

Confucius Teaching on Building A Happy Life (31)

- a foundation for Mahayana Buddhism practice

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How To Surely Become a CEO

Hello my friends, good evening. We have entered the fourth chapter which is on “trustworthiness.” We have also mentioned, not only is our trustworthiness required in all Five Ethical Relationships, but righteous credibility, morality, and gratitude must also be maintained to help and support each other. In this way, one is bound to enjoy harmonious, happy, and complete interpersonal relationships.

In terms of the issue of trustworthiness, do we need to keep our word in business? Yes. (Audience’s answer) But there is also a saying, “One must be cunning to become a businessman.” Too many fallacious ideas nowadays! We must really know how to judge. For instance, there is a saying, “If one does not seek personal gains, he will be weeded out.” Who said this sentence? We can’t find the source. May I ask why did he say this? Too selfish! Very possibly, he wanted to leave himself a way out (for his own selfishness). This attitude is not good! Considering that our words can give wrong ideas to others, we must be cautious with our speech and deeds. When we are uncertain if our words are correct, we should not readily spread them. That is why the sages teach us, “When I am still unsure of what I know, I will not hastily spread it.”

Regarding business issues, we have also encountered parents who say, “Since you taught children to be so sincere and trustworthy, what should they do when they go into business in the future?” We would tell them, “Then your son will surely become a CEO.” If everyone is dishonest and only he can be trusted, who will people do business with? Of course, they will do business with the credible person. The idea that “one must be cunning to become a businessman” is wrong. One can deceive others once or twice but he cannot cheat people for long. As it is said, “Time will eventually reveal a person’s heart.” Moreover, even if he could get business through trickery, he has actually reduced his own blessings. He may still boastfully say, “You see, I have made so much money!” Actually, he was destined to have that wealth. But he used the wrong method, leading to his destined blessings being decreased. This is “A petty man behaves as a petty man in vain”! People should uphold credibility whether in government, business, or any organization. This is the right attitude of life.

Do Not Make Empty Promises

Next phrase, “I must not agree to do something inappropriate; if I do, I will put myself into a dilemma.”

We also mentioned dealing with children's demands; we can agree if they are reasonable, but if they are not, we must persevere. Otherwise, if you fulfill their every demand, you are nurturing their greed and extravagance, which will cause serious harm to them instead. So, we cannot easily agree to such requests. When we find out that children give false promises, we must guide and educate them. This morning we mentioned, when children promise others, they must first consider whether they have the ability to do it. Next, they must consider whether their promises comply with the school regulations and the nation's law. We have to establish such attitudes in children since young so that they will not make promises lightly.

As adults we must not make empty promises either. For example, when someone has an emergency and seeks your help, you must first calm yourself to listen to him clearly. Sometimes when the other party is very anxious, his urgency will drive your mind into confusion. Perhaps after you have promised him, things may not be as you thought. For instance, his words are just one side of the story. The situation may not be as you expected since you did not calm yourself. Then, it will be very difficult for you to deal with what you have promised. Therefore, "Urgent matters should be handled calmly and taken slowly." When the other party seeks your help and even wants to settle the matter with you, you must also first consider whether his ability is sufficient. Secondly, make sure your own ability is enough. You must make sure all of the conditions are right. If you casually promise him when the conditions are not right yet, you will then get stuck between doing and not doing. At that time, you will feel very embarrassed and even cause some misunderstandings. Your original intention was good, but it may be hard for you to clean up the mess in the end. Therefore, rational judgement must accompany kind intentions. So, "I must not agree to do something inappropriate, if I do, I will put myself into a dilemma."

How To Give a Good Speech

Let's see the next phrase. "Whenever I speak, I must say it gracefully with sincerity; neither hasten nor blur."

Since we have many interactions with others, shouldn't we need to learn how to talk? Yes! Have you ever learned to speak? If you have not, would you like to come up here to practice? You just have to practice more. Speaking has to be trained since childhood. Nevertheless, I was not trained from childhood because I was not talented then. I have never participated in any speech competitions or reading contests. To me, I was insulated from those opportunities. However, when I was in college, I opened up my mind with regard to learning. At that time, I learned about health which I felt is very important to a person. So, at the tea shop nearby our college, I often asked two to three friends, "Can you come and listen to my speech?" I made an appointment with them at the shop and started talking to them about "The Importance of Nutrition to Human's Health" and "The Importance of Interpersonal Relationships.", I started practicing in front of two to three people. Later, when I was going to Haikou, Teacher Yang told me, "As soon as there is an opportunity, even with only two to three people, go for it!" I obeyed the teacher's instructions and delivered over one hundred lectures one after another at that time. After that, I headed to Shenzhen and gave another two to three hundred lectures in about half a year. Right after that, in July we started to conduct lectures nationwide and I have been training myself all along like this. So, when it comes to speaking, we "must not be afraid of difficulty." Practice makes perfect. But it all lies in our intentions. Most importantly,

our speech must be able to benefit others, or else “It is better to speak less than talk too much.”

At the classes we hold in various places, our center’s teachers often give children the opportunity to speak on stage. Other than speaking, they are also trained on their demeanor: walking with a dignified poise, standing with an upright stance, and always giving a deep bow to show reverent salute. When they go on stage, they have to first introduce themselves and then say, “Last week I did such and such filial acts for my parents.” Because, when each tells what he has done, everyone can then practice “Upon seeing the good points of others, I should strive to be as good as them.” My friends, where is *Dizigui*? Its teachings can be applied in life at all times. Other than speaking, they are also trained on their demeanor. They first make a bow when they walk on stage, and then they will introduce themselves, “I’m so and so, I’m however many years old.” At this time, what could you see them doing with their hands? Swinging back and forth, not following their will. At times, their speech was not clear. What should you do when children speak unclearly? You have to give them some leeway. “Come, once again.” You have to give them several attempts until they can speak correctly. In this way, they can train their audacity.

In terms of the tone of speech, they must “neither hasten nor blur.” We previously talked a lot about the attitudes and manners of speaking. Are there any other phrases in *Dizigui* which are related to this? “Before an elder, I will speak softly. But if my voice is too low to be heard, it is inappropriate.” The tone of speaking should be moderate, neither too loud nor too soft. Also, “When answering questions, I must look at the person without averting my eyes.” When we talk to people, we must look them in the eye to show our respect. You can spend some time to pay attention to and train children on these little details. They will naturally follow the standard rules of conduct after three to four weeks. There was a little girl who was quite introverted... We let all children practice their speech during the classes. A few months later, this introverted little girl won a prize in a speech contest. Her mother was elated. If your child is afraid to talk, you can first demonstrate to him and then let him practice speaking with you. He will surely enjoy doing it. When you practice together with children, they will be more convinced.

Apart from letting children practice their speaking, we must always observe whether we speak too fast when we talk to others. If we do, how will others feel? They will have to strain themselves to listen. It will be dangerous if they have heart disease. Many friends say, “I already speak slow enough.” Is this good or bad? We cannot use our own standard, but must use the standard acceptable by others. Honestly, what is the purpose of speaking? Of course, we speak to let people listen and not for ourselves. Let’s say you are talking to your boss on the phone about some official matters but the boss speaks too fast and you cannot listen clearly. What should you do since you have to deal with this matter? At this time, you should not directly tell him not to speak too fast if you are not very close to him. You can take a step back by repeating to him what you have heard, “So you are saying such and such...?” Repeat what you have heard to him! In this way, he will immediately tell you again in case you may have indeed heard wrong. Otherwise, if you pretend to have understood but make mistakes later, the boss will not think that he speaks too fast. He surely will say, “You haven’t done your job.” So, we must make it a habit: regardless of who is giving us a task, we must repeat

what he has said before we hang up the phone. Only then can we avoid making any mistakes. Oftentimes, the misunderstanding in one sentence will make us start over from scratch. In life, “An inch of time is worth an inch of gold,” we must not waste everyone’s time just because of our negligence to one sentence. This is not good! We must be prudent in dealing with this matter. Next phrase:

Do Not Engage In Gossip

“When hearing gossip here and there, I will not get involved if it does not concern me.” We just mentioned the need to repeat others’ instructions. We can also let children nurture this habit from a young age. By forming this habit from an early age, I believe when his teacher asks him to do something, he will say, “Teacher, is this what you mean...?” I am sure these teachers and elders will be very pleased with him since he can be trusted.

“When hearing gossip here and there” means discussing others’ good and bad points. Why do people gossip like this? What is their purpose? As the saying goes, “A gossip is a troublemaker himself.” People have the habit of forcing others to pick one side. “Are you here with us or over there?” Is there this tendency? We should not pick either side. So, “I will not get involved if it does not concern me.” Quickly stay away from the source, because a gossip must have a purpose. Number one, he wants to entice you. Number two, he wants to vilify others. As long as there are rumors, a group will suffer. We are never happy to see such things happen. Therefore, what we need to do is not engage in gossip. We should go in the proper direction by being kind and accepting of others.

It is very important for you to remain neutral in a group. Why? Because there must be biases on both sides. When one is too prejudiced or acts excessively, will he feel he is wrong? No! But after a while, how will he feel? He will feel he has made a mistake and wish to discuss the matter with someone. Let’s say a certain supervisor does something wrong today. Some will criticize excessively while some will protect blindly. Does this ever happen? Then both sides would be locked in a bitter dispute. At this time, our neutrality is of great use. Why is that so? Does this person who protects the supervisor really love him? He is merely swayed by his emotion. The more you protect this supervisor, the more he may not see his mistakes this time. He might join you to debate with another group, and sooner or later people would lose trust in him. Your original motive was for his good, but what may happen in the end? Harmed him instead!

Quite a while later, the one protecting the supervisor would also think about it. At this time, we can help him understand that being truly good to the supervisor definitely does not mean blindly protecting him. Since he has been getting along with the supervisor for some time, when you speak like this, oftentimes he may say, “You’re right, there were a few times when I exhorted him, he didn’t listen.” We can further tell him, “Since you can often point out his shortcoming, he will trust you even more after he has slowly verified on his own.” We should not give up exhorting our supervisor just because the first and second attempts failed. “Time will eventually reveal a person’s heart.” He can gradually be transformed.

On the other hand, “When criticizing others for their faults, do not be too harsh, you must consider whether they can bear it.” When others make mistakes, you should not criticize severely, you must observe how much they can tolerate. Honestly, you are not the one involved, you might also make the same mistakes when you are in his position. That is why we should handle matters with tolerance. Actually, those who blame excessively will feel weird inside too. When we have no verbal disputes, it also helps restrain them. Sometimes they may say, “Why are you so well cultivated? We should introspect ourselves!” Indeed, within a group, as long as we do not evoke dispute, do not engage in emotional argument but wholeheartedly do our duty instead, we can often offer a rectifying effect in the group. Do not underestimate anyone, including our own power.

This is about “When hearing gossip here and there, I will not get involved if it does not concern me.” “I will not get involved” refers to staying away from dispute, but if there is an important company matter, we must actively get involved. We take part because we hope to get things done well. At this moment, we should talk when we need to. If we do not speak up at the proper time and only voice our opinions after the matter has failed; this is inappropriate! When a decision must be made in a meeting, simply discussing matters instead of taking it personally, we must point out the improper points. When we do so, we definitely have no opinion about a certain colleague. After the discussion and decision making, we are still good colleagues when we exit the meeting room; if we bring something delicious to share with colleagues, he will not be left out. But, if we feel awkward inside, we will make him feel the same. As a result, the matter will get more and more complex when it was originally fine. So, we still have to remain sincere to everyone.

How To Learn From Others

Let us look at the next phrase, “Upon seeing the good points of others, I should strive to be as good as them.” Even when far behind them, I am getting closer gradually. Upon seeing others’ wrongs, I must introspect right away. If I have the same faults, I will correct them; if not, I will be vigilant.”

“Upon seeing the good points of others, I should strive to be as good as them.” This means when we see others doing good, we must take the initiative to learn or even lend a helping hand. What are good deeds? We must be the judge. My friends, what can be considered “good”? “Anything that can benefit others.” (Audience replies.) This is a very good answer. Anything else? As people we need guidelines for goodness so that we can judge wisely. During these few days of learning, we also have a standard for goodness. What is called? It is called *Dizigui*; it is the standard. That is why we can all experience that our life does not depart from its teachings.

In *Liaofan’s Four Lessons*, there is a thorough explanation regarding how to judge goodness. We can seriously read this book when we have time. It mentions, “Is hitting and scolding people good?” Is it? Why are you all thinking so long? If it takes half a day to think about whether it is good or bad when seeing something happen, you may still not know the answer in the end. Is hitting and scolding people good? Not necessarily! (Audience replies.) Right. So, we must look at it from the root. There is goodness of true and false, right and wrong,

deviated and proper, partial and full, big and small, difficult and easy, straight and crooked; there are too many... There is one very important attitude in learning, which is to be proactive without waiting for people to tell you. So, we have homework when we go back, which is to carefully study the principles in *Liaofan's Four Lessons*. It will be of great help to you and your family. This book has been regarded as a treasure for ruling the nation by the Emperor of Japan. So, it is also very helpful to a country.

I often give an analogy: life is like a game of chess and *Liaofan's Four Lessons* is like the rulebook for playing the game well. How can we create our own destiny? The methods and theories pertaining to changing destiny and seeking fortune from inner cultivation as well as real life examples are all expounded in this book. When you really understand the rules, even if your current life is not so smooth sailing, I believe your life in the future will be very promising. This is the wisdom and true practice of life. Do not pray for an easy "game of chess" for you to play in life, because an easy game will often cause a person to become idle and unrestrained. Hence, the conclusions to your life depends on your chess-playing skills and wisdom.

True and false goodness are mentioned in this book. Many scholars asked Master Zhongfeng, "Is it bad to hit and scold people?" The Master said, "Not necessarily." They then asked, "Is it good to be respectful and polite to people?" The Master also said, "Not necessarily." These scholars got confused by the Master's words. Fortunately, they knew to humbly seek the Master's advice. Master Zhongfeng said, "If one hits and scolds people to wake them up, the slap that wakes them up has a good intention and can benefit them, it is considered good." My friends, you must make sure that a person can wake up when you slap him. Otherwise, please do not do so because you will incur his enmity. So, one must be flexible when acquiring knowledge and wisdom. We must wait for the right opportunity or else we may have a lot of obstacles after learning for one or two months. You may say, "What Confucius and Teacher Tsai said is inaccurate."

The Best Birthday Present

I have a very good friend. Once he was in a very bad mood because he had encountered many adverse situations. He had been seriously performing good deeds for quite a while but still ran into many bottlenecks. During my conversation with him that day, he was full of grievance and complained for about an hour. After he had finished complaining, I gave him a blunt analysis,

"As a matter of fact, when we look for rewards from our good deeds, our mind is no longer pure. The blessings gained would be quite limited." I then explained to him, "Those consequences were caused by your previous errors and that they were slowly manifested." While I reasoned to him for about half an hour, he fell silent and lowered his head.

Afterwards, he called me early the next morning and told me, "In over thirty years of life, yesterday I received the best birthday present." I felt very guilty and sorry because I scolded him painfully on his birthday. When he thanked me I gave him my highest respect. It was truly remarkable! Faced with such severe criticism he could still seriously examine himself right away, I believe with this attitude, he can certainly transform adverse situations into

favorable ones. Later, this friend successfully passed many exams and is currently teaching very well in school. He also shared many of his studying experiences at the cram school with the subsequent students for years. Owing to his service to others, his blessings emerged very quickly. So, you must make sure that your slap can wake up the other person. I understood that he trusts me completely; he knew well that I would never harm him, and I did that for his sake. Had he not awakened from my slap, I might have incurred his grudge. We have to grasp this sense of propriety.

Goodness is Not Always As it Seems

Next, the scholars also mentioned that being very polite and respectful is good, but Master Zhongfeng said, “If one’s purpose is to get promoted and satisfy personal desires, then such manners and respect are hypocritical and aren’t good.” From the Master's teachings, can we understand where to judge true and false goodness? From a person’s intention. No matter how polite he is, that politeness is still an evil if he has one selfish thought. On the contrary, hitting and scolding people are considered good if one’s thoughts are on benefiting others. We must judge from his intentions.

Secondly, we can judge from “right” and “wrong.” During Confucius time, Confucius had two students named Zi Gong and Zi Lu. Zi Gong was a successful businessman, so he often went to other countries to do business. The state of Lu had a law which stated, “If you are in a foreign country and discover Lu citizens who have been sold as slaves, you can spend your own money to redeem them, and the government will refund you the ransom.” Is this rule good? It was very good because it could encourage people to love their fellow countrymen. Zi Gong had just ransomed someone back and the government wanted to reward him. As he was too rich, he said, “I don’t want it.” He did not accept it. When this news spread and people came to know about it, they regarded Zi Gong as a man of great integrity because he did not even want the money.

But, when Confucius learned this, he told Zi Gong, “Your deed was inappropriate!” Why was Confucius’ opinion different from that of ordinary people? The Master analyzed the matter to Zi Gong, “The majority of the Lu people are poor and the rich are very few. If you don’t take the money today after ransoming people, then other poor people who see their compatriots in other countries may think, ‘Zi Gong didn’t accept the ransom, if I take it I will appear morally inferior. But, if I don’t take it, I may worry about my own life.’ So, when they want to save people, they will have concerns and hesitations. If one out of a hundred people hesitate and don’t ransom someone when they can, that person will be at fault because that slave may have a family with children and a wife.” Thus, Confucius said to Zi Gong, “What you have done will have negative effects in the future; some people may not be able to return to their own country because of this.”

On another occasion, Zi Lu happened to be walking on the road one day. When he encountered a person who had fallen into water and was about to drown. Zi Lu was very righteous; he immediately jumped into the water to rescue him. This person had nearly drowned, so he was very thankful to Zi Lu. He was so happy that he gave his cow to Zi Lu. He said, “This cow is for you.” Zi Lu was elated and took the cow home. Most people would

think that Zi Gong was morally superior for declining the ransom, while Zi Lu seemed to be morally inferior for taking the cow. But Confucius said to Zi Lu, “What you did is right. In the future, undaunted by danger, more people will try to save others when they see people in trouble; they will realize that good deeds beget good rewards.” So, the saints would think about an issue from a broader view instead of just one point. That is why we must also consider the future impact to determine whether a matter is good or bad. We should not do things which seem to be good now but will bring much harm in the future. On the other hand, we must do things which many people may disagree with at the time but will benefit a lot of people in the future. This is the meaning of “to judge goodness and badness from its long term effects.”

Different Types of Goodness

There are also deviated and proper types of goodness. At one time, there was a prime minister named Lu Wenyi who had resigned and returned to his hometown. His reputation throughout the country was exceptionally good, and he was well respected by the people. On the way back to his hometown, he encountered a drunkard lying in the middle of the road. His retinue immediately wanted to chase away the drunkard. But Lu Wenyi was very kind, he said, “Let’s just go around, no need to stoop to his level.” Before long, they learned that this drunkard had been sentenced to death. When Lu Wenyi heard this news, he recalled that it was wrong to give way to the drunkard back then. He knew that the prime minister was coming and he even dared to block the minister. Wasn’t he recklessly bold? Yes. What would he say to others since the prime minister had to take a detour? “Look, even the prime minister had to give way to me.” He would become unbridled and increasingly rampant. Consequently, he later committed a crime resulting in the death penalty. So, Lu Wenyi realized, “Had this drunkard been sent to a local official for punishment earlier, he might have been forewarned and not have committed such a grave offense today.” It was proper for him to have kind intentions but the result was bad due to his condonation to this drunkard. Such a situation is called “proper intentions with deviated results.”

In another case, there was a drought and the whole region was short of rice and other grains. Many people started to rob landlords for food. The landlords reported it to the government, but no action was taken. Afraid that all of their food would be robbed, these landlords organized their servants and had them armed with sticks. They went to punish the robbers. As a result, they were scared and dared not create trouble again. The landlords had been thinking of their own rice and grains but had put a stop to future chaos from the robbers as a result. This is called “deviated intentions with proper results.” Their original intention was not to help society, but in the end their actions affected everyone. This is why there are proper and deviated types of goodness.

There are also partial and full types of goodness. We have mentioned these goodness in class previously. It is about a lady who donated two cents, and an abbot personally helped her repent. After she entered the palace and became affluent, she donated a few thousand taels but the abbot only sent his disciple to help her transfer merits. Since the two cents were given wholeheartedly, the goodness was full. The later donation was only a small fraction of her wealth, and her heart was not as respectful as the first time. So, this was considered partial

goodness. I once heard a report about an old farmer couple who donated all their life savings to buy an ambulance to save people. This old couple had performed full goodness because it was done out of utter sincerity.

One Deed Can Outweigh Thousands

Goodness can also be big or small. Once, a scholar of the Song Dynasty, Wei Zhongda, while sleeping, was taken by the underworld spirits to see King Yama*. (*Ruler of the hells in Buddhism.)

King Yama said, “Now, please take out all the records of his good and evil deeds and weigh them to see which one is heavier and which one is lighter.” When Wei Zhongda’s evil deed records were brought out, they could almost fill a house, whereas his goodness was as small as a chopstick. Surprised, he then asked King Yama, “How could there be so much evil when I’m not even forty yet?” He himself was very surprised. King Yama said to him, “So long as you give rise to evil thoughts, they will be recorded in the nether world. Even though you may not have committed evil, you still had evil thoughts, that’s why there are so many scrolls.” I believe after Wei Zhongda heard this, he should have been extra cautious with his own thoughts afterwards.

However the little good record was heavier than so many evil records when it was weighed. Astonished, he asked, “What exactly is in that scroll?” They opened it and took a look. It turned out that the emperor had planned to embark on a large-scale construction at one time. When the monarch undertook such projects, what would happen to the people? They would suffer severe hardship; manpower and treasury would be drained. Many families would be scattered, wrenched apart even, because the husband would often be away from home, making it difficult to maintain a family. After hearing this, Wei Zhongda said, “The emperor didn’t accept my suggestion at that time, how could it still be considered good?” King Yama then said to him, “This one thought of yours was for the sake of tens of thousands of people, so this goodness is huge.” Hence, the size of goodness depends mainly on one’s intention. Only when we learn how to judge goodness can we practice “Upon seeing the good points of others, I should strive to be as good as them. Even when I am far behind them, I am getting closer gradually.”

The book, *Liaofan’s Four Lessons*, also summarized goodness into ten practices. The first one is “To bear a loving and respectful mind.” How should we implement this? Who must we love and respect first? Our parents. (Audience replies.) You see, we can practice this by applying the teachings in *Dizigui*. The second one is “respecting elders.” We honor our parents at home and respect our supervisors at work. In the school, we should respect the school principal and administrators. Likewise, we have to respect the leaders of our government; we must never criticize them wantonly as this is disrespectful. So, this is “respecting elders.” Next is “helping others to do good deeds.” In fact, this can be practiced at your fingertips. Let’s say you happen to be at the school gate and see a parent picking up trash, you can do it with him right away. This is “helping others to do good deeds.”

The fourth one is “exhorting others to do good deeds.” How do we do this? I once heard this sentence when I was in college and thought it really made sense: “In the adult world, people

will not listen to what you say but will look at what you do.” Since adults are more stubborn, they will not be convinced by what you say; they must see it to believe you. Otherwise, if you only talk, someone would say, “You are no different from me, so you have no right to advise me.” Thus, most of them have to be transformed through our true practice. There was a famous officer named Guan Ning in the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280). He managed the region under his governance very well. When he saw a cow destroying and trampling other’s rice fields, he quickly led the cow to one side and waited in the shade for the owner. When the owner came and saw the officer waiting there, and that his own cow had done something bad, how would he feel? He would feel very ashamed. Did Guan Ning scold him? Did he? No! But I believe the owner would feel very embarrassed and remorseful. This is transforming others by one’s virtue.

At that time, his people often got into quarrels and fights because they had to fetch water at the only well in the area. Instead of exhorting them, he bought a lot of buckets and went to fetch water very early. After that, he just placed the buckets of water there. When the people rushed to get water, they saw that their senior official had already done it for them. Immediately, they felt ashamed. This is to urge and arise others’ shame through leading by example. So, it requires great wisdom to exhort others. We will stop here for today. Thank you everyone.