

Confucius Teaching on Building A Happy Life (28)

- a foundation for Mahayana Buddhism practice

Validated by Master Chin Kung

The Speaker: Teacher Tsai Lixu

2/15-2/23 2005

Word Is Bond

Good morning everyone! Yesterday we began the fourth chapter on "trustworthiness." We also mentioned that one's word is one's bond, "When I speak, credibility is foremost." It also implies a deeper meaning: righteous obligation. We do not have to voice what our duties are, but we should always bear them in mind and never forget them. Yesterday, we also mentioned the parent-child relationship, we spoke of many filial children. One of them did not give up hope in searching for his mother in order to attend to her to fulfill his filial duty even though they had been separated for fifty years. So indeed, "Heaven will not disappoint those who keep trying." Eventually Zhu Shouchang of the Song Dynasty successfully found his mother. Moreover, not only did he take his mother home to tend to her, but he even took care of his half-siblings. These were all the duties that scholars always kept in mind.

When I listened to Teacher Yang telling the ancient Chinese sages' *Moral Education Stories* in Australia, I almost burst into tears every time. Once, a burly looking man from Hong Kong was sitting next to me. When he saw tears streaming down my face during the lecture, he slowly pushed tissues towards me. He did not look at me, he just slowly pushed the tissues towards me. He is also very gentle-hearted. Why did my tears keep rolling down? Because I was deeply touched by the true stories, such as "Zi Lu Carries Rice"; when Zi Lu was still extremely poor, he spared no effort to support his parents. He traveled over a hundred miles to carry some rice home to serve his parents. When he was carrying the bag of rice home, not only did it not feel heavy for him, but he also felt very fulfilled and delighted because he was carrying out his duty as a son. Later, he became an official and was affluent. Even though he was always served sumptuous meals, he had no appetite for them. The people around him asked, "Such extravagant food, why don't you eat it?" Zi Lu replied, "Because my parents are no longer around to enjoy these foods with me. These meals can't compare with those I had when I first helped my parents carry rice over a hundred miles. That food was delicious and satisfying." The saints' and sages' stories made me feel what the "real taste" of being a human is. As I listened, I cried out in my heart and told myself that people should live like this to be happy.

Many friends discuss with me how to learn the saints' and sages' teachings. Actually, what is the most important thing to learn from their teachings? We must learn their intentions and motives. The saints and sages would not dare to ignore the values of filial piety, fraternity, loyalty, trustworthiness, decency, righteousness, integrity, and a sense of shame, and would always apply them in their interactions with people. When they could always implement these virtues, their bad habits would naturally and gradually disappear. By familiarizing ourselves with the teachings of *Dizigui*, we can always self-reflect and remind ourselves of the saints' and sages' conduct and intentions. In this way, I believe "Set a loose schedule, but

apply tight efforts; when our efforts reach a certain level, obstacles will dissolve." When a person really applies the saints' and sages' intentions and behavior, he will surely be filled with immense joy every day.

"Trustworthiness" is mentioned because it is one's duty and obligation. Yesterday, we mentioned dutiful morality and obliging kindness between superiors and subordinates. We also mentioned yesterday that subordinates should be rational instead of being emotional to communicate well with their leaders in their work. In fact, why do people have conflicts? Mostly because they are too distant from each other and lack communication. When communication is lacking for a long time, opposition and confrontation will easily arise and conflicts will ensue. Leaders should open the door for conversation and be generous in accepting their subordinates' advice. At the same time, subordinates should have the responsibility to exhort their superiors.

My friends, do you dare to give advice to your superior? I have heard friends say, "I don't have the courage to do so." Some even said, "There are several superiors in a department, who should I follow? Only if I follow the right leader, can I make rapid progress in my career in the future." If we use this intention to work for our superiors, will such a life go well? Every day, you must closely observe his mood and facial expression, fawn on, and flatter him; this is too tiring! If the supervisor you bet on does not get promoted, what would happen? Wouldn't you be so upset that you would thump your chest and stamp your feet? Moreover "A change of sovereign brings a change of ministers in the cabinet." It is really exhausting when we all serve our superior for the purpose of seeking fame. If by fawning and flattering you are really promoted and follow this leader, does that mean you can then sit back and relax with your life? Not necessarily. Can a leader who fawns and flatters keep making progress in his career? Impossible! A leader who accepts fawning and flattering has limited wisdom and insight in life. What would happen then? He would be replaced when something goes wrong. We can see many high-ranking officials in the current society who were dismissed from their post after two to five months. Although you may have made the right bet, in the end it would come to nothing.

Where should we bet our effort and intention? Especially as civil servants, what should we follow? We should go along with our own duty and people's needs. In this way, you would give frank advice to your leader without qualms. Since you are fulfilling your duty to serve the people, your abilities would also improve by the day. When you have real abilities, who would a good supervisor use once he takes office? Of course, he would appoint those who can really be trusted to do the job well. Then, opportunity would naturally come to you without you pursuing it. So, in our life, if we can follow the principle of "Tao takes its law from Nature," we can naturally meet with success and will not live amidst worries of personal gains and losses. Therefore, subordinates should fulfill their duties and advise their superiors without expecting any returns.

Loyalty Is Righteousness

Over ten years ago, there was an economic storm in Southeast Asia; many countries were facing great challenges and some of them with financial problems had collapsed. At that time an employee at a Korean company, which was facing bankruptcy, donated his own money to the company and told his boss, "Our company can't go out of business. Please accept this money of mine and use it first." Indeed, moral responsibility and righteous kindness do exist between superiors and subordinates. Could this happen among Chinese people? Could it?

You must have confidence! We see this in the Koreans; may I ask who they learned this from? Right, the Chinese! The Koreans are now really serious about learning Chinese culture. They have a series of courses from elementary school through university for learning Confucian culture. And all the Koreans take pride in learning it. So, we must really be able to understand this treasure left by our ancestors or else this wisdom will be carried forward by neighboring countries and not by us. Then as their descendants, we would not be performing our duty.

That was the "superior-subordinate relationship." Next is the husband-wife relationship. Of course, spouses must also keep their word. Otherwise, what would happen? Perhaps they would get suspicious of, verbally attack, or mock each other. Since they interact with each other day and night, the relationship would be very dangerous. So promises must be kept. I have heard now that husbands and wives have their own secrets and private savings. If we have secrets and private savings that we do not tell the other party about, when we use a fabricated and insincere attitude with the other party, would the other party be able to sense it? Could they? Yes! People frequently deceive themselves and others. Actually, doing so will make us feel insecure. Even if you do retain some money with you, you will be on edge everyday. When you keep money like this what will happen to your health? Since you are constantly worrying every day, your health is bound to deteriorate. Spouses should adhere to one attitude when regulating a family: they should not keep secrets and should be honest and open. This is best.

Every time my mother received her salary, she would give it all to my father. In my family, my father takes charge of the finances; my mother has never asked about this matter. The more my mother trusts my father, the harder my father works for the family. In fact, people who truly trust others tend to have a more relaxed life. My mother never manages money and neither does she know how to ride a bicycle. Every time she goes out, she tells my father, "I can't do anything, I am dumb!" So how does my father attend to her needs? Happily and with a great sense of achievement. Later, after I learned to drive, it became my turn to serve my mother too. People should not be too clever and take control of everything, causing others to feel inept around you. In the end, you would become exhausted from overwork and be disliked by people. One's shrewdness should be indrawn and never be used to oppress others. Moderation is required here.

In terms of speech, one should keep one's word. There should be mutual gratitude between husband and wife. We must be thankful for their accompaniment throughout more than half the journey of life. As a man, one must always remember that his wife has helped him do one very important thing. What is it? Carrying on the ancestral line. This loving kindness alone cannot be repaid because a man cannot do it by himself, right? Therefore "I must repay the kindness of others, and let go of resentment." When husband and wife often think about each other's contribution and kindness, they can let go of conflicts. By always bearing others' kindness in mind, we will be happy to see each other. How could the relationship possibly be bad? When spouses get along well, they live a joyous and harmonious life every day.

In the Han Dynasty, Emperor Guangwu had a minister named Song Hong who was very incorruptible and very responsible. At that time, Song Hong was Minister of Works, meaning he was in charge of the civil engineering work, which was a very important position in the country. Emperor Guangwu's elder sister, Princess Huyang, had just become a widow because her husband had passed away. The Emperor was discussing with her about helping her find another husband from someone among the Imperial Court. Then he asked his sister, "Who do

you admire most among all the ministers?" The princess immediately said, "Song Hong's manner is extraordinary and he has excellent virtues." The emperor understood her meaning at once. He called for Song Hong and said to him, "When one gains status he should change to new friends, and when one has wealth he should change his wife. Is this the nature of human sensibilities?" This seems to be the current trend with human sensibility. He was trying to test Song Hong's mind to see if he had the intention to marry his sister.

My friends, what would he become if he married the emperor's sister? The emperor's relative. In an instant he would go from minister to what? A royal family member; many people dream of having such an opportunity. Song Hong understood the emperor's meaning and immediately said these two sentences to him, "Don't forget friends whom you made when you were poor; don't abandon your wife who has been through hardship with you." It means that when we have many friends who have helped us as we struggled through poverty and the hardships of life, we cannot forget these friends when our career finally takes off. And we cannot divorce our original wife who accompanied us through the hardships of poverty while building a career together.

Song Hong was very skillful in speech. Suppose the emperor had asked, "Do you intend to marry my sister?" Suppose Song Hong had quickly replied, "Don't you know that I can't abandon my wife who has gone through thick and thin with me?" How would the Emperor react? "Why aren't you showing me due respect?" Song Hong said it pleasantly and concisely by first saying, "We can't forget friends whom we knew when we were poor." He paused so that the emperor would first think, "Yes, we must attach importance to moral righteousness in life." Song Hong then said, "We can't divorce the wife who accompanied us through the hardships of poverty." In this way the emperor would not put him in a difficult situation. Therefore, we must be artful when we talk, the order is important. It is like when you exhort a friend: as soon as you see him can you say, "Come, today I will point out your shortcomings"? He would be speechless. You have to first tell him about his recent positive points by mentioning one or two of them. Then you can tell him the shortcoming that he should rectify. This is the proper order of speech because we have to accord with people's feelings. It is said, "With sophisticated skills in dealing with interpersonal relationships, we can create symphonies everywhere."

Because Song Hong had rejected the emperor and his sister, Princess Huyang, his righteous affection and moral courage not only affected his family, but also influenced all ministers and generals of the Imperial Court, as well as scholars over a thousand years later. Often when these scholars became richer and high-ranking, they might have thought of changing their wives. but when they read about Song Hong they would restrain themselves, because such awe-inspiring righteousness can exert powerful influence. I also believe that long after Song Hong rejected this royal marriage, the dynasty's civil and military officers never dared to divorce their wives. The scholars should demonstrate this attitude: "His bearing constitutes an example to the world, his conduct is emulated by all people, and his speech becomes the criterion of society." They always held fast to the motto "Learn to be a teacher of others, and act as a model to the world." Only then could their behavior influence the social atmosphere. We must also emulate Song Hong's intention by setting a good example in word and deed for our family and society. In this respect, husband and wife must keep this obliged credibility and moral responsibility.

The Bond Between Siblings

The fourth of the Five Ethical Relationships is "love and respect between siblings." Siblings must also keep their word. If they do not, the family atmosphere might have problems or even conflicts. Since siblings should have both righteous affection and obliged kindness, they must unite so that parents can rest assured. As stated in *Dizigui*, "The older children should be loving and the younger ones should be respectful; when siblings get along harmoniously, filial piety already exists in their actions." In my memory of love and respect between siblings, my father never told me that I must love my older sisters, nor did he tell them that they must take care of me. The most important thing was that my parents set an example for us to emulate. As the saying goes, "People will accept our teaching when we lead them by example; if we only give them verbal teaching, they will argue with us." When you really practice what you preach, your children will naturally be happy to follow your example. On the contrary, if you only teach verbally, after hearing you for a long time they may disagree with you and will quarrel with you in the end!

Today many siblings go to court to sue each other for wealth and property. It is stated in *Zhu Bolu's Maxims for Managing the Family*, "Fights and lawsuits are prohibited within the family." What is considered very taboo in a family or clan? Litigation among family members. We often speak of obliged affection among people and the law of the nation. We must take care of the former because ignoring it will lead to disharmony, which makes it impossible for a family to prosper. When family members sue each other for inheritance, I guarantee that they will not be able to keep this money. When conflicts arise among siblings, what have they already done for the next generation? Set a very bad example! This family has already revealed signs of failure. "Fights and lawsuits are prohibited within the family; litigation will bring misfortune in the end."

In the Ming Dynasty, there was a lady whose last name was Chen. Her parents had passed away relatively early and she still had two younger brothers who were only six and five years old. She was of marriageable age and her parents had left some inheritance for the family. All her relatives had been prying and coveting her family's wealth. What to do? In life, one often has to confront choices, which relies on one's wisdom. If she married, who would take care of her two brothers? So she made up her mind to take care of her brothers wholeheartedly.

She knew that her relatives had been scheming of ways to get her family's inheritance. So, one day she lit many bright candles at home, cooked a lot of dishes, and set them on the table. She was aware that these relatives often walked by her house; so after setting up the feast, she walked outside and invited these relatives in saying, "Come in, come in! Have some food inside with us." Initially, these relatives had come to see if they could get something from Chen, but Chen ended up taking the initiative to invite them in to dinner. As a result, these relatives felt ashamed and said to her, "We just came here because we ran out of candles, we wanted to borrow some from you." So, she invited all of them into the house to have dinner together. Everyone was embarrassed and dared not look at each other. Since that day, these relatives never came to her house again. This was because she was very broadminded and avoided direct verbal conflicts with her relatives. Thanks to this attitude, she had awakened her relatives' sense of shame. Furthermore, they could also deeply feel her decision to raise her younger brothers. Later, her two brothers also had their own families and careers. She did not get married until age forty-five and never had any children. Later, her two brothers naturally attended to her in her old age.

It is this kind of affection and moral responsibility that the older brothers and sisters had for their younger siblings in ancient times. So, we should also emulate their examples. Actually,

people often care about gains and losses: for instance, they may think that they will suffer losses when they take care of their younger brother more. If they are always calculating like this, their life will be unfulfilling and unhappy. So, we should go all out to help when our siblings have difficulties.

There is one of our teachers in Shenzhen whose husband's younger sister happened to work in Hawaii. Her life there was very difficult. The husband told his wife, "I hope to send all our savings from these two to three years to my sister, because she is going through a tough time." If he were your husband, how would you answer him? At that time, you should think, "broadmindedness leads to immense fortune" and "a noble man is always ready to help others attain their aims." You should help your husband fulfill his fraternal duty, his love for his younger sister, and his filiality. Because when his parents see him caring so much for his sister, they will have peace of mind. The wife immediately said, "I admire your deed very much and feel elated too. I will help you send the money." When husband and wife interact in this way, I believe their affection will grow deeper and deeper. Even though we have given up the money, we have gained our family's harmony and happiness. It is also said that "a family that lives in harmony is bound to be prosperous." Since everything can be prosperous, are we still afraid of not having money in the future? In life, we must fulfill our duties and be farsighted instead of being calculating all the time. This is the moral responsibility between siblings.

The Obligations Between Friends

Let us look at the fifth relationship: "trustworthiness between friends." Other than keeping one's word, friends must also have credibility and obligation. In the Han Dynasty, there were two scholars named Zhang Shao and Fan Shi. They studied together at the Imperial College* and had a very good relationship. (*The highest ranking educational institute in ancient China from the Han to the Sui Dynasty.) Later, they returned to their respective hometowns. They made a pact to meet up two years later to the day, whereby Fan Shi would visit Zhang Shao. After two years, Zhang Shao told his mother, "My friend will visit me today." His mother said, "I think he might have forgotten the promise made two years ago." Moreover, the friends' houses were a thousand miles apart. Zhang Shao said to his mother, "My friend is a very trustworthy person, he will surely come." So, his mother began to prepare some sumptuous meals. Sure enough, Fan Shi turned up and became their guest. It goes without saying that "When drinking with a bosom friend, even a thousand cups are not enough." Their friendship had grown stronger with time.

Later, when Fan Shi was critically ill, he told his wife, "You must look for Zhang Shao and tell him to come and see me off because I will be dying soon." So, his wife quickly went to inform Zhang Shao. As time was running short, Zhang Shao rushed to his friend's hometown as soon as he heard the news. Fan Shi was going to be buried but Zhang Shao had not arrived. Meanwhile, the workers performing the funeral were taking measurements but could not measure accurately, so they could not bury the coffin; this was taking forever. As soon as Zhang Shao arrived, the very next measurement was right. So, Zhang Shao personally buried his friend. Why did Fan Shi need his friend to help him arrange the funeral? Because he had great trust in Zhang Shao. Furthermore, Fan Shi knew very well that not only would his friend arrange his funeral properly, but he would also take care of his wife and children. We are deeply touched to learn about this kind of affection between friends in ancient times.

There was another ancient scholar named Zhu Hui. When he was studying at the Imperial

College, he met a friend named Zhang Kan. Although they studied together, they seldom talked to each other. Zhang Kan had been observing what kind of a person Zhu Hui was. Later he was touched by Zhu Hui's virtues and felt that he was a very trustworthy person. One day, Zhang Kan told Zhu Hui, "I intend to entrust my wife and children to your care." It showed that he had absolute trust in Zhu Hui. But Zhu Hui did not say anything because their friendship was not very strong. Perhaps Zhang Kan knew well that his days were numbered and he passed away not long after. When Zhu Hui heard the news, he took his son to Zhang Kan's house and gave his family a lot of food and clothes. His son was puzzled and asked him, "Dad, you have never interacted with this person before. Why are you helping him so much after his death?" His son had this doubt. Zhu Hui replied, "Zhang Kan originally wanted to entrust his wife and children to me. This shows that he trusted me and had already regarded me as his confidant. So, I have already treated him as a friend in my heart." The ancients were unwilling to go against their inner voice. If he had, his conscience would not be at ease. Even if they were not bosom friends, he had already treated him as a friend, so he had to fulfill his duty as a friend.

What are the obligations between friends? The first is of course to exhort each other. As stated in *Dizigui*, "When we exhort each other to do goodness, both our virtues are established; when we do not dissuade each other from doing bad, both our morals will be undermined." If we do not advise our friend when he is at fault, we have not fulfilled our duty as a friend. So, the foremost duty is to exhort one another; the second is to show our concern; the third is to praise each other. As *Dizigui* states, "Praising others' good deeds is a good deed in itself; they will be encouraged to do even better when they hear about it." The fourth is not to disclose bad things about our friends' family, as doing so is being morally unrighteous. Lastly, we must willingly share our wealth when our friends are in need. We talked a lot about exhorting others in this lesson. Why? Because the current society is rather complicated; since every one of us has only one pair of eyes, it is impossible for us to take care of every aspect. Therefore, parents, children, superiors, subordinates, spouses, siblings, and friends all need reminding. By being reminded, we can understand the truth better. First, we must be willing to accept people's advice and secondly, we must know how to advise our friends and relatives. That is why we talked more about this topic.

Next is caring about friends. In fact, we have to implement this at all times. We cannot teach our children, "You only need to care for your family and friends, not other people." Is it right to teach like this? People only have one heart. How can it be divided in two? When one is indifferent to strangers, will he remember his family's kindness? Very difficult! When he can extend care to everyone, how can it be possible that he will not take care of the people closest to him, his parents and siblings. For instance, we can frequently remind children that they should be even more respectful to people who have a hard time getting around. Their lives are already difficult, if we look at them with a strange expression, it will make them even more uncomfortable. We can cultivate children's compassion and kindness from these small matters. For example, when we see elderly, toddlers, frail people, or pregnant women getting on a bus, we can quickly lead our child to give up our seats. This is nurturing him to care about others' well-being.

Other than caring for our friends, we must also show concern for their immediate and extended family. When you respect your friend's father, your friend and even his siblings will be happy too. You can then get along well with his entire family. When you call your friend after being out of touch for two to three months, you can show your concern by asking, "How's your mom's health? Has your dad been well recently?" Even though it is just a simple

greeting, you will make the other party feel very warm. Since we have learned *Dizigui*, not only can you care for his parents, but more importantly, you can also care about his children's education. Almost all families now have to rack their brains for their children's education. We have been promoting sages' teachings for over a year and many families have made quite big changes after accessing the method of educating children.

When I was lecturing in Shenzhen, there was a wife whose entire family, including her husband and four children, came to attend my class. The children were already teenagers in junior and senior high school. It was very interesting! This wife happened to be a little displeased with her husband. Later after the class, she told me that she had originally felt that her husband was at fault. After learning the core teaching of Confucianism, "when things do not accord with our wishes, we must turn inwards and examine ourselves in every point," she switched her mindset and realized that she had not done well enough and was not qualified to criticize her husband. She had also treated her children the same way. In the past, she would always see their shortcomings, but after that lesson, she reflected whether she had been setting a good example. As soon as she changed her thinking, the obstacles were naturally eliminated. So, we have to care about our friends and further care for their family and life.

Next, we have to encourage and acknowledge each other, because throughout our life's journey our mood often fluctuates. At this time, we particularly need our friends' support and comfort. It is often said, "Scholars despise each other." Why is that so? Because they have developed arrogance and even jealousy. Let us think about it: when a scholar gives rise to contempt for others, thinking that his knowledge and articles surpass those of his peers, he has actually gone downhill. Would he succeed in his pursuit of wisdom in this life? Impossible! As the saying goes, "The more knowledgeable and well-cultivated a person is, the more modest he will be." A truly learned person would see everyone with a peaceful and joyous heart. How would it be possible for him to disdain others?

So, when we study the saints' and sages' classics, we must tackle one killer: our own jealousy. Moreover, when jealousy arises, not only will one and the other party suffer, but the greater problem is that it will affect people in society. For instance, if the scholar is very virtuous and many people are learning from him, your jealousy and even verbal slander will cause this large group of people to lose confidence in him. Then you have committed a grave offense. When a person is always jealous of others, his brain activity will surely become increasingly inflexible because he hinders people from learning the saints' teachings and the opportunity to acquire wisdom. Since Dharma-dana (imparting sages' teachings) increases our own wisdom and intelligence, if we obstruct people from teaching others, we will become deluded and ignorant. So, we must broaden our mind to appreciate others and practice this phrase in *Dizigui*: "Praising others' good deeds is a good deed in itself; they will be encouraged to do even better when they hear about it. Upon seeing the good points of others, I should strive to be as good as them. Even if I am far behind them, I am getting closer gradually." When friends can mutually praise and rejoice in others' meritorious deeds, regardless of a group or the academic world, a harmonious and peaceful atmosphere will ensue. Therefore, we must praise others' good deeds.

The fourth obligation is not to reveal bad things about our friends' family. Because our friend trusts us, he might discuss some private matters about his family with us. We have to be very careful about these words and not disclose them to others. Because sometimes when you tell people, this matter will be used by someone to create rumors. This will hurt our friend's feelings or his family. Therefore, when our friend has already opened his heart to us, we

should be more vigilant with our words. Of course, we actually need not disclose many of our family's private matters to people. For example, you may tell your neighbors and friends some bad things about your husband. In the end, to whose ears might these words spread? Your husband's. When he hears it, he will surely get angry. This would badly affect the husband-wife relationship. Besides, it will cause everyone to despise you and even show the same disrespect to your husband, which is very bad. So, we have to promote our husband's goodness and conceal his wrongs. Although he may think that he is no good, if one day he were to find out that you are praising and approving him outside, he would definitely think that he should strive to improve himself so as not to let you down. So, it is important not to expose the bad things about our own or other families.

The last obligation is we must be willing to share our wealth with friends. "Wealth" here does not only connote money and things. We can also extend it to mean internal and external wealth. Inner wealth refers to physical labor, experience, and wisdom while external wealth is money and goods. Since ups and downs are inevitable in life, when our friend really has an urgent situation, such as his parents falling seriously ill and he cannot instantly raise a lot of money, we have to save people in critical condition and immediately help him when we can. "The size of kindness is not important" but what matters most is that it is "given in times of crisis." If you can extend such help and care to him, he will be very touched. This is the responsibility of sharing wealth between friends. I remember when I was little, my father used to help some of our relatives who could not afford to register for their children's schooling. When he took out the money, what could I sense about his attitude? Other than utter sincerity, his attitude was he did not expect them to return the money as he regarded it as mutual help between family members. Indeed, every word and deed of our parents has an imperceptible effect on children. We will stop here for today. Thank you everyone.