohol and slaps you too, but is it the same as the previous one? "I'm never forgiving you!" That's strange! It's the same one slap but the effect is different. Who brought you the misery? Suffering is self-inflicted. As we are not forgiving enough and don't put ourselves in other's position, we use likes and dislikes to solve problems. We accept everything that we favor and reject those things that we aren't happy with. We cause a lot of obstacles and troubles for ourselves.

Many people say, "He's already so grown up yet he doesn't even understand this principle of self-conduct." In which area has he grown up? His physical body, right? Yes! Though he has lived for thirty to forty years, his big body doesn't represent great wisdom. You may say, "He should know better!" The fact is he doesn't understand; had anybody taught him how husbands and wives should get along? Having studied for over ten years, have you ever come across such an article? Any article? Is this relationship important in life? It's important! In the Five Ethical Relationships, as long as the spousal relationship is proper, the other four will follow suit. You see, such important lessons aren't taught in school. An elder once told me that our education system has taught everything except one subject. What is it? You don't know? Moral education. It's true that they have all sorts of lessons including dancing and singing, but they lack the thing needed most: how to get along well with others. Therefore, her husband is a victim and we have the responsibility to help him. As the classic *Commentary of Zuo* states, "Not everyone is a sage, who can have no faults?" When you regard him as your son, you can immediately embrace him. With your embracing attitude, he will return from his lost path due to realizing the outside temptation is merely a delusional amusement. People often have to make mistakes before they come to know the truth. The outside third party is definitely not a good woman. A good woman will never break up someone else's family. Since this husband has poor cultivation, he was easily deceived by the woman's enticing speech.

Women's Secret Weapon

Teacher Yang has taught classics for about ten years. Apart from teaching children, she often teaches classics and calligraphy until past ten o'clock. After the children have left, it's the adults' turn to attend the class. As these women were troubled by many family problems and

couldn't find a solution, they felt much pain. Teacher Yang often told me that being a woman is really not easy, so we must give them more care and love. Many parents with family and education problems would seek Teacher Yang's advice and she would try her very best to help them. Teacher Yang often arrived home after one o'clock in the middle of the night. She always wore a coat and put an umbrella inside her clothes. What was it for? To use it whenever it was needed. It's more dangerous at midnight, so she must be fully armed. She also had to wrap herself up so that other people couldn't tell whether she was male or female. It can be seen from such a small action that among Teacher Yang's values, what is her main emphasis? Her top priority is to help people while her own issues of life and death are secondary.

There was a woman who asked Teacher Yang what to do about her husband's having an affair with another woman. Teacher Yang first calmed herself. When she did that, what would the other party do? She would also settle her mind. Then Teacher Yang asked her, "Do you really want to solve the problem?" She wanted to see if the woman was determined enough. She answered, "Yes!" Teacher Yang said, "Now that you have made up your mind, I will tell you, you must genuinely implement it. In such a situation, you must use the 'precious weapon' of a woman." What is this weapon? Tenderness. (*audience's reply) How do you all know it? Correct, amenability and tenderness must be applied. Teacher Yang said, "From today onwards, whatever wrongs that he does are secondary. Most importantly, you should reflect on whether you've done things correctly, such as taking good care of your children and parents-in-law. You should first carry out your duties well and let your virtues awaken his heart of remorse."

The next day, this woman dressed herself neatly and tidily. Could she dress sloppily? Many men are actually scared away by a woman's displeasing appearance. So, we still have to look dignified. She dressed very elegantly and took good care of her children's homework. After the children had gone to sleep, she sat there waiting for her husband to come home. She continued watching every second tick by. When it was already past twelve, she suddenly experienced one truth: all accomplishments are attributed to patience! Had she seethed with rage at that time, all her previous efforts might have been futile. She continued waiting until past one o'clock when she heard the sound of someone opening the door to come in. Now what? This woman quickly ran towards her husband, smiling brilliantly, while picking up his briefcase with both hands and said, "You're back, what a hectic day for you! You must be hungry, I'll cook a bowl of noodles for you." While she went inside to cook the noodles, her husband was in a daze, he wondered what had happened. From then on, she waited every day for her husband to come home. My friends, even though this husband had gone astray, at least he still had a little sense of shame. After about one to two months, her husband came home very early one day. Soon after he entered the house, before speaking a word, he knelt down and said, "Please forgive me! I have to repent my wrongdoings to you. During this time, I have been tormented by my conscience and I can hardly take it anymore."

What must we do to resolve the setbacks and predicaments in life? We still have to use our sincerity and virtues to overcome. No matter what kind of challenges we face in life, we must "not be afraid of difficulty," and remember Mencius' teaching: "When Heaven is about to

confer a great responsibility on a man..." We must also have the courage to take on responsibilities. "Taking on responsibility is the starting point for personal development." My friends, you can recall your own life: when did you make the greatest progress? It was in times of challenges and adverse conditions. We must be grateful to tests and unfavorable situations. This is "I must not be afraid of difficulty." Next phrase:

Be Proactive, Not Perfunctory

"I must not be perfunctory."

When we despise and ignore certain matters, our mind has already lost its respect and cautiousness. What things do we easily neglect and despise? Let's say we are going to give something to others today; even so, we must still remain respectful. In ancient times, there was a story about a person who saw many people going hungry, so he got some food for them. He thoughtlessly said to them, "Come! Come and eat!" As a result, one of the hungry men said, "I won't accept food that is rudely offered. You aren't even treating me like a human being." He would rather starve to death than eat that food. Our attitude will affect others' feelings. So today, even if we give donations and do charity, we mustn't forget to uphold respect and cautiousness. As a matter of fact, the other party is allowing us to cultivate fields of blessings and accumulate hidden merits; we should be thankful to them.

It's like my having given over a hundred lectures in Haikou; some elderly women in their seventies still often came to listen to my talks. Since they only spoke Hainanese, I had no idea if they could really understand my speech. But strangely, I saw them sitting there often responding with smiles. Many people thought that our talks have benefited them. However, I said to all the teachers, "We have to be grateful to our audiences because they are helping us improve ourselves." Likewise, you all look very kind and compassionate. If you were to show an unfriendly look, I might not have the courage to go on talking. Since so many people are giving us the opportunity, we can continue to grow. The speakers must always be grateful and humble. In this way, even if we are practicing giving, we would not forget to guard our mind well. Otherwise, when we're disrespectful and arrogant, the Dao we've been cultivating will be ruined.

In terms of giving food and even belongings, let's say we are going to donate clothes to someone, can we just give them some dirty clothes? We must be sincere when giving things to others. Before giving away the clothes, what should we do? Wash them clean! I remember when I intended to give my car to a friend, my father reminded me that we must make others happy when they receive our gift. But most of us would ignore this point, thinking that the other party should be contented when we give them things, right? Due to this neglectful and discourteous attitude, even though your original intention was good, oftentimes the gift might have a lot of problems, causing the recipient to become uncomfortable. After listening to my father's instruction, I started to inspect my car and found that the clutch was no longer easy to operate because it has been used for over ten years. I was only able to master the clutch after driving for several years. Despite my goodwill, he might have felt troubled had he found the

clutch difficult to operate and needed to spend a huge sum of money to repair it. He was already having financial difficulties; we have to be considerate of others. Even if we're giving people things, we must also consider their feelings. After repairing it, I gave the car to him. One to two weeks later, he called me and said that the car was still in good running condition even though it was over ten years old. Before long, this friend had a baby. With the baby around, what would happen if you rode a motorbike? Very dangerous! We have been friends for twenty years. It was he who introduced his girlfriend's teacher to me.

You see, such a good affinity between people will bloom more wonderfully as long as we seriously manage and put effort into it. For instance, if a friend comes to be our houseguest, we "must not be perfunctory"; we must first think of what daily necessities he may need if he comes over. Even if he does bring his own things, we must also prepare a set for him. People tend to be forgetful; in case he forgets to bring a towel and feels bad asking you for one, he may just wear his clothes without wiping his body dry and may catch a cold as a result. When we can always think for our friend and make him feel at home, I believe your friendship will become firmer and closer. I used to hold the position of dormitory head in Australia, whereby I was in charge of the daily necessities of a dorm. I often went to the lavatory to check if the toilet paper was sufficient. When the weather changed, I would ensure that the comforters were adequate. Every bit of our cautious support will definitely make our friends feel warm and happy. We must also spare no effort to contribute and care for others' food, clothing, accommodation, and transportation. This is "not being perfunctory."

In terms of educating a child, such as asking him to mop the floor, what should he do after he has finished mopping? He may think to himself: "Since you asked me to mop the floor, I'm doing it just to please you. I have to hurry up so that I can watch cartoons." Is this possible? The first time your child agreed to do something for you, he might have done it with a reluctant and perfunctory attitude, and if you didn't correct him, what would he possibly become in the future? He would carry out his tasks irresponsibly. Whether children are responsible and prudent in doing things also depends on parents' patience in tracking them.

The first time you let your child mop the living room, you must check whether he mopped it clean. If the corners are still very dirty, it means that he isn't serious in his work. Apart from showing his carelessness, it also means that he never completes tasks. How should he regard his job as completed? By asking his father or supervisor to check his work. Otherwise, he would think that what he has done should be quite satisfactory but it may still be far below the standards of his father or supervisor. This is also a responsible attitude. Should the father feel that his son's work is unacceptable, he should correct him immediately by saying, "Come son, you've worked so hard today and you've done pretty well." People love to listen to words of encouragement. You should start by encouraging him a bit, then tell him, "If you could further clean the corners thoroughly, then your job would be perfect. When I was your age, I didn't do this task so well." You can give him some acknowledgement. "Next time when dad asks you to do some work, you must first let me take a look after you've finished. Then you can go and do your own things." In this way, children will know how to treat everyone, every matter, and everything with respect and cautiousness.

I once stayed at Teacher Yang's house for half a year and she cared for me very much. She is very meticulous. Afraid that I didn't have money to spend during that period, she put some money in a wallet, placed it on top of the refrigerator, and simply said, "Take money whenever you need it." We can also feel that this elder has constantly been thinking about our needs. She was afraid that I would feel uncomfortable without money and would hesitate to tell her, so she used this skillful method to let me solve the problem very conveniently. Of course, I didn't take the money because after staying in her house for over a month, I went to teach in that school right away and had earned some money. Even though I'm not rich, I would have the opportunity to obtain money whenever I needed it.

Furthermore, when I was interacting with Uncle Lu, I also realized that he always treats people with great respect. I remember when I returned from Australia, he came to Taizhong to visit me and even brought a box of organic brown sugar konjac for me. Even though I'm his junior, he treats me very politely and never acts as if he is of a higher level. He bought the brown sugar konjac because he inadvertently heard that I almost went into the organic business before. So, when he saw the organic brown sugar konjac, he immediately thought of me. When interacting with people, Uncle Lu is very careful about understanding their likes and needs. Whenever there's an opportunity, he will surely contribute his efforts. He also taught juniors like us that we should reduce the worries of others in many of our actions. He further explained that when we leave our friend's house at night, we must call to tell the other party that we've reached home safely and not to worry about us. When we can always put ourselves in others' shoes, we can reduce their worries for us. When we leave our parents' home at night for instance, as children, we should remember to call our parents and loved ones when we've reached home so as not to let them worry about us. We mustn't take these small things lightly.

I often take flights with Teacher Yang. Before boarding, she has the habit of confirming with the other party whether the flight is on schedule. And she would calculate the time: let's say the plane was scheduled to arrive at 7:30; she would give an allowance of twenty or forty minutes--longer for an international flight and shorter for a domestic flight. She would tell the other party to come and pick her up at 7:50, with a twenty-minute gap, so that people wouldn't have to wait too long. When we're thoughtful of others, they will be considerate of us too. So, don't be perfunctory. Next phrase:

How To Avoid Becoming a Rowdy Heretic

"I must stay away from rowdy places, and I must not ask about things that are heretical or unusual."

"Rowdy places" refers to places which are more complicated and extravagant, our children should not go to those places. Why would children go to these places? Why? They feel empty because they don't have a goal in life. Another very important, root problem is he doesn't have the ability to judge, so he doesn't know what kind of friends he should make, what kind of places he should go, and what kind of things he should do, so that they are helpful to his

life. When would he develop this ability to judge? Many parents would be very nervous about one thing. They would say, "I'm afraid that my child will make bad friends in the future." My friends, do you have this worry? Yes or no? Yes! Is it helpful to continue worrying? No! We must think of ways to help children establish their ability to judge.

I once saw a report of a child who had committed a very serious crime and the police station called to inform his mother. When she received the call, she said, "It's absolutely impossible that the criminal is my son. He wouldn't do such a thing." Later, before she entered the police station, she was still telling herself that it must be someone with the same first and last name as her son. When she opened the door, she saw her son sitting there recording his statement. She denied any responsibility, blaming his son's friends for corrupting him. Is it right for her to say so? The saints and sages teach us, "When things don't accord with our wishes, we must turn inwards, and introspect ourselves." If we don't have this reflective attitude, we won't know how many mistakes we've made in life, and such a life is really not worth it.

I said to many friends that whether we will encounter good or bad friends depends very much on us. We shouldn't think and worry based on our afflicted mind; we should accord with rationality and the truth in facing matters. *The Book of Changes* states, "Things of a kind come together. People of a mind fall into the same group." (Birds of a feather flock together.) It means that kind-hearted people will stay together while evil people will attract immoral friends. In this respect, when our children are very virtuous and kind-hearted, they will naturally draw good friends to themselves. Most importantly, we must start to develop a child's goodness.

My sister started teaching her son to read *Dizigui* when he was just over three years old. She also explained the meaning to him. She brought him out to interact with other small children when he was three or four years old. When he saw other children hitting or calling others names he would pull his mother's hand and say that these children shouldn't do that. Why did he judge so? After you have taught him *Dizigui*, for example, when you teach him that filial piety is a wholesome and proper deed, will he know what unwholesome is? Not being filial! When you teach him that loving siblings and respecting elders are virtuous acts, will he know what is wicked? Disrespectful and unloving toward siblings. When he knows that cautiousness is very important and accomplishing his own tasks is good, he will also know what is bad. When he knows that loving people is good, will he know what is evil? Right, so children can discern right from wrong. Then, he will know how to make the right choices.

When he always bears kind thoughts, how will he feel when he goes to a rowdy place? He will feel very uncomfortable. So now, if you asked me to go to the dancing hall and stand for a minute, I would surely have difficulty breathing and a headache, as the magnetic vibration there is bad. "When we associate with virtuous people, we will blend in with them over time." After you have received the saints' and sages' teachings, whatever you think and do will be wholesome. When put in an unwholesome environment, you will instantly feel very uncomfortable and will naturally avoid such places. Only when children can discern between right and wrong can they make wise choices. Do parents teach this now? When children are

not taught to distinguish between good and bad, they will be corrupted at once when they encounter immoral friends in high school.

"Everything arises from causes and conditions." What causes a person to make bad friends? He can't differentiate between good and bad. It is the wicked friends appearing which leads to bad results. People often pay attention to the condition but overlook the real cause. In thousands of years of history, many sages had lived in chaotic times, but they were able to remain unaffected because they knew the principles of self-conduct very well. My friends, if you let your child firmly establish the foundation of discerning right from wrong, you can then sit back and relax in your middle and old age. We must plan our lives by thinking deeply and planning carefully. Alright, we'll stop here for today. Thank you everyone.