

Liao-Fan's Four Lessons

THE SECOND LESSON:

WAYS TO REFORM

The Reason to Reform:

To Avoid Misfortune and Accumulate Good Fortune

A Sign for all Good Fortune and Misfortune

The first lesson speaks of the Law of Cause & Effect. It concentrates on creating the confidence to alter destiny and the ways in which to do so. The second and third lessons place emphasis on the methods, thus they are concerned mainly with the ways to refrain from wrongdoing, accumulate virtues and change destiny.

During the Spring-Autumn Period, China was divided into several small nations. Many prestigious advisors and counselors of these nations were able to accurately predict whether a person's future would be good or bad, fortunate or unfortunate based on their observation of that person's speech and behavior. Many of these are recorded in history books.

From here, we can see the reality in ancient philosophy. Spring-Autumn, one of the Five Classics is an historic account of the Lu Nation. (It is a period mentioned throughout Liao-Fan's Four Lessons and refers to a period in China's history over two thousand years ago when the country was undergoing great change and turmoil.) Throughout his lifetime, Confucius edited and compiled these records into a book, which has been passed down through the centuries to this day. This book has commentaries written by many people.

The most popular and widely studied one has been extensively footnoted by Qiu-Ming Zuo and is called the Spring-Autumn Annals,. Confucius was not the author, but collected and edited the abundant records of the Spring-Autumn Annals by Zuo. Two other editions are the Gong-Yang Commentary and the Gu-Liang Commentary. By far, the Zuo's Commentary is the most accurate, best written and footnoted. All three editions have been compiled in the Thirteen Ancient Chinese Scriptures.

Mr. Liao-Fan told his son that there were many advisors during this period who were able to accurately predict whether a person's future would be good or bad, fortunate or unfortunate based on their observations of that person's speech and behavior. These predictions were later proven correct. On an individual basis, they could tell a person's success or failure. On a much larger scale, they could predict a country's rise and decline. Many of these examples have been proven in the articles found in the Spring-Autumn Annals and the National Language. All these tell of ancient Chinese history.

These individuals during this period had this ability because they understood the Law of Cause and Effect. When our speech and actions are good, and we are dignified and considerate, then it is safe to say that we will possess good fortune and a promising future. On the other hand, if our speech is harsh and our actions frivolous, then our future will be gloomy. Even if we seem to be doing well now, this period of success will be short-lived, like a flower that blooms only once in one hundred years. Since our speech and actions can predict destiny, we would do well to place extra caution on our thoughts and behavior.

Usually, there are signs that signal impending danger or the coming of good fortune. These signs are a reflection of one's heart and mind. Though it is the mind from which thoughts arise, one's appearance can fully portray a person's character.

This is not just a theory but a fact that applies to individuals as well as to countries. A sign always precedes the actual occurrence of any event. The sign originates from the initial intention and is seen in thoughts and behavior. This is why calm and logical people are able to observe and predict future changes. He can see a nation's rise and fall through its people's desires and actions. It is said, "A country is based on its people". Just by observing the hearts and minds of people of all levels of society, what they are thinking and doing, we can often foresee a country's future, whether it is going to prosper or decline. The same applies to families. The manner in which the household members think and behave will greatly affect its success or failure. And this is true for individuals as well. There is a sign for everything and it is usually obvious to someone who has sufficient understanding and training to see it.

Usually a person is more fortunate when tending toward kindness but invites trouble when tending toward meanness. Ordinary people often do not know what is actually going on. It is as if their vision was blurred. Since they cannot see the true reality, they claim that good fortune and misfortune are unpredictable.

"Kindness" refers to our heart and behavior. Truly kind people will help others even if it means bringing harm to themselves. They will be strict with themselves but forgiving and lenient towards others. These people are bound to have an abundance of good fortune later in their lives. On the other hand, a person invites trouble when tending toward meanness. Such a person who treats others with disdain and concentrates only on self-indulgence can look forward to severe misfortune but they cannot see these signs. It is as if their vision is blurred, their eyes have been blindfolded. It would seem that there is no way to foretell destiny when actually, all the signs are right before their eyes. What types of people seek advice from fortunetellers? It is these ordinary people. What Mr. Liao-Fan told his son next is very important, we need to pay particularly close attention to and learn from it.

When we are absolutely honest and truthful, our hearts will be in agreement with the will of heaven.

This is the main principle. We must be sincere in all our actions towards others. We do not cheat others and we do not fool ourselves. The “Will of heaven” is what Buddhism calls the true nature. It is the state of having no wandering thoughts and constantly maintaining only those thoughts that are virtuous. When we are absolutely honest and truthful, our hearts will be in agreement with the will of heaven. In other words, even if we are presently suffering from hardships, they will soon be over and an abundance of good fortune will soon be ours. Therefore, whether in this world or beyond we need to begin from the foundation of sincerity.

Confucianism speaks of learning and cultivation. Within the Eight Guidelines, “the sincere and virtuous heart” is the essence. We accomplish this by “severing our desires and uncovering our self-nature”. If we do not do this, we will be unable to accomplish ultimate sincerity. When severing desires, what are we cutting off? The Six Dusts or polluting factors of (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and thought) and the Five Desires for wealth, lust, fame, food/drink and sleep. If these desires cannot be diminished, our hearts will be constantly affected by the external environment. How can such a heart hope to remain sincere?

Even if we cannot completely discard these desires, we can work to gradually curtail them. Most of us are immersed in our wandering thoughts, which are actually to no avail. The best thing for us to do is to abandon these thoughts and some of the enjoyments that we experience through our six senses and to be more considerate towards others. If we welcome others to share in our good fortune, then it will become even greater good fortune. Once we understand the logic in this, we need to act upon it.

When I started studying and practicing Buddhism, Liao-Fan’s Four Lessons was my most significant introduction. A dedicated Buddhist, Mr. Jing-Zhou Zhu gave me this book as a gift. After reading it, I looked back on my life and realized that I had the same faults and destiny as Mr. Liao-Fan for I was also supposed to have a very short life. All the fortunetellers had told me that I was to die young, even Living Buddha Gan Zhu also said this. I believed them and was convinced that I was not going to live past age forty-five. Therefore, when I became a monk, I based my study on my presumed death at forty-five because that was all the time I had. I did not ask for a longer life. As expected, at forty-five I became seriously ill.

At that time, Master Ling-Yuan from Keelung’s Da-Jue Temple was holding a summer retreat and asked me to lecture on the Surangama Sutra. I had only reached the third scroll when I became ill. I did not go to see a doctor or take any medication because I realized that my time was up. I simply stayed home every day, recited “Amitufo” and quietly waiting for my death and subsequent birth into the Pure Land. However, after a month, not only did I not die but also I regained my health! In all these years, as I have practiced according to this method and began to see the results I have felt increasingly confident. Now, I have let go of everything and I feel even more liberated.

Therefore, in order to receive, we must first let go. If we are reluctant to let go, then we will not be able to receive. The Chinese say “to give is to gain”. This phrase comes from Buddhist sutras. We

first give up something in order to receive something in return. If we do not give up then we will receive nothing. So, this lesson on reforming our destiny is all about letting go. What if we seek something? To seek also helps us to receive. But how do we do this? Just let go and we will receive everything we are seeking. First, we must let go of all our desires and wandering thoughts. Mr. Liao-Fan said, "When we are absolutely honest and truthful, our hearts will be in agreement with the will of heaven". This advises us to discard from the root, to discard our selfishness, to completely extinguish any thoughts of benefiting the self. Instead, all our considerations should be of how to benefit society, humanity and all living beings. Once this is achieved, we will gain infinite good fortune.

By observing our goodness, others will be able to foresee the coming of good fortune. On the other hand, by observing our lack of goodness, others can also foresee upcoming adversities.

Thus, all happiness and adversities have signs. Others know that good fortune is about to come to us when they see kindness in our hearts and behavior, for we let other people share in our good fortune. On the other hand, if we are unkind and selfish, robbing others of their benefits but never relinquishing any of our own, then our benefits and good fortune will eventually be used up and disappear. Once these have run out, there will be none left, then misfortune and calamities will befall us. So, as long as we continue to have reckless behavior, others will know that adversity will shortly occur. This principle of observation is applicable to an individual, a family, a society, a nation, even to the world. As long as we remain calm, composed and careful, we will be able to see everything clearly. Therefore, it is possible to predict all good and bad fortune, happiness and suffering, a stable or turbulent world and even the rise and fall of a country.

The Basis of Reform:

A Perfect Awakening of Three Hearts

A Shameful Heart:

From Shame Comes Great Courage

If we wish to obtain good fortune and avoid misfortune, we must start first with reform before we even contemplate kind behavior.

We have seen how signs are only seen by those who have very pure minds and who can practice deep meditation. We do not have to practice Buddhism. We can be a Taoist, a Confucian, a scholar or simply someone who has attained purity of mind. The deeper the concentration, the farther we are able to see. This is why Buddhist sutras often tell us that an Arhat can see five hundred past lifetimes and five hundred future lifetimes. Actually, all living beings possess this ability for it is innate. This is the way it should be. However, this ability has now been lost because our minds have been distracted. Various wandering thoughts, discriminatory thoughts, attachments and

afflictions have confused the mind sufficiently to lose its natural ability. Buddhism teaches us how to eliminate these pollutants and obstructions and to uncover our original self-nature.

Once we understand the principles, we then decide where to begin the process of reform. We have several effective methods. Each of us would like to attain good fortune, happiness and wisdom while avoiding adversity. Good fortune is the effect, which comes from good behavior, the cause. But if we do not first eliminate our karmic obstacles, good fortune will be difficult to obtain. Therefore, our primary objective is to rid ourselves of this negative karma. Some people believe in seeking outside of themselves not from within. Most people seek for what they wish, within the constant. This will not work. For, although we now place great hope in the knowledge that there is a variable in the course of things, that variable has yet to materialize. So how can we reach our final goal? We must first practice to purify our minds. What is goodness? When our minds are serene and pure, this is foremost goodness. When our mind is impure, then all the good deeds practiced will be tainted. Consequently, the amount of good fortune that we can receive would be limited. In other words, we have not yet thoroughly eliminated our karmic obstacles.

We can therefore conclude that preserving the mind of virtue and purity is of utmost importance. How do we return our mind to its natural state of purity? Just as Mr. Liao-Fan said, we must start with reform first before we even think about behaving kindly. The word “must” is a crucial requirement. So how do we reform our wrongdoings? The following are a few important guidelines.

There are three ways to reform our faults. First, we must be able to feel ashamed.

Many ancient Chinese sages and virtuous people taught that “being ashamed is similar to possessing courage”. Confucius defined it as great wisdom, great kindness and great courage. What is great courage? It is knowing “shame”. Only by so doing can we learn to regret and turn over a new leaf, to be impelled to improve ourselves. If we do not know shame there is no hope, no future for us. However, we do not want to use other people as the standard for our behavior. We should raise ours a little higher. How high? We can set our standards according to those held by Bodhisattvas. They are humans just like us. So, why is it that he or she can become a Bodhisattva with infinite life while we are still trapped in reincarnation of the Six Realms? This is a major humiliation!

Think of all of the ancient sages and virtuous people whose names and teachings have lasted for hundreds of generations. They were people just like us, but why is my name tarnished and my reputation ruined like a cracked tile?

If we can often think this way and ask ourselves this question, then the “shameful heart” will take shape. This is the first step and the driving force in changing our destiny. What is the force behind this motivation? It is an inconceivable and original ability. Today we can readily identify with what Mr. Liao-Fan is explaining here. There were several great Chinese sages during ancient times, Confucius, Mencius, Zhou Gung and Yi Yin. We can think “They were great men, well I’m great too!

They were human. Well, I am human, too! If they can do it, then why can't I?" This is where and how we start to reflect.

Transcending our world, others have become Arhats, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas. They have lived an infinite number of lifetimes. Well, so have we. Why is it that after countless lifetimes of practicing Buddhism, they have succeeded in becoming a Bodhisattva or a Buddha, whereas, we are still mired within the Six Realms of Reincarnation? This is the greatest shame! No other disgrace in this world can match this one.

In this world or beyond, these sages have all become teachers of heavenly beings. One of the ten names for all Buddhas is "Teacher of Heavenly Beings and Humankind". Here, a teacher is essentially a role model. He or she can set a good example and be a good role model for all living beings. We can use this to examine our own behavior. Why have our names become tarnished and our reputations ruined? This describes how we would suffer for our offenses.

One of Mr. Liao-Fan's virtues is that he does not attempt to hide any of his faults. He does not talk about other's mistakes, only of his own. As soon as he realized his faults, he immediately began to correct them. This was his strength and the crucial element that led to his later achievement.

We are unwilling to part with worldly desires.

Our first fault or ailment is that we are "unwilling to part with worldly desires". This means that we are still longing for, still clinging to something. The reason we feel such longing is that our naturally pure mind has become polluted. Worldly desires refer to the Five Desires or emotions and the Six Dusts. Since the word traditionally used to convey sense objects also means "dust", it carries the implication of pollution.

If we do not wipe the tables or the chairs we use everyday, they will doubtlessly become covered with dust. To wipe them daily is to rid them of dust or pollution. This is similar to our pure minds being polluted by desires and "dust". Wealth, lust, fame, food or drink and sleep are the desires, which give rise to the emotions of greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance and doubt. These are the elements of pollution. This is why the Buddha called the external environment the Six Sense Objects or Six Dusts. These are impurities, which contaminate our pure minds and are the root of our illness.

If we wish to recover the pure mind of our self-nature, we must let go of clinging to these desires and dusts. To be able to let go is the hardest thing for us to do. But, if we can let go of one degree of desire, our minds will become purer by one degree. If we can let go of two degrees then our minds will become purer by two degrees. There are fifty-one levels of Bodhisattva practice. Each level is based on the amount of emotions the Bodhisattva has been able to discard. Once we can let go of all fifty-one dusts and desires, then we will become Buddhas. If there is still just one

degree left that has yet to be relinquished, then we are an Equal Enlightenment Bodhisattva. These dusts and desires are in effect, our karmic obstacles.

The Pure Land School often uses the phrase “Carrying our remaining karma to be born into the Pure Land”. This means that before our death, if we have been unable to let go of all of our longings for worldly attractions, we will carry our remaining karma along with us to our next form of existence. Some people in the past believed that the Pure Land School does not practice the method of “To be reborn with remaining karma”. They felt that the phrase should have been “To be reborn after eliminating all karma”. This theory shocked Pure Land practitioners around the world. This interpretation of needing to eliminate all karma is incorrect for it does not correspond with the sutras.

Although we cannot locate the actual words “To be reborn with remaining karma” in any of the sutras, the meaning is very clear. If we believe that we can only be reborn when all of our karma has been eliminated, then when we read the Infinite Life Sutra, we would not help but wonder why we would even need to be born in the Pure Land if we had eliminated all of our karma. Equal Enlightenment Bodhisattvas still have one degree of remaining ignorance and are not yet totally free of all desires. A tiny fragment of karma remains. Thus, Bodhisattvas are called Enlightened Sentient-beings.

Strictly speaking, only one being exists with a pure mind, a Buddha. Aside from Buddhas, no other mind is truly pure. Even Equal Enlightenment Bodhisattvas still possess one degree of remaining karma, still have some of the Six Dusts. However, they do not have the desire for these emotions. This is why they are called Enlightened Sentient-beings. They are aware of emotion, are unlike we ordinary people who are still clinging to these worldly desires. We would do well to understand this.

The phrase “Carrying our remaining karma to be born into the Pure Land” was said by the patriarchs and is based on the sutras. It complies with the meanings in the sutras. This is especially so in the Pure Land School. We can be born into the Western Pure Land even if we still possess all of the afflictions. We have seen, both in the past and the present, numerous Pure Land practitioners who passed away to be born into the Pure Land. These are true accounts from reliable witnesses. Thus, we need to have the ability to realize the true reality and not be affected by deviated views. We need to accord with the teachings in the sutras, not with individual people for individuals can misinterpret the sutras.

I secretly do many improper things and think others will not know about them. I am shamelessly proud of myself. One day I will sink to the level of an animal without even realizing it.

“Improper” refers to things that we should not do, something illegal, illogical, against moral standards, human ethics or cultural customs. Mr. Liao-Fan secretly did things that he was not supposed to do and thought that others would not know about them. Frankly, some people would not know. What kind? Those, whose minds have been clouded by ignorance and who are totally

deluded. On the other hand, those who possess proper thoughts, wisdom and a calm and composed mind will be able to tell. We cannot hide from these people. In addition, there are also the beings and spirits of the heavens and earth, who are present.

The heavenly beings and spirits have five paths of knowledge, which are rewarded, not achieved through practice. So, if the heavenly beings and spirits know; needless to say, the Bodhisattvas and Buddhas know. They are aware of every single thought that arises from beings within the Six Realms. After reading this in sutras and books written by the sages, we would tremble in fear to realize that there is absolutely nothing that we can hide from them. Is it not better to regret our wrongdoings on our own? Since they know everything even if we do not confess, it would make us feel a little less guilty if we voluntarily regretted and felt remorse.

Mr. Liao-Fan was shamelessly proud of himself. This pride is arrogance. It is a heart, which feels no shame. "Shameless" refers to someone who is totally "unfeeling", someone who feels no shame or remorse. In other words, one who is totally without a conscience. If we feel guilty after a wrongdoing, we can still be considered a good person. Although we hide our offenses from others, we still feel a weight on our conscience. There is still hope for our turning back. However, if we feel absolutely nothing after a wrongdoing, then there is no hope for us. Only the person who can feel ashamed can be helped.

When we are shameless and arrogant, one day we will sink down to the animal realm. While presently in the human realm, as a result of or negative karma, we will eventually fall into the Three Bad Realms. Although we do not know this, the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, beings and spirits of heaven and earth do know. When our luck is down, the bad spirits will come to harass us. These spirits do not just arbitrarily harass anyone. They select their target according to the person's behavior. They dare not bother those who will be born into the Three Good Realms and they are extremely respectful to people with kind hearts and compassionate behavior. On the other hand, they torment those who perform bad deeds. They will ridicule and bully such a person, be insolent and sarcastic because they know that this person will eventually fall into the Three Bad Realms.

True Buddhist practitioners understand these principles. Once we understand these, we will naturally be cautious and watchful over our every thought, word and deed. In this lifetime, not only do we not want to fall into the Three Bad Realms, but also we want to transcend the cycle of birth and death. If we truly wish to transcend reincarnation, there is only one path to take. It is to seek birth into the Western Pure Land. Therefore, we need to have firm and unshakable determination.

How do we attain birth into the Pure Land? It is attained through firm belief, the vow and mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha and our cultivation of purity of mind. It is attained by permanently letting go of worldly attachments. We do not need to completely let go of everything for if we were able to do this then we would become Buddhas. However, the more we let go the better off we will be. It would be best not to think about anything that does not have to be thought about. Instead, we can settle our mind on chanting "Amitufo". We can then transform our thoughts from those that

only benefit our families and ourselves to those that benefit all other sentient beings. In so doing, our minds will become pure.

The difference between enlightened beings who are Buddhas or Bodhisattvas and sentient beings is that awakened beings think of sentient beings, not of themselves, while sentient beings, ordinary people, only think of themselves and not of others. Even if we did not deliberately try to sever our self-attachment, by constantly thinking of benefiting all sentient beings, our self-attachment would gradually diminish by itself. Once we no longer have self-attachment due to our achievements in Buddha Name Chanting, we will attain the level of One Mind Undisturbed in Mindfulness. We would then achieve a higher level of birth, into the Land Where Everything is Temporary. In this way, we are assured of being born into the Pure Land.

We need to start from here and practice earnestly, to set our sights far ahead, to not only consider our immediate future or even just this lifetime. Our immediate future and this lifetime are only illusions and impermanent. The sutra said it well, "whatever takes form is illusion". We need to know that nothing is permanent, that nothing is worthy of worry. As for the family members and relatives around us, we would do well to tell them the proper teachings and encourage them to practice accordingly.

A fellow practitioner who was very anxious about his child asked me for help. His child wanted to study abroad, which was very difficult to do. He himself lived in Paris and he asked me what to do? I taught him to let go of all wandering thoughts and to have the whole family recite the Infinite Life Sutra and chant "Amitufo". Then, there would be an answer. He said, "This won't do, I need to handle this properly before my mind can settle down to reciting sutras and chanting "Amitufo". I replied, "If you think this way, then there will be no hope for you in this lifetime". He asked why and I replied, "You are handling this wrong. The method you have thought of and tried to use is within the control of your karma. But, you do not have the strength from the help of the Triple Jewels".

We need to know how to use the strength from the Triple Jewels and to give up relying on just our own. We cannot achieve on our own. We need to use our pure mind in seeking help from the Triple Jewels. Then, we will attain inconceivable help from them. This is very important. As I said previously, we need to use the variable, not the constant. The constant is destined. The variable can be used to create our destiny.

In re-creating our destiny, we seek from within our mind. This mind is the true mind, not the false one. When our mind is constantly filled with wandering thoughts, we are using our false mind. It exists because of the constants, not the variables. If we use our true mind, then the constant changes. We can see this very clearly in the sutras and in Liao-Fan's Four Lessons.

How do we seek help from Buddhas and Bodhisattvas? We do not make deals with them, offering terms and conditions. We do not ask them to help us to become wealthy or to make millions of dollars saying that in return we will split the money with them. That we will share it fifty-fifty, five

hundred thousand for us, five hundred thousand for them. This is not right! How can we imagine that they would agree to this? It is wrong for us to think of exploiting Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, to want to employ the strength from the Triple Jewels, to offer deals, to make wishes and attach conditions to them. There are no deals to make, no terms to negotiate.

The most basic principle and important point is for us to uncover our purity of mind. This is what Buddhism teaches us to do. "Why bother to seek the self-nature on the outside, when it is already complete within us and is already able to give rise to infinite things". This principle explains that everything already exists. If we seek within, there is nothing we cannot attain. When there is a sincere request, a response will follow. Because originally the self-nature is complete, it is able to give rise to infinite things.

The Triple Jewel does nothing more than act as a catalytic condition. We seek and attain something our self-nature originally had. If we did not already have it in our self-nature, even the Triple Jewels would not be able to help us. "In Buddhism, whatever is sought will be attained." If we totally believe without the slightest doubt, that whatever is sought will be attained, like the vow to become a Buddha, then certainly everything else can be attained, as well. Therefore, we need to understand the principle that by seeking, we will attain. As ordinary people, we do not know this. We use our worldly intelligence in learning and practicing Buddhism. We need to understand that in so doing, we are not attaining fame, wealth and prestige as we believed, but are actually committing offenses. Whatever is attained is still something we were destined to have. It would not be worthwhile to seek it. In the future, we will suffer the consequences from the offenses we have committed.

Buddhism talks of the Ten Dharma Realms. Within each of the Ten Realms exists another Ten Dharma Realms, thus it is called "hundreds and thousands of realms as such". Currently, we exist in the human realm. Within this realm, Ten Dharma Realms exist. This moment, if we are single-mindedly mindful of Buddha Amitabha and seek birth into the Pure Land, then for this moment, we are in the Buddha realm. Being mindful of a Buddha is the cause. Becoming a Buddha is the effect.

In this moment, if we are being mindful of Bodhisattvas and of cultivating the Six Paramitas, then we are in the Bodhisattva realm. Similarly, if we are being mindful of virtue, morality and humanity, we are in the human realm. However, if we are greedy, constantly scheming to make money, to possess the materialistic enjoyments of this world, then we are in the hungry ghost realm. If we are confused and deluded in our thinking, drifting along through our life, we are in the animal realm. And if we are displeased and angry with everyone and everything, we are in the hell realm.

Although we are currently in the form of a human, we can still be in any of the other nine forms. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and the spirits and gods of heaven and earth can see us very clearly as we are, whether we are a Buddha, a Bodhisattva, or another form of being. Therefore, there are Ten Dharma Realms within each Dharma Realm. Once we understand this principle, once we know the true reality, we will know how to choose. This choice ultimately rests in our own hands.

There is nothing else in the world, which calls for more shame and remorse than behavior such as this. Mencius once said, "Shame is the greatest and most important word in a person's lifetime." Why? Because one who knows shame will put forth his or her best efforts into correcting faults and will eventually attain sagehood or become a virtuous person. One who cannot comprehend the word shame will be unrestrained and immoral and will be just like an animal. These are really key words to correcting our faults.

It is shameful for us to still be mired in the Six Realms of Reincarnation while others have become Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Nothing calls for greater shame than this. The word shame has a very close connection with humans. Why? By being ashamed, we can become virtuous, can become a sage. By being unashamed, we will doubtlessly fall into the Three Bad Realms. So we can see how close a connection this word shame has with our future. By knowing shame, we will tirelessly strive to wipe it away and replace it with the inspired enthusiasm to eventually become a sage or a virtuous person.

By not knowing shame, we will be dishonorable and false, engaging in immoral activities. In Buddhism, only those without shame still have greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance. But by knowing shame, we will no longer have these Four Poisons. The mind of greed will lead us into the hungry ghost realm. The mind of anger and hatred will lead us into the hell realm. The mind of ignorance will lead us into the animal realm. What is there for us to be proud of? Compared with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, we are unimaginably far behind them! By understanding this, these afflictions will naturally diminish, naturally vanish.

To be perfectly frank, it is shameful to fall behind others in performing virtuous deeds and attaining good results. If we know shame, we will strive energetically to improve ourselves. We hope that those who have generated great aspiration will come together to form a "Sense of Shame Society" to promote the movement of knowing shame, to awaken people to join together in creating a society of peace and happiness for humankind.

A Fearful Heart:

From Fear Comes Sincerity and Respect

The second way to reform is to know fear. The celestial beings and earthly spirits all hover over our heads in observation. It is impossible for us to deceive them.

Constantly having this fearful mind will enable us to discipline ourselves so that we will no longer dare to commit wrongdoings. It will help us to be constantly apprehensive. But, what are we fearful of? Above us, there are celestial beings who have supernatural abilities of clairvoyance. They are able to see very clearly our every movement. Below us, there are earthly spirits who also have the five supernatural abilities (clairvoyance, clairauidence, knowing their past lifetimes, physical abilities and knowing the minds of others). Although their abilities cannot compare with those of the

celestial beings, their perceptions are much keener than ours. For example, they have greater abilities in sight and hearing. However, we exceed them in wisdom. It might be difficult for us to believe that even having these abilities they are not more clever and wise than we are.

Presently, scientists have proven that numerous animals possess unique senses. For example, a dog's sense of smell is keener than that of humans. Thus, they can detect scents that we are unable to. Dogs also have keener hearing than we do. But, they are not as intelligent as we are. Other animals also surpass us in various abilities. It should not be at all surprising that ghosts and spirits surpass us as well. Thus, it can be believed that spirits and ghosts have the five kinds of supernatural abilities. Why do they still suffer? They are not as wise as we are and most do not possess as much good fortune as we do. We need to constantly remember that above and below, there are spirits and ghosts that are perfectly aware of our every thought, every act.

Even when my wrongdoings are done in a concealed place, the beings and spirits of heaven and earth are just like a mirror, clearly reflecting all my faults. If my offense is serious, then all kinds of adversities will befall me. If my fault is minor, it will still deduct from my current good fortune. How can I not feel fear?

Even if we are committing minor faults in the most concealed place where nobody is around to witness them, the beings and spirits who are clairvoyant can see everything very clearly even through walls. This is appalling! But the capabilities of these beings are still not considered great, for their abilities are nothing compared to those of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Fortunately for us, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have great compassion and loving-kindness. Since they have purity of mind, when they witness our wrongdoings, they will not cause us trouble for they do not mind our offenses.

However, Dharma Protectors are ordinary beings who will cause trouble for those who have committed wrongdoings. Also, the spirits and ghosts are still ordinary beings. They get angry when they see us committing wrongdoings and will sometimes cause trouble for us. They are even more prone to punish us for our severe wrongdoings, thus adversities and calamities will befall us. If we truly understand this truth, how would we not be afraid?

Therefore, there are several passages in the Infinite Life Sutra that call for respect and fear. There are an infinite number of beings in the Western Pure Land, each has the Heavenly Eye, is clairvoyant, can see everything without any obstruction. Each has the Heavenly Ear, is clairaudent, can hear every sound throughout the universe, in the past, present and future. They see what we cannot see. They hear what we cannot hear. When we think about it, what is there that we can hide from the utmost virtuous people in the Western Pure Land? If we cannot deceive them, then how could we even think of deceiving Buddha Amitabha, Great Compassion Bodhisattva and Great Strength Bodhisattva? It is impossible!

Once we understand this and we deeply realize that we need to seek birth into the Pure Land, it is not important what form our merit dedication takes. All the beings there know our aspirations. There is no need for us to verbally say, "We seek birth into the Pure Land." They already know this. They knew it the instant that we first gave rise to the thought. The truth is that we need to honestly chant the Buddha's name. There is no need to say any unnecessary words. We just need to seek One Mind Undisturbed, to seek the highest level of birth into the Western Pure Land. In so doing, we will be foremost in wisdom, merits and virtues.

And there is more. Even when we are alone in our room, the beings and spirits watch over us very carefully and record everything. Even if we try to conceal or cover up our improper acts with clever speech, the spirits and celestial beings can see through to our hearts as clearly as seeing into our lungs or liver. Ultimately, we cannot deceive ourselves. If others were to see our behavior, we would find ourselves discredited. Therefore, how can we not be constantly cautious of our every action and be fearful of the consequences they might evoke?

Previously, we read about when we are outside, interacting with others. Here Mr. Liao-Fan wrote of when we are alone in our room. When we are alone behind closed doors, we can become careless, behaving as we wish, not realizing the importance in cultivating alertness even when alone. When with others, we tend to restrain ourselves. When alone, we tend to relax.

My late teacher Mr. Bing-Nan Lee told of an occurrence that happened almost two thousand years ago. Mr. Kang-Cheng Zheng and a group of classmates were reflecting on their faults. As each reflected, they found that they had many shortcomings. Only Mr. Zheng could not think of any. Finally, someone told him, "Think again". He replied, "I am thinking!" He thought for a long time. Then he remembered. One time, when he went to restroom, he forgot to put on his hat. This was his shortcoming. (In the past, it was a Chinese custom for a man to always leave his hat on, even at the time of death or it would have been a disgrace.)

It is obvious that in times long past, people were constantly watchful over their thoughts and behavior even when alone when their appearance would be as neat and orderly as if they had company. Nowadays, people would say "Why bother"? But this was how people used to behave. They were watchful over their behavior even when alone. In their minds, even if they were to hide themselves away, beings and spirits of heaven and earth could still see them. It would have been impolite to them if people were careless and behaved as they pleased. Even a concealed spot is still visible to the beings and spirits. Thus, our demeanor should always be respectful. We should never indulge ourselves even the slightest bit.

Even in our room, it should seem as if innumerable pairs of eyes were watching us, innumerable fingers were pointing at us. We should be as watchful and cautious of our deeds as if we were in public, not daring to behave as we please. Although we are extremely secretive in trying to conceal our behavior, or to cover up our faults with glib talk, actually, this cannot be accomplished. It is as if our internal organs were visible to all. This is how clearly the spirits can see us.

This is just an example to relate how even in a concealed room, in a bedroom, our every movement, our every thought is known to the spirits. There is simply nothing they do not know about. We may think that we have secrets, but we are only deceiving others and ourselves. In actuality, spirits of heaven and earth have already seen through all of this. Once seen through, we are worthless, our attempts to hide were useless. Once we have realized this, how could we not fear?

But there is more to it! As long as a person still has one breath left, then he or she has the chance to regret even the most serious wrongdoings and offenses.

When we are ashamed, we will have a respectful and fearful heart and this will enable us to reform and we will eradicate our offenses. Many Buddhists attend repentance ceremonies daily, doing so for their entire lifetime trying to repent and eradicate karmic obstacles. Not only do some fail to eradicate their karmic obstacles, the more ceremonies they attend, the more their obstacles increase. Why? They do not know how to sincerely regret, but conceal them even more. To truly cultivate is to be able to feel ashamed, to have respect and to know fear. It is essential for us to understand this and to change our improper thinking.

Those who have committed the greatest transgressions such as the Five Deadly Offenses or the Ten Bad Conducts are bound for the hell realms. However, as long as they still have one remaining breath, are they able to be helped? Yes, if they are willing to regret and correct their erroneous ways. If so, then they are still able to turn over a new leaf. If they are truly ashamed, sincerely give rise to a respectful and apprehensive heart, deeply regret their ways, vow to be born into the Pure Land and chant "Amitufo" one time to ten times, then they are assured of being born there.

For example, during the Tang Dynasty (over one thousand years ago) a butcher named Shan-He Zhang, chanted "Amitufo" just ten times at the last moment before his death and was born into the Pure Land. The Visualization Sutra tells us that in ancient India, King Ajatasatru killed his father, egregiously mistreated his mother and caused dissension in the Sangha. There was no evil that he would not commit. In the Ajatasatru Sutra, Buddha Shakyamuni told us of his cause and effect. At the last moment of his life, with still one breath left, the king truly regretted and attained single-mindedness of Buddha Amitabha as he sought birth into the Pure Land. He was born into the eighth level, truly inconceivable.

From this, we know that there are two ways to be born into the Pure Land. One way is to cultivate and accumulate merit and virtue daily, to follow the regular way of practice to seek birth into the Pure Land. The other way is for those who have committed great evil and who feel deep remorse at the last moments of their life. Therefore, we do not want to look down on those who have committed wrongdoings. Perhaps at the last moment of their lives, their ability to feel deep remorse will be so strong that they will attain a higher level of birth than we will. This is very possible. It is said, "A prodigal who returns is more precious than gold". A reformed person is even better than an

average practitioner. Average people are incomparable to them. Thus, we do not want to look down on those who have committed wrongdoings.

Once we understand this, we will not even consider counting on our luck, thinking we can commit transgressions and that as long as we feel regret in time before our last breath to still be born into the Pure Land. It would be wrong for us to think in this manner, for this way will guarantee our falling into the Three Bad Realms. It is extremely difficult to be able to regret at the last moment of life and to be born into the Pure Land. On appearance it would seem as though there was only one lifetime involved here, that one who was deluded has awakened at the last moment of life. But, for what appears to only involve our last minutes actually involves all of the good roots and good fortune accumulated throughout innumerable past lifetimes. We must possess deep-seated, solid good roots.

If we visit a hospital, we will understand. Look around. How many people are still clearheaded and alert in their last moments? Being rational and alert is the first criterion. If we are confused and unaware at that time, are unable to remember to feel remorse and if we forget that we need to chant, then we will fall into the Three Bad Realms. We need to know the true reality and not dare to think this way, not count on our luck. Why? It is unimaginably difficult to achieve in this way. It is rare to have one out of thousands of people remain clear-headed at the time of their death. This is the first criterion, without meeting this we will be unable to achieve. We have to ask whether we can guarantee ourselves that at the instant of our death, we will remain clearheaded and alert?

The second criterion is to encounter a benevolent teacher. And the third is to turn back immediately at that instant, to single-mindedly regret, to be mindful of Buddha Amitabha and to seek birth into the Pure Land. Can we guarantee all these conditions will exist at that precise critical moment? If not, then we need to honestly, sincerely and regularly cultivate daily to accumulate merits and virtues. This is our only truly reliable and safe way. If ten thousand people practice the Pure Land method accordingly then ten thousand will achieve. Mr. Yu said in his commentary that, "By laying down the butcher knife, one can become a Buddha right then and there. If we have the heart to regret our wrongdoings, then we can begin again." Obviously, the earlier we awaken the better. So please, make haste in turning back and do not commit any more wrongdoings.

Once, a person who behaved badly during his entire lifetime felt remorse just when he was about to die. He realized his past mistakes and regretted all the bad things that he had done. His mind came to a very kind thought and immediately afterwards, he peacefully passed away.

There are many examples of this, some of Buddhist practitioners, some not. In recent years, one that we personally witnessed was that of Mr. Guang-Da Zhou, a businessman who lived in Washington, DC in the United States. Mr. Zhou had been a good person who had not committed bad deeds. He proved to us that one may encounter Buddhism in his last moments of life, chant "Amitufo" one to ten times and be born into the Pure Land.

Mr. Zhou did not encounter Buddhism until a kindhearted friend introduced him to the Pure Land teachings just three days before he passed away. He was joyful upon hearing of them and accepted without the slightest doubt. He made the vow to be born into the Pure Land and single-mindedly was mindful of Buddha Amitabha. This was the result of his good roots from past lifetimes. Once he had vowed to be born into the Pure Land, although he was ill, he no longer felt pain.

This is the reward or retribution for good or bad things done. Once the true mind is generated, the Triple Jewels help it. Although he was in critical condition, he was still spiritually uplifted. This was due to the strength from his vows and the joy of practicing Buddhism. It is similar to experiencing something good, which puts us into high spirits. His energy and strength came from within him and from Buddha Amitabha. Thus, Mr. Zhou was able to have the spirit to chant "Amituofo". After chanting for three days, he was able to see the three sages of the Western Pure Land descend from high in the clouds to escort him to the Pure Land. This happened recently, how can we not believe?

In our practice, the essence or what is in our heart and mind is important, not formalities. Mr. Zhou never listened to Buddhist lectures, nor had he previously read any sutras. He had not taken the Three Refuges or the Five Fundamental Precepts. He just had a kind friend who encouraged him to chant "Amituofo". Really! Buddha Amitabha and the sages came to escort him to the Pure Land. Thus, cultivation stresses the heart, the true mind.

The Yu commentary stated that, "It is never too early to begin practicing. It is never too late to regret. To pass away peacefully is a phenomenon of transcendence". It is still not too late to regret at the time of our death. Every time a person dies well, he or she is assured of going to a good place. Die well, born well. The fifth of the Five Chinese Good Fortunes is to pass away peacefully without suffering, assuring our being born into one of the Three Good Realms, of not falling into the Three Bad Realms.

This is to say that if a person can have an overwhelming and courageous kind thought at the most important moment, then it can cleanse away hundreds of years of accumulated misdeeds. This is just like only needing one lamp to bring light into a valley that has been dark for a thousand years. It does not matter how long one has been committing misdeeds or if the offenses were newly made. He or she is an exceptional person as long as they are able to reform!

Both Buddhists and Confucian scholars have spoken this truth. It is the truth, not something false. We need to be brave and determined in regretting and reforming. Even if the offense is major or of long standing, it can be regretted and eradicated. Having an overwhelming and courageous kind thought at this most important moment is to truly and sincerely regret and eradicate karmic obstacles. In this way, it can indeed cleanse away hundreds of years of accumulated misdeeds.

The book speaks of only needing one lamp to light a valley that has been dark for a thousand years. This is comparing the lamp and the brightness to our bravery and determination in reforming and in our ability to wash away long accumulated misdeeds. Thus, no matter how big or small, no matter from time long past or newly made, what is of utmost importance regarding offenses is that we reform. We must reform.

It is often said in Buddhism that, “true Dharma repositories are rare”. If we are not true repositories, we will be unable to continue the lifeline of Buddhism. For example, a cup has to be cleaned very well, for the water it holds to be drinkable. If it is not clean, but is tainted with just a trace of poison and we fill it up with water and drink it, then we will be poisoned. Poison is the negative karma. To become true Dharma repositories, we first need to completely eliminate our afflictions for us to be capable of receiving the Buddha’s teachings. And then we will be able to benefit not just ourselves but others as well.

We reform and cultivate good fortune. Why do we need to reform first before we make ourselves into a repository for the Dharma? So that we are able to receive all of the good fortune that Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, beings and spirits of heaven and earth bestow on us. This is true good fortune not that which deteriorates. If our repository is not clean, but is filled with afflictions and negative karma, then the good fortune given to us by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will turn into even deadlier poisons. How will we be able to withstand it? This is why we first need to start anew to cultivate good fortune.

If we do not reform our erroneous ways, then the good fortune we cultivate will serve to increase our faults to their fullest. Why? Without good fortune, we only commit small transgressions, since we do not have the opportunity to create bigger ones. However, with great good fortune, then the wrongs we commit will be even bigger. In the future, this will lead us deeper into the hell realms, to bear even more severe sufferings. Although poor people may have thought of committing transgressions that are more serious, they are generally unable to create serious ones. Whereas, the ones that rich people create are more grave than those of average people.

We need to understand that we first need to reform to eradicate misfortunes before we cultivate good fortune. We do not want to seek good fortune first, but to rid ourselves of misfortunes. Then, the good fortune we cultivate will be genuine goodness. If we do not eradicate our accumulated habits before we cultivate good fortune, then as our good fortunes increase, it is most likely that we will create even worse offenses. In passing on knowledge, will a truly benevolent teacher teach this kind of students? No! Why not? He or she knows that it will harm the student. Buddhism would say that such a student is not a Dharma repository. If he or she is not, then the teacher cannot pass on the teachings.

This is not to say that only a very smart and wise person is a Dharma repository, no. If a person has a pure mind, has a kind heart without greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance, then he or she is a Dharma repository, regardless of intelligence. We read in Master Tan Xu’s memoirs, about a

monk who took moldy candles outside to dry in the bright sunlight. He was very slow-witted, without even the slightest bit of wisdom. But his mind was pure, he was honest and he bore no ill will for anyone. The old Master took a liking to him. He was a Dharma repository so the Master taught him to prostrate to the relics of Buddha Shakyamuni at the King A Yu Temple, three thousand times a day. After three years of prostrations, he was awakened. And after awakening, he was able to compose poetry, verses, was extremely articulate. Eventually he even lectured on sutras and was widely welcomed. But although he had achieved attainment, he still lived thriftily, remained very humble and courteous towards others. To be able to do so is to be a Dharma repository. This is true good fortune.

By choosing a successor, a Master can either help a person achieve or can harm that person. Since the past, good teachers, whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist, have been selective in choosing their successors. The most important criterion for selection is virtuous conduct. Other qualities are not taken into account because they can be nurtured. Thus, we need to start by reforming if we really want to achieve, to be born into the Pure Land and to benefit ourselves and others. As Mr. Liao-Fan said, "It is of utmost value to be able to change."

Besides, we are living in a tumultuous and constantly changing world. Our body, made of flesh and blood, is extremely perishable. If our next breath does not come, then this body will no longer be part of us. Then, even if we did want to reform, it would be too late to do so.

These four sentences advise and encourage us to grab hold of the opportunity, to regret and reform while we still are able. This world is ever changing, is impermanent. The sutra stated that, "life is only a breath". If our next breath does not come, it is the next life and it will then be too late to think about regretting and reforming. Knowing that this is the utmost important matter in life, we need to treasure this opportunity, to not waste time but to reflect daily within ourselves and to earnestly regret and reform daily. Being able to do so is true cultivation.

However, many people think that cultivation is simply reciting sutras, prostrating to the Buddha, or chanting a Buddha's name daily. To do so in this manner has nothing to do with our own negative habits. It is simply a formality. It will change nothing. To cultivate is not simply reciting a sutra. Cultivation is to not give rise to wandering thoughts as we focus our attention on the sutra text during the time we recite a sutra. Nor should we analyze the meanings, because to do so is also wandering thoughts. Thus, the goal of cultivation is cultivating the pure mind, is halting our wandering thoughts. Reciting sutras, chanting mantras or chanting a Buddha's name, all share this goal to cultivate the mind. When the mind is pure, the body will be pure.

Throughout these years, we have truly taken to heart that with purity of mind, the body will become pure and not fall ill. Naturally, we still need to be careful with our daily intake of food and drink and with our manner of living. Although we are advancing in age, with a body that is pure, an environment that is pure, without worries, without afflictions, we would neither fall ill nor grow old. My late teacher, Mr. Bing-Nan Lee, was a perfect example of this. Even in his nineties, every day

was a rush of lectures, appointments, social engagements, etc. From this we can clearly see how a person who is advanced in years, can remain perfectly competent while living a healthy, long life, without falling ill. Many younger people cannot accomplish this. It was all due to the purity of his mind and thus, his body.

Therefore, when we commit a wrongdoing, our retribution in the physical world is a bad reputation, which will last for hundreds, even thousands of years. Even filial children and loving grandchildren cannot restore our honor. Then in our afterlife, we might end up in hell suffering immeasurable pain.

If we do not know to regret and to correct our wrongdoings, then we will be burdening future generations with our bad reputation. Even our filial children and virtuous grandchildren will not be able to wipe these away.

We are currently unable to see the hells with our own eyes. But, please be assured that our negative karma will lead us to the hell realms and they are truly terrifying. Sutras talk of the hells and there are many explanations of how long we will remain in them. The easiest to read and understand is the one Mr. Lee listed in the Fourteen Lecture Outlines. They are very believable and accord with the sutras. One day in hell is equivalent to two thousand seven hundred years on earth.

The Chinese often proudly tell of their five thousand years of history. But this is only two days in the hell realms. And think how terrifying hell is! The shorter life spans are ten thousand years! If we were to calculate their days to be three hundred sixty five in a year, that means a day in hell is equal to almost three thousand years in the human realm! We must understand the magnitude of this! The suffering is ceaseless, without a day of release. We will not be able to emerge for hundreds and thousands of aeons. And in this lifetime, it is very easy for us to create the cause of going to the hells. However, once we have fallen into the hells, it is unimaginably difficult to get out. Therefore, if we believe that the Buddha only tells us the truth, then how can we continue to act rashly and blindly commit any offense!

Even the sages, virtuous people, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas cannot help us escape from the bad consequences. So how can we not be afraid?

Even the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas with their great compassion and kindness, are unable to help us when we fall into the hell realms. Can Earth Treasure Bodhisattva who presides there help to us when we fall into them? No! Very honestly, he can only help those who possess abundant, solid good roots and good fortune, and who can accept and accord with his teachings. Then, they will truly regret and mend their ways to be able to transcend the hell realms. However, when we are suffering intense pain, it is virtually impossible to accept even good words. The more we suffer, the more malicious thoughts and angry feelings we will have. Then, even when others say something pleasant to us, we may feel that they have insulted us and hate them even more for it. This is true

for those who are suffering in this world let alone those in the hell realms! Thus, more often than not, those suffering in the hell realms will commit even more serious offenses, consequently making the transcendence from the hells even more difficult and this is why even Buddhas and Bodhisattvas cannot help us.

What kind of people is Earth Treasure Bodhisattva able to help? Those who truly possess good roots and good fortunes. Because of one erroneous thought, these people fall into hell but are able to be helped. Earth Treasure Bodhisattva can advise and encourage them. Because they are willing to listen, to regret and be awakened, it is easier for them to transcend from the hells. Otherwise, there is no way to help them. Even Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are helpless in this matter. After seeing how it is and considering all this, how could we not be afraid?

The second way to reform teaches us to have a fearful heart. We need to know that we cannot hide even the slightest faults from the beings and spirits of heaven and earth, much less from all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Therefore, even if we were in a dark room, we would do well not to give rise to deviated thoughts. And without deviated thoughts, we naturally will not commit any bad deeds. This is the simple truth! Therefore, when we regret and reform, we need to start from our hearts. When our hearts, our minds are virtuous and kind, naturally our speech and behavior will be likewise. When our hearts are not virtuous and kind, no matter how we try to pretend, our speech and behavior will be a lie.

A Determined and Courageous Heart:

From Courage Comes Inspiration

The third way to reform is that one must have “a determined and courageous heart”.

We need to be brave in regretting and reforming. The first way talked about how being ashamed is close to being brave. Being ashamed is being awakened. Not being ashamed is being deluded. Therefore, being ashamed is a condition for awakening. Being courageous is a condition for its effort and accomplishment. Being ashamed is to awaken from within, for the mind to be truly awakened. Having a fearful heart is the external force that helps us to refrain from doing anything bad, which also reflects the extreme deep shame in our self-nature. Shame is the state of mind of being ashamed. Fear is the state of mind of being conscience-stricken. To feel ashamed and to be conscience-stricken are two virtuous states of mind.

There are eleven virtuous Dharmas in the Sastra on the Door to Understanding the Hundred Dharmas, one of which includes shame. If we can feel ashamed, then we are bound to achieve. Throughout his life, Master Yin-Guang said that he was “constantly shameful”, that is, he would constantly bear in mind a shameful and fearful heart. He cultivated with this frame of mind, thus he was able to be diligent and brave in improving himself. In this way, he truly achieved in having a determined and courageous heart.

When we hesitate to reform our faults because we really do not want to change, we are content with what we can get away with. For a reform to take place, we must use all of our efforts and resolve to change immediately. We should not doubt or postpone our resolve to change until tomorrow or the day after.

More often than not, we are drifting along day to day. Please be aware that if we are not advancing, we are regressing. We do not seek progress. We especially do not have the heart to keep progressing in our virtuous conduct. Today, people are also brave and diligent in trying to advance, but what they seek are the Five Desires, the Six Dusts and the Five Poisons. They do not know to fear the consequences. The sages of this world and beyond taught us to keep progressing in our morality, ethics and wisdom for they are higher than just academic attainment. The learning of ethics and morality is different from academic attainment. Learning is the wisdom that flows from our true nature, what Buddhists call our original, innate wisdom.

On the other hand, academic skills and learning are called worldly intelligence. Today, we advance bravely and diligently, but we are going in the wrong direction. We are going into the Six Realms of Reincarnation, into the Three Bad Realms. The sages of this world and beyond teach us that we need to transcend the Six Realms, to free ourselves forever from reincarnation, to catch up with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Therefore, as Mr. Liao-Fan said, to reform, we must use all of our efforts and resolve to change immediately. We should neither doubt nor wait to reform, nor postpone our resolve to change until sometime in the future. Once we have realized this, we must do all that we can to lift our spirits and diligently advance. We need to do it now, without any doubt, delay, hesitation. There is no need to wait any longer, say it and do it now.

A minor fault is like a thorn piercing our flesh. It should be quickly removed.

When we have a thorn piercing our skin, it is very painful. We will do whatever we can to quickly extract it. But to bear a minor fault in our mind is even more painful. We need to become aware of it, for if we are not, it is as if we have no sense of feeling. As if we do not know that we have pain when something is piercing our body. Now, it is not our flesh that is unfeeling, it is our conscience.

A big fault is like a finger bitten by a poisonous snake. We must cut off that finger without hesitation to prevent the poison from spreading and taking our life. In I Ching, the Book of Changes, when we get the symbol of wind and thunder, it tells us that we have strong determination in reforming and are certain to succeed in doing so.

This is just an example to show us how determined we need to be to end all incorrect ways. When we are lethargic and listless every day, it is due to our karmic obstacles emerging. When we have numerous wandering thoughts, afflictions, worries, and find that nothing is going as we wish, it is due to our karmic obstacles emerging.

In Buddhism, we often speak of karmic obstacles. What are they? They arise when we have nightmares at night. They arise when we do not have a regular pattern in our daily living habits. When this happens, we need to earnestly reflect, to be vigilant! If we are able to correct all our faults, then our karmic obstacles will be eradicated.

When we have fewer karmic obstacles, we will be filled with the Dharma joy. We will feel light in body and mind, without any burdens. To have fewer karmic obstacles means to have fewer afflictions. With fewer afflictions, our mind will naturally be pure and constantly give rise to wisdom. With wisdom, we will see and understand very clearly everything around us, whether affecting body or mind, whether regarding Buddhism or worldly matters. We need to have the determination, need to want to be able to examine our motives and feelings, to find our faults and courageously correct them. In no way should we be afraid of doing this.

I Ching, the Book of Changes contains sixty-four combinations, each combination has six explanations or predictions. The wind-thunder symbol represents benefit and is concerned with resolution and determination. If we are able to make the resolution and have the determination to correct our erroneous ways and to cultivate kindness, we need to do so for only then are we able to receive true benefits. If we can immediately reform without hesitation, then we have done as the wind-thunder symbol said we would.

If we can follow the three ways of shame, fear and determination to reform, then our personality will surely be transformed.

In reforming ourselves, we need to have these three hearts of shame, fear and courageous determination. To have a shameful heart is self-awakening. To have a respectful and fearful heart is to be conscience-stricken. Only when we have both of these do we give rise to a courageous and determined heart. To regret and reform ourselves. So knowing this, why are we unable to correct our faults? We do not yet possess a shameful and fearful heart. We have thus, not generated the motivation to give rise to a courageous and determined heart. The courageous and determined heart arises from the shameful and fearful heart. If we do not know shame, then we are not afraid of being laughed at by others so there is no incentive for us to cultivate kindness.

How do we nurture these three hearts? Of all sutras, why do we choose the Infinite Life Sutra for everyone to practice? It is not that the rest of the sutras are not good, they just do not explain as perfectly as does the Infinite Life Sutra. It completely explains the matters, principles, causes and effects. It is not too lengthy so it is easy for modern people to practice and it is the essence of all sutras!

Our Morning and Evening Ceremony Recitation Book is especially compiled for fellow practitioners at the Amitabha Buddhist Societies. Ancient virtuous people originally edited the older version of the recitation book. So, their version was designed to cure the problems of the practitioners of that time. Thus it was, as expected, effective for them. However, our problems differ from theirs, thus

we need to modify the morning and evening recitations. For the morning ceremony, we recite chapter six of the Infinite Life Sutra, in the hope of having the same mind and vow as that of Buddha Amitabha.

For the evening ceremony, we recite chapters thirty-two through thirty-seven. These six chapters explain the five offenses of killing, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct, lying and consuming intoxicants. The essence of these six chapters consists of the Five Fundamental Precepts and the Ten Bad Conducts. They are causes. These chapters also talk of the Five Sufferings, which are the current sufferings we undergo and the Five Burnings, which include the retributions we bear after our current life, the consequences we undergo in the hells. As we recite these daily, they can help us to reflect, regret and reform. Reciting these six chapters is essentially the same as reciting the repentance verse. After reading it, we need to be vigilant, to be awakened, to sincerely mend our ways and to follow their guidance in understanding and cultivation. This way we will gain benefit from this kind of recitation practice. Therefore, it is important for us to have these three kinds of hearts.

Just as the sun's rays shine on a thin layer of ice in the springtime, there is no need to worry about its melting.

If we have these three hearts, we will immediately reform our faults. It is just like the ice in springtime. As the weather grows warmer, the ice grows thinner. When the sun comes out, the ice melts. It is the same with our wisdom. As it grows, our karmic obstacles melt away.

Three Methods of Practice to Reforming

Changing Through Behavior

There are also three methods of practice to help us reform. First is changing through behavior, second is changing through reasoning and third is changing from the heart. Since the degree of achievement varies, so do the results. For example, if I killed living beings in the past, I now vow not to kill again starting today. If I was angry and yelled at others in the past, I vow not to get angry starting today. This is how a person changes through behavior and refrains from repeating a wrongdoing by vowing not to do it again.

The commentary stated, "generating a shameful, fearful and determined heart as the cause of regretting and reforming, shows us the three paths of behavior, reasoning and heart. This details the methods of practice in reforming." Previously Mr. Liao-Fan spoke of principles. Now he tells us of the methods of practice. In total, there are three general kinds of methods. First, let us talk about "changing through behavior".

When we are angry, we lose our temper and yell at others. This encroaches upon using abusive language. We can change through our behavior and refrain from repeating a wrongdoing by vowing not to do it again. This is to totally change through behavior, to find each and every fault

and reform them. At first, Mr. Liao-Fan also changed through behavior. We see him accomplishing his three thousand good deeds over ten years. Taking this long to accomplish this amount of good deeds is not that outstanding. The second time he took only four years to accomplish the next three thousand good deeds, when he sought and attained a son. But the time spent was still fairly long. Truthfully speaking, the result attained was as sought, to change through behavior.

In Buddhism, to change through behavior is to abide by the precepts. There are eight schools in Mahayana Buddhism and two in Theravada Buddhism. However, both start their cultivation from “abiding by the precepts”, in other words, cultivation through behavior. This is especially true for the Theravada precepts which emphasize behavior not the intention or thought.

This is different from the Mahayana precepts like those in the Brahma Net Sutra. This particular sutra was not completely translated into Chinese. It is a somewhat lengthy sutra of which only the most important chapter, the “Mind Precept Chapter”, which is comprised of two scrolls, was brought to China. The first explains the state of mind of a Bodhisattva. The second explains the Bodhisattva precepts and behavior. Truthfully speaking, what is important is the state of the mind. The first section emphasizes changing from the mind, to reform. The latter section emphasizes changing through behavior. Naturally, to change from the mind as well as through behavior would be the best way to reform ourselves.

However, it is a hundred times harder if we force ourselves not to do something than if we just stopped doing it naturally. If we do not uproot our faults, but merely suppress them, the faults will eventually resurface even if we have temporarily stopped committing them. Therefore, the method of changing through behavior cannot help us to permanently rid ourselves of our faults.

The root of our problems lies in our minds. If we only suppress our faults instead of eliminating them, they will simply reappear at another time even if we have temporarily stopped committing them. Therefore, the method of changing through behavior is not permanent. It is not the best way for it only treats the symptom. It is treating the head when there is a headache, treating the foot when there is a foot pain. This leaves the root problem intact, not uprooted and eradicated. In other words, the behavior may seem all right but the mind is polluted. The outside seems all right but within is not.

Changing through Reasoning

We can try to reform by refraining from wrongdoings by understanding the reason and principle behind why we should not do something. In the instance of killing, we can reform through contemplating that loving all living things is a virtue of heaven. All living beings love life and are afraid to die. How can I be at peace with myself by taking another’s life to nurture my own? At times, animals were even cooked alive, such as fish or crabs. They may not have been completely slaughtered before going into the cooking pot. Such pain and suffering reach down into the very bones, how can we be so cruel to them?

When we eat, we use all kinds of expensive and tasty things to nourish our bodies, enough to fill the whole dinner table! But once the meal is done, even the best delicacies will become body waste and be excreted. The result of our killing accomplishes nothing. Consuming vegetarian foods can fill and nourish us just as well. Why let our stomach become a graveyard and reduce our good fortune through the violation of killing?

Here, Mr. Liao-Fan talks of changing through reasoning. We want to know the true reality, to think of its principles, its logic. Then, we will naturally no longer have the heart to eat the flesh of another sentient being. Before, we were not clear on the reasoning and tried to do something very grudgingly. Trying to force ourselves to do something is extremely difficult. We will not be happy or willing and can end up painfully, struggling with ourselves.

Once, we understand the principles, the logic, we can reconcile these problems. Thus, we need to constantly bear in mind that “loving all living things is a virtue of heaven”. It is natural for us to do so. Especially now, even scientists are coming to gradually understand this. Today, we speak of the natural ecological balance. This is the same as “loving all living things is a virtue of heaven”. Our ecological system is naturally balanced. If this balance is destroyed, all sentient beings in the world will experience the catastrophe. Therefore, those who are wise will do nothing that will result in destroying our ecological system.

Actually of all the animals, humankind is the worst for we are the most cruel, the most evil. Tigers and poisonous snakes only kill when they are hungry. After their hunger has been satisfied, they do not even pay attention when other animals walk back and forth near them. This shows that they killed from natural instinct. But it is different for humans, we have no need to kill, on the contrary, we slaughter at will. Few animals create negative karma. Think about it, the negative karma created by humans is unequaled by animals! When we consider this, we will realize that there is nothing in the Six Realms for us to be proud of. It is great suffering to fall into the animal realms. However, animals at least do not create negative karma. They are reducing theirs!

If we do not practice Buddhism when we have obtained this human form, then what is the good of having it? We commit wrongdoings daily. Animals reduce their karma. We create them. When their karma has been eliminated, they will emerge and be born into the Three Good Realms. On the other hand, our karma has increased and when it comes into fruition, we will fall into the Three Bad Realms. They prepare to emerge from, we prepare to go into. What is there for us to be proud of? Moreover, we need to remember that all sentient beings are mortally afraid of death. When we kill them, it is because they were unable to fight back. Talk about the weak being the prey of the strong! They had no way to resist. Unable to resist, were they willing? If not, then be assured that they will have resentment and hatred. How will we be able to avoid revenge that will in turn breed further revenge?

Once, a fellow practitioner came to me and asked, “Is there any use in transcending the spirits of aborted babies”. I said, “No use! You think transcending them will solve things?” The practitioner

asked, "But if the child was born deformed or retarded, would it not undergo much suffering? Would it not be better to abort it?" I replied, "We need to understand that bearing a deformed or retarded baby is bearing one who has come to demand payment of a debt. You owe a debt. By aborting the baby not only are you not allowing the debt to be claimed, but also you have killed him or her. In other words, the debt you owed in the past has now been multiplied. In a future life, it will be even worse. Right now scientists only see what is in front of us, they do not know of cause and effect of the next lifetime. Cause and effect are connected in the three times of the past, present and future. This is a grave offense."

The practitioner persisted, "But the baby has yet to take shape. It is only in its first or second weeks of gestation." I said, "No, he comes upon inception, it has nothing to do with taking shape or not. Upon conception, it has found you. You have this affinity with it from the past, whether it is repaying a gratitude or a grievance, demanding payment of a debt, or repaying a debt. If the baby had come to repay gratitude and you killed it, you would be returning kindness with ingratitude. It would become your enemy in the future. Perhaps, it was a filial child and virtuous grandchild come to repay kindness, but by killing it you have turned the fetus into a mortal enemy. This is terrible! You are trying to accomplish a little merit by spending a small amount of money thinking you can transcend this baby by erecting a plaque? Nothing is this easy! You are only deceiving yourself. It is not the truth".

Therefore, if everyone could just see the past cause and the resultant effect, it would be terrifying! We have to be careful, to understand the principles and know the true reality. It is a grave transgression to kill or harm another sentient being to nurture ourselves. However, today, people regard this as perfectly normal. Some religions even think that animals were creations of God given to them to eat. If these sentient beings were intended for us to eat, then would we not question whether God truly had the virtue of loving all living things? This is wrong thinking, which leads us to commit so many transgressions. And we do not even know how very wrong we are. All sentient beings when killed and slaughtered cry out from their fear and their pain. When we listen to those terrified cries, how could anyone think they willingly submitted to their death.

It is stated in the sutras, "A human dies and becomes a sheep. A sheep dies and becomes a human." Life after life they will kill each other seeking vengeance. Thus, it is said that if you eat sixteen ounces of flesh, you will pay back sixteen ounces of flesh. A debt of money must be repaid in cash and a life owed must be repaid in kind. This is the immutability of the Law of Cause and Effect. Once we truly believe and accept this, we will never again have a thought of harming any sentient being. Why? We do not wish to pay back with our lives in the future.

Nor do we want to seek ill-gotten wealth. Why? Because we know if we do, in the future we will have to repay the debt. By understanding the true reality, we naturally will abide by the law, be content with what we have and be honest in all that we do. Be assured that this is neither passive nor regressive but is to do our best to create a beautiful and bright future for ourselves. It is to seek

a good life, not only for this time, but for all of our future lifetimes as well. Without wisdom and without knowing the true reality, we will not be able to attain what we seek.

Mr. Liao-Fan was speaking of eating animal flesh. We see sentient beings being killed, witness their pain and suffering, which reach down into the bones. How could we bear to take their life to nurture our own? Besides, once we have finished eating, even the most delicious foods will become body waste. People long for delicacies, for food that tastes good. But, no matter how we cook it, the only thing that will know and enjoy the taste is our tongue, nothing after that. Just for a few seconds of enjoyment we have killed countless sentient beings, committed innumerable transgressions!

Eating vegetarian food can be just as filling and nourishing. Some may say that vegetarian food is not nutritious. Actually, many vegetarians have lived long and healthy lives. Many monks and nuns who became vegetarians when they were little are strong and healthy. How can we say it is not healthy to be a vegetarian? All these are incorrect ideas. When we take the life of another sentient being and eat their flesh to nurture ourselves, we not only make enemies and incur their hatred for us, but we also reduce our own good fortune. A truly intelligent person would never do this willingly.

Think again of all the living beings with flesh and blood. Like us, they have a conscience since they possess self-awareness. They and we are one entity. We can cultivate virtue and allow these living beings to respect us and feel safe around us. How can we continue to harm them and make them hate us? If we think about it, we will naturally feel sorrow for these animals and be unable to swallow their flesh.

All living creatures not only possess life but have self-awareness. They are no different from us. Other than Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who understand the concept that all beings are one entity. From this segment of the text, it is logical to assume that Mr. Liao-Fan's family has become vegetarian, because he understood the reasoning and knew the true reality. Nowadays, there are still some people that have the wrong idea, thinking that adults can become vegetarians but children are too small to do so. Parents are afraid that they will be malnourished, so they still want them to eat more meat. This thinking is incorrect. Actually, this is akin to thinking that they might not have enough karmic obstacles, might have too few mortal enemies, so we should help them incur more karmic foes. This is what it amounts to. If we explain this to them, not only do they not believe us but they criticize us, saying that we are out of touch, that we are ignorant of science and nutrition.

In fact, this is not the case at all. They are mistaken. It is best to be awakened as early as possible; the younger children start becoming vegetarian the better off they will be. It will help them to build a solid foundation of good fortune and merit. As the Infinite Life Sutra and the Sutra of Good Fortunes and Misfortunes said, "the ancestors were ignorant". The ancestors here are the older generation. They have no wisdom, thus they lead us to unwittingly commit transgressions, creating

much negative karma. This matter of our food and drink intake alone is appalling for the offense is indeed serious!

Another example of changing through reasoning is the person who often gets angry. They need to stop and think that everyone has his or her individual strengths and weaknesses. According to my reasoning, if I touched on someone else's weakness, I should feel sorry for that weakness and forgive any shortcomings. If someone offends me for no reason at all, then it is that person's problem and has nothing to do with me. There is no reason for me to get angry.

In the past, we tended to lose our tempers, to be filled with anger. We would do well to sincerely reflect within remembering that "we are only human, that we all have our faults". Other people have faults, so do we. If we cannot forgive them their shortcomings, how can we expect them to forgive ours? When we think about this, we will no longer condemn them but feel empathy for them. People only make mistakes due to their ignorance, their foolishness. They do not have the ability to distinguish between true and false, proper and deviated, harmful and beneficial, thus they cannot correct themselves, cannot end their erroneous ways and cultivate kindness. We should feel sorry for them and not reproach them. In so doing, we follow the Buddhas' and Bodhisattvas' way of interacting with people, matters and objects.

Mr. Liao-Fan said that when someone offends us for no reason at all, then it is their problem and not ours. If someone attacks us unfairly, it does not concern us. "There is no reason to become angry." Even if they attack us physically. This body is not us. Our purity of mind will never be hurt by attacks, as purity of mind originally contains nothing. It is a pity that we do not employ purity of mind when we interact with others or matters. What we use is our false mind, which is not the true self. What Buddhism seeks is our "original self before we were born to our parents". This original self is the true mind, the pure mind, which does not give rise to any wandering thoughts. The external environment will not affect the pure mind. Thus, it does not concern us, so why should we bother with it? Why should we be so attached to it? Once we sever all wandering thoughts, discriminatory thoughts and attachments, think about it, what is there to concern us? Nothing.

All these are observations from the aspect of reasoning, thus it is said "to have achieved perfect peace of mind through reasoning". By understanding the reasoning, our minds will be settled, no longer affected by external conditions. Regardless of what happens on the outside that which is within can remain calm. In the midst of favorable conditions, we do not give rise to the heart of greed. In the midst of unfavorable conditions, we do not give rise to the heart of anger. Regardless of the circumstances, we are able to maintain our mind of purity, equality and compassion to genuinely reform ourselves.

I also think that there is not a great person who thinks that he or she is always right. There is not a truly learned person who blames their faults on others. Therefore, when things do not go the way we wish, it is because we have not cultivated our virtues and morals, and have not accumulated enough merits to move others!

We should always reflect upon ourselves first. In so doing, criticism can actually become a training ground to refine our character and to strengthen our abilities. Therefore, we should be very glad to accept someone else's criticism and teachings. What is there to be angry and complain about?

This teaches us to reform from the heart. And this is the best way to change. In the Flower Adornment Sutra, the purpose of the fifty-three visits of Sudhana was to practice and learn from experience. It is to cultivate and reform from the mind. Therefore, we need to earnestly reflect upon ourselves.

In Buddhism, Buddhas are "great persons" and Bodhisattvas are heroes. They stand out among others and they do what others cannot. Thus, Buddhist main halls are called "Grand Hall of Great Heroes". What ordinary people are unable to do, to regret and reform, the Buddhas can. Buddhas are able to correct all errors, thus to be a great hero. Therefore, there is not a self-righteous Buddha or Bodhisattva. There is not a great sage or virtuous person who is not humble, who is not patient, conciliatory and agreeable. Humility and respect are a revelation of our virtuous nature.

A truly learned person would never blame others or the heavens. Knowledge and good conduct are wisdom. It is revealed from our true nature, whether it is Buddhism or Confucian teachings. The wisdom spoken of in Confucianism also flows from our original nature, thus it is called "the sincere and honest mind". Sincerity is the true mind, it flows from the sincere mind, it is wisdom, it is called knowledge and good conduct. Therefore, a learned and wise person never blames others or the heavens for their misfortunes. Therefore, one who complains about others is not a genuine learned person.

When we do not succeed in our undertakings, when in everyday life our speech and behavior are criticized or slandered by others and things are not going our way, we do not want to blame those who criticize us. Instead, we would do well to reflect within, to understand that it is because we have not yet achieved in our cultivation of morals and virtues. And this is why we are unable to touch them.

Therefore, we need to look within first and see if we have mistreated others. When people verbally abuse us, criticize us, slander us, we can accept it. Not only will we not have thoughts of vengeance, but also we will have a grateful heart. Why? They have provided us with invaluable assistance, which can help us to reflect within, to correct the mistakes if we have them, to guard against them if we do not. If we are not at fault, we do not blame them. If we are at fault, then we correct our mistakes immediately. Sudhana adopted this method when visiting his fifty-three spiritual guides to completely correct all of his faults and to eventually become a Buddha.

The fifty-three visits concern training the mind through experience. Experiences are the interactions we have with others and matters in our daily lives. Everything and everyone provides us with the means to reflect within. Using the external environment, no matter who the individual is we are to regard them as our teachers. We are to regard what they teach us as lessons taught to us by

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. We need to earnestly reflect within, to learn and practice. There is only one student, us. Everyone else is our teacher, our benevolent advisor. All are Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. They do not have faults, only we do. This is how Sudhana became a Buddha.

When we read the Flower Adornment Sutra, Sudhana did not change into another body, he became a Buddha in his own body. He started as an ordinary person and continued to practice until he reached the ultimate perfect enlightenment in one lifetime. And if we learn this ability, this method, then we too are assured of becoming a Buddha in this body, in this lifetime. How did Sudhana cultivate? How do we cultivate? First, do not blame everyone and everything else. Blame only ourselves. If other people are disagreeable to us, it is because our karmic obstacles have surfaced. All other people are Buddhas, are Bodhisattvas without the slightest faults. Whatever we see that incurs our dislike is our own karmic obstacle, our own fault.

The Sixth Patriarch of Zen, Master Hui-Neng, said it very well, "It is our own shortcoming if we see the faults of others, as we will fall back also". When we mind the faults of others, our karmic obstacles will surface and we will regress. He also said that, "A true practitioner does not see the faults of others". Sudhana was a true practitioner. He did not see any faults in others. He only saw his own. He was afraid of not having enough time to correct his own, much less having the time to find the faults of others. Thus, he saw everyone as virtuous people, as Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. In this way, he himself also became a Buddha, a Bodhisattva. If we still see the faults of others, it is our fault, our karmic obstacles materializing. So, in the eyes of the Buddha, everyone is a Buddha. In the eyes of ordinary beings, even Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are ordinary beings. Therefore, the best way of reforming starts from within.

Criticism can actually be a good thing. It is not easy for us to discover our faults even when we try to. When others find them and tell us about them, it will save us a great deal of trouble. Therefore, we should be very glad to accept someone else's criticism, as this is our "training ground to refine our character and to fulfill our goals". They have come to help us, to be our benevolent advisors. We simply need to adopt this manner of acceptance. In this way, we will see that there is nothing to be angry about. Nothing to complain about. How can we be angry? How can we not accept? How can we give rise to the heart of revenge? This is too great an offense! They are our benefactors and yet we want to repay them with reprisals! This is a major offense.

When the Chinese speak of filial piety, we are reminded of Emperor Shun (who lived over four thousand years ago). In Chinese history, everyone recognizes him as the model of filial piety, able to move heaven and earth. Who helped him to achieve this? His parents and half-brother. After his mother died, Shun's father remarried. When his stepmother mistreated him, his father went along with her. Then, years later after his half-brother grew up and he also mistreated Shun. Consequently, not only did three people mistreat him but they even tried to kill him.

He did not change his gentle heart, but constantly reflected, "Why can I not make my parents and brother happy?" He regarded their actions as his own faults for he did not see the faults of others.

Everyday he reflected on his faults, on how to regret and correct them. In the end he finally influenced and reformed his whole family. He did not try to run away from home, did not think of revenge. When Emperor Yao learned of Shun, he chose him as his successor and married his two daughters to him. For if Shun was able to influence his whole family, then he was able to influence the whole country.

In the sutras, we read of "Endurance Celestial Being". Who helped him to attain achievement? Kaliraja. Buddha Shakyamuni spoke of this example briefly in the Diamond Sutra and provided further details in the Great Nirvana Sutra. Kaliraja is a Sanskrit word meaning a tyrant, a self-indulgent ruler who is without principles. The celestial being was cultivating on a mountain. For no reason at all, Kaliraja lost his temper and put him to death by dismembering him. Endurance Celestial Being did not have the slightest trace of hatred. Indeed, he perfected the paramita of patience. He did not view any person or matter as evil. Think about it and try to imagine the level of purity of mind that he had attained. What do we learn from practicing Buddhism? The importance of attaining purity of mind through endurance.

People might say that we are simply insensitive if we do not differentiate good from bad. Even with the Law of Cause and Effect laid out in front of us, our hearts are pure without any attachments. It is not that we do not understand what is happening around us, we are clear on everything, but we are without the slightest discriminatory thought or attachment. As for Endurance Celestial Being, his mind was pure because he had found the true reality. But because sentient beings have afflictions, it is necessary to explain to them the principles in a progression of ideas. For ourselves, we understand that the four attachments of self, others, phenomena and time are not real. Everything is equal, without the slightest difference. Differentiation is based on the principle of equality to help others. Therefore, differentiation is non-differentiation, because differentiation is not for ourselves, but for others to use.

Since sentient beings have not yet found their true nature, we should teach them to end their erroneous ways and cultivate good deeds. When we ourselves have attained this state, there will be no erroneous ways to be ended, no good deeds to be cultivated. This means our minds are in a state of purity and equality, the One True Dharma Realm, the state of non-cultivation, non-attainment. Within these, we still do whatever is needed for cultivation and attainment. In so doing, we are not attached to either extreme of emptiness or existence.

If we have achieved this state, but do not put into practice, then we will fall into the extreme of "emptiness". If we are attached to the appearance of matters and do not thoroughly understand the logic, do not see into our original nature, then we fall into the extreme of "existence". We should neither attach to emptiness nor to existence. As Great Strength Bodhisattva explained, we are "to concentrate the six senses on uninterrupted pure thoughts". With concentration of the six senses, we do not fall into the extreme of existence. With uninterrupted pure thoughts, we do not fall into the extreme of emptiness. In so doing, our mind is pure and nondiscriminatory, with everything in

accordance with the true nature. We chant "Amituofo" continuously, without interruption from dawn to dusk, without attaching to either existence or emptiness. This is what we need to learn.

Additionally, we should maintain the mind of stillness when we are slandered. Although the slanderous rumors and tale bearing spreads like a huge fire burning to the sky, eventually, like a torch it will burn itself out in space.

This not only tells us what we should do in principle, but in behavior as well. When others insult and slander us, if we remain calm and unaffected, then naturally everything will pass. When others verbally abuse us, we do not need to respond in kind. When they curse us, we just listen. After a few hours, they will get tired and stop. This is a very effective method to handle this type of situation.

I learned this from a classmate when I was a teenager studying in school. Because at that time, I was very caustic like Mr. Liao-Fan. I loved to ridicule people and play tricks on them. However, that classmate became my spiritual guide. I was overbearing towards him, even ridiculed him in public. But, he never responded in kind. It continued like this for an entire year and in the end, he got through to me. This person was truly amazing. He simply did not return one blow or one insult. I learned this skill from him and have used it my entire life.

It can also serve to increase the cultivation of our inner-self. As for accumulating good fortune, average people would praise us even more saying that we were truly good practitioners! If it were not for these people insulting and slandering us, then we would not have the opportunity to practice endurance. They have come to help us to succeed in our practice. Why would we not accept their help? If someone treats us like this at work and we can interact with them with a mind of purity, our supervisor will admire us, our co-workers will respect us and our opportunity for promotion will be greater than expected. This person has brought a great advantage to us. How could we not want it? If we respond to their verbal response in kind, then we would be sinking to their level.

When I was in school, if two students quarreled, usually the teacher would punish both by having them kneel on the ground. We would feel it was unfair! Obviously, I was right, so why did the teacher also punish me? It was not until later that I understood. In any arguments, any fights, both parties are at fault, are at the same level. If one is high and the other is low then the argument would not have taken place. For example, an adult would not fight with a baby. It was very logical. Now, when we encounter this kind of situation, we can tell right away the high or low level of the individual's cultivation.

Thus, when we encounter these matters, we need to know that these individuals are our benefactors who have come to give us a gift. We cannot return their kindness with ingratitude. First, they have come to test our level of cultivation. Second, we will accumulate good fortune for we are about to gain the praise and respect of others. Therefore, these benefactors are not bad people, but are actually good friends whom we do not want to wrong unjustly.

If we hear others slandering us, get angry and try to defend ourselves, it would be like the spring silkworm spinning its own cocoon tying itself in suffocation. Therefore, no benefit but rather harm is derived from getting angry.

What this passage teaches is not only important in worldly teachings, but also in Buddhism. There are two essential practices in the Six Paramitas of Bodhisattvas. The first is giving. When we practice giving, we cultivate good fortune. We cannot live without good fortune. This is even truer for Buddhas. We call the Buddha "Respected One with Perfect Wisdom and Good Fortune". He is unsurpassed in wisdom and good fortune. Thus, it is logical for us to seek good fortune and wisdom, as our self-nature is originally complete with them.

There are three kinds of giving. From the giving of wealth, we gain wealth, from the giving of teaching, we gain wisdom and from the giving of fearlessness, we gain health and long life. This is what all sentient beings seek. The Buddha taught us that by planting good causes, we are assured of harvesting good results.

The other Paramita is the practice of patience. This enables us to maintain the good fortune that we have already cultivated. If we only practice giving and gain good fortune, but do not practice patience, we will lose our good fortune. The Diamond Sutra tells us that "everything is attained through patience". We have no choice but to cultivate the Paramita of Patience to safeguard achievements, whether worldly or Buddhist. We often read in the sutras of "the fire burning our forest of merits". What is this fire? It is anger and hatred. If we lose our temper, then we lose our merits as well. Thus, it is extremely difficult to cultivate and safeguard our merits. If we want to know how much merit we have cultivated and accumulated, think of the last time we gave way to anger. When we give rise to one angry thought, the fire burns our forest of merits.

If Pure Land practitioners were to get angry at their last moments of life, then all would be lost! This explains why the Buddha taught us not to touch the body of the deceased within eight hours of passing away. Although the person has breathed their last breath, the spirit has yet to leave the body. If we were to touch the deceased, it would cause great pain and possibly anger. If he or she were to become angry at this critical moment, they would lose all of their merits. Thus, merits are indeed difficult to cultivate and accumulate for they can be lost at any time. However, good fortune and virtue will remain intact.

What is merit? Merit is the pure mind, is concentration, is wisdom. Think about it, once we lose our temper, how would we have concentration and wisdom? We would not. As for good fortune, it is our wealth and intelligence. When our mind attains Constant Mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha, One Mind Undisturbed, we can accumulate merits and virtues. But with just one outburst of temper, all is lost: no Constant Mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha, much less One Mind Undisturbed. Therefore, we need to constantly bear in mind that merits are difficult to keep, so we want to maintain vigilance.

In our cultivation, on the path to awakening, our karmic creditors will often come to create trouble for us. Why? They have an overwhelming need for revenge. They see that we are about to succeed in our cultivation and know that once we have attained achievement, they will no longer have the opportunity for revenge. Thus, they will do all they can to obstruct us, to block us in our progress. And the way they hinder us is by making us destroy, making us burn our forest of merits. But, if we are determined not to have our merits destroyed, then no external force can do so.

Sometimes, when we encounter unpleasant circumstances or personal problems, we become unhappy and lose our tempers. Once we do this, we burn our merits. Who makes us unhappy, so angry? Probably all those unfavorable conditions, enemies and people stirring up trouble. This is another example of "The speaker had no such intention, the listener interpreted it to be so". Perhaps, the speaker had no intention to upset us, but we interpreted what was said to be deliberate, feeling uncomfortable and miserable. We may burst out in anger. We may manage some control and keep it inside. Whichever, our merit is gone.

Why would all of our merit be destroyed with just a little anger? Because we have lost our purity of mind. Therefore, all the teachings and attainments are based on patience and deep concentration. Not only is concentration the key to our cultivation in transcending the Six Realms, but is the key to worldly teachings as well. "To remain unmoved by slander" is deep concentration, is wisdom revealed. To get angry due to slander is a manifestation of karmic obstacles. We can choose whether to have our wisdom revealed or our karmic obstacles materialized. We need to be clear on this.

Are these encounters good for us? Where practitioners are concerned, yes! It is a good training ground for us to constantly have someone causing trouble for us, to not have things going as we wish. If we do not cultivate under such circumstances, then how would we achieve concentration? Therefore, the presence of adverse conditions and affinities provide just the right opportunities for us to discipline ourselves and to practice the Paramita of Patience. We cannot be thankful enough for these opportunities much less complain about them. How can we get angry? This is instead just the right opportunity for us to train ourselves.

In the past, the method people used in helping a person to learn discipline was to teach them to practice the Paramita of Patience. If they regarded this person as having potential to be a Dharma repository they would not look at them with pleasant expressions. They would purposely pick on them at every opportunity, acting as if they disliked that person. This was to see whether they were able to be patient, able to endure the harassment. If the person was unable to endure and left, then they were forgotten! If we cannot endure or be patient, then we cannot attain achievement. Even if we are exceptional in all other areas, if we do not have the patience to endure, then there is a limit to our achievement.

In the Valuable Teachings of Zen, we read of an old monk who severely mistreated one particular student. He constantly reproached and verbally abused the student at every opportunity. One time,

when the student was washing his feet, he poured dirty water all over the student but the student would not leave. Later, the old monk really got angry, kicked him out and refused to allow him to come back! The student had no alternative. Unable to stay near his Master, he camped out in a distant hallway of the way place. When the old monk lectured, he would listen outside the window, not letting the old monk see him.

After one year had passed, it was time for the old monk to pass on the teachings, to retire and choose a new abbot to take his place. No one knew whom the old monk would choose. The old monk asked those who were present to get the student who was listening outside the window and to bring him in so that he could pass on the teachings and position to him. Only then did everybody realize that for all those years, the old monk was purposely training him.

If we want to give up every time we encounter some small unpleasantness and are unwilling to be patient and accept the torment, we will not achieve, no matter how outstanding or excellent we may be in other areas. The key to success or failure in achievement lies in patience and endurance. If we can patiently endure, we will achieve deep concentration. And with deep concentration, we will uncover our true wisdom and not be affected by external conditions.

Sometimes we will see new people, with excellent qualities, at a way place. But after only a short time, they leave. The residents will smile thinking that it does not matter. If people do not have the patience to endure, they cannot achieve. It would not matter much whether one person more or less, who could not achieve, were to stay at the way place. Those who were shortsighted would consider the loss of such a talented person as regrettable. But, in the end, it is not so. A truly talented person is one who has attained deep concentration and wisdom for only with these will we be able to pass on the wisdom of the Buddhas, thus enabling Buddhism to remain in this world. Without deep concentration, we will not attain wisdom. And first, we have to have patience and endurance to achieve deep concentration. Without these, how would we succeed?

If we have the wisdom to recognize a true way place where we can learn from those who can help us on the path to enlightenment, then no matter how they mistreated us, we would not leave. If we have not yet obtained the learning how would we be willing to leave? We would be willing to endure any kind of mistreatment. Why? Only when we had learned everything, would we be willing to leave and not before. Only by doing so are we truly seeking to learn the teachings. If we could not endure the slightest disagreeable circumstance and just left, then we would have been useless and it would have been pointless to keep us.

The words in this passage are very important for they are a wonderful way to end slander and disputes. We simply ignore them. Even the worst will fade. Therefore, when people slander us, do not dispute it or debate it or we will bind ourselves further. Thus, it is said, "No benefit, but rather harm is derived from getting angry". At work, a superior will not give an important job or a promotion to someone who easily becomes angered. When a superior tries to assess the efficiency of a subordinate, he or she will observe the way the individual interacts with others on a daily basis

to decide whether or not this person is worth training, is a promising employee. When they observe that we are easily angered, then they will know that we are not worth training because our anger will only cause difficulties.

There are other faults and offenses we can change. If we can understand the reasoning behind the need for reform, we will not repeat our mistakes.

These two sentences are the highest principles underlying our ability to change. Mahayana Buddhists adopt this method as it is faster for us to achieve with it. Others change themselves through actions, which are minor details, like the branches and leaves of a tree. It is easy to repeat mistakes using the latter method because it is to change on the outside, action by action! Also, it is very painstaking and time consuming to gain a good result by this method for it is more difficult than changing through reasoning. It is much wiser to change through reasoning than through actions for the mind is the root and everything arises from the mind.

Changing from the Heart

What is meant by "changing from the heart"? Although we have thousands of different types of faults, they all stem from the heart, from the mind.

Positive and negative karma are created from our mind, as is the entire universe. The Buddha told us in the Flower Adornment Sutra that "The nature of the Dharma realms arises from our mind. Nature is essence. Essence is the mind". How do Mahayana Bodhisattvas enter the hell realms when they go to help the beings there? By understanding the principle that everything arises from our minds. We learn from the Earth Treasure Sutra to break through the doors of the hells. This is explained in the Flower Adornment Sutra. What is Hell? A creation of our mind. Understanding this, we will learn that there are no gates to Hell, we can come and go freely.

So, we can correct our faults by starting to change from our minds and practicing good deeds. If we practice from our minds, then even a tiny good deed like freely giving a penny to a beggar, would be of infinite merit and virtue. Why? It comes from the great compassion that is brought forth from our true nature. It is boundless broadmindedness. Because it arises from our mind, the good fortune from it is infinite for it accords with our true nature. However, if the good deed arises solely from our actions then it is a small merit for it did not arise from our true nature.

How then do we reform ourselves from our mind? Through sincerity. We do so by cultivating from the mind, by wanting to correct our offenses, practicing good deeds and refraining from wrongdoings. When we correct from the mind, there is no such thing as should or should not. It is necessary to meet the requirements when reforming ourselves by reasoning and realizing the principles. When we reform from the mind, it is unconditional, pure and sincere. In this way, giving rise to even the slightest of kind thoughts will connect with our true nature. Knowing that everything arises from the mind, we would do well to correct our faults by starting from the mind.

If my heart is still of thoughts, then actions will not arise and faults can be avoided.

This is an unsurpassed principle. Purity of mind can cancel the negative karma accumulated over infinite past aeons. How can we attain purity of mind, stillness of thought? Through the unmoved mind, which is deep concentration. This is called "One Mind Undisturbed" in the Buddha Name Chanting Method. Once we attain this state all of our negative karma will be eradicated. However, when a new wandering thought arises, our negative karma will again materialize.

For example, when we are watching TV and turn it off, there is no longer a picture, only a clear screen. When we again turn on the TV, the picture reappears. The karmic phenomena stored in the mind of sentient beings is the same. When our minds are in deep concentration and calm, none of the karmic phenomena will manifest. When our minds give rise to wandering thoughts, the karmic obstacles will again materialize. Understanding this, we would do well to nurture purity of mind, the state of not giving rise to a single wandering thought. As Master Hui-Neng said, "The true mind originally contains nothing, collects no dust". We need to know that karmic obstacles exist in our false mind, not in our true mind. Originally, our true mind was pure. It still is pure.

An example is wearing eyeglasses. Originally, our eyes are pure. When our glasses are covered with dust, our vision is blurred. There is nothing wrong with our eyes, the problem is with the glasses. Where are our karmic obstacles? The dust on the glasses is the contamination. There is no obstacle within our eyes. When we completely eradicate the contamination, the dust, as well as the glasses we will have pure vision to see clearly. This is the same as uncovering our true nature to become Buddhas. If we wear glasses, there is still a barrier. Then we are ordinary people, sentient beings. Once we can rid ourselves of these obstacles, we are Buddhas.

What kind of mind are we now using? The deluded mind, not the true mind. There is no hindrance in the true mind. When we try to see everything with our naked eyes, it is like observing things with glasses of distortion, seeing the external environment through a layer of delusion. This delusion is the Eight Consciousnesses and fifty-one mind objects, glasses that have been heavily contaminated. We then interact with the external environment through the Eight Consciousnesses and fifty-one mind objects. Therefore, the environment has changed to that of the six dusts. If we do not apply these Consciousnesses and mind objects to see the external environment, then we do not see the environment of the six dusts but that of the true nature. So, we would see the nature of form, listen to the nature of sound and transfer the six dusts or pollutants to the nature of our senses. This will purify the mind enabling it to be able to see our true nature, to become Buddhas.

Now the big problem is that we simply cannot rid ourselves of these glasses, of the Eight Consciousnesses and fifty-one mind objects. The goal of Buddhist practice is to teach us to let go of these things, to transform consciousness into wisdom. Wisdom is the functioning of the true nature. Consciousness is the functioning of the deluded mind, the function of the Eight Consciousnesses and fifty-one mind objects.

Arhats, Pratyekabuddhas and Theravada Bodhisattvas still use these Consciousnesses and mind objects. They have yet to clarify their true nature to become Buddhas. They know how to regret through actions and through understanding the principles. But they do not yet change from the mind, from the heart. Why? They do not know where their hearts are. We learned in the Surangama Sutra, that Venerable Ananda was very clever, but he did know where his heart was. In the beginning of the Surangama assembly, Buddha Shakyamuni asked Venerable Ananda where his heart was. Ananda could not answer for he did not know what or where it was. How can we regret from our heart, if we do not even know what our true heart is?

For Mahayana Bodhisattvas in Truth Teaching, the level of Bodhisattvas above the First Dwelling in Perfect Teaching, forty-one Dharma Body Bodhisattvas described in the Flower Adornment Sutra that their way of regretting is to feel remorse and to reform themselves from the mind. We will better understand once we study the Flower Adornment Sutra, particularly Sudhana's visits to the fifty-three spiritual guides. How did Sudhana practice? These fifty-three spiritual advisers represent Bodhisattvas of Perfect Teaching from the level of First Dwelling to the highest, the level of Equal Enlightenment. They manifested as men and women, young and old, from all walks of life. How did they cultivate? The genuine practice of Buddhism is comprised of principle, examples and practical applications for us to follow. The forty-fascicle version of the Flower Adornment Sutra is peerless. Although we cannot study the complete Flower Adornment Sutra, the chapter on "Universal Worthy Bodhisattva's Conduct and Vow" is very important. We need to know how to apply this most outstanding Mahayana teaching so that modern people will incorporate it into their daily living. This is an excellent sutra for sincere cultivation and is worthy of being widely propagated.

Following this principle, ancient virtuous people have often provided us with guidance to help us "to generate the Bodhi Mind and be constantly mindful of Buddha Amitabha", regardless of the circumstances. Is this reasonable? To single-mindedly chant "Amitufo" all day and night to reduce all of our wandering thoughts into one thought of "Amitufo"? Is "Amitufo" good or bad? Neither. It is separate from the duality of good and bad and accords with our true nature. Good and bad is duality and this duality only exists in our conscious mind, not in our true mind. We will naturally attain enlightenment when we have been constantly mindful of "Amitufo" for a long time. Among eighty-four thousand methods, this method is unsurpassed.

If we cannot attain complete enlightenment due to our insufficient efforts, it is all right because we can see Buddha Amitabha. And once we see Buddha Amitabha, we will uncover our true nature. This expedient and convenient way cannot be found in any other methods. In other methods, if we do not obtain enlightenment we will not be considered as having achieved. It is not necessary for us to be able to see the true nature when we practice mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha. But, if we can see Buddha Amitabha, then we are considered as having achieved attainment. How do we cultivate the mind? We do so when we are constantly mindful of Buddha Amitabha. All our negative karma will be eliminated when we sincerely and single-mindedly chant "Amitufo". How could "Amitufo" have any negative karma? It is true and perfect goodness. It is not the goodness of

good or bad. That kind of goodness is relative. True goodness is separate from duality. It is the absolute great goodness.

If our heart is rooted in faults such as desire, fame, profit or anger, we do not have to find ways to get rid of each fault.

This is just to give us some examples. We may have millions of faults. But we do not have to find each of them one by one. Those practitioners specializing in abiding by the precepts do so by disciplining their behavior. They think about what went wrong. They think about how many mistakes they have committed every day. They carefully think of each and every one and then correct them one by one. They not only reflect upon their behavior daily, but also keep a record of their merits and faults.

This method of record keeping may work well for some. Each of us has a different personality and character related to our habits accumulated over innumerable lifetimes. Mahayana practitioners however, do not practice in this way. On the other hand, Theravada practitioners are very happy to practice this method and benefit from it. Different people, different characters, thus different principles, different methods are used.

There are many practitioners in China (Tibet, Korea and Japan) who practice Mahayana Buddhism. However, in South Asia, Thailand, and Sri Lanka most practitioners are Theravada Buddhists and have been so for generations. They end their erroneous ways and practice kind deeds to change their behavior. Whereas, Mahayana practitioners refrain from wrongdoing and practice kind deeds through reasoning and an awakened heart.

All we need is a sincere, kind heart and the willingness to practice good deeds. As long as our heart is virtuous and kind, then naturally our mind will not generate any improper thoughts.

This is an excellent method, simple and clear. However, if we do not have true wisdom, we still cannot achieve. Why? Because of doubts. Because of wondering how it could be possible for us to eradicate all the offenses we have committed. We doubt, we do not believe, we cannot accept. When we hear that we are “to concentrate our mind on Buddha Amitabha and to seek birth into the Western Pure Land”, we still think that since we have committed so many wrongdoings, how can we possibly go to the Pure Land. We would be ashamed to see Buddha Amitabha. Not only this, we would not even dare to pay our respects to his image in the way place, thinking that our offenses are too numerous and heavy. It would be embarrassing to see him. If we think in this way then it would be better to regret and reform through behavior for at least if we corrected one fault when we discovered it, our minds would be more settled. Then it would be good.

Those who can accept the Pure Land method possess great good roots, good fortune, causes and conditions. If we did not already have the best root nature, it would be impossible for us to accept the Buddha Name Chanting Method. Once we do accept it and practice earnestly, then we can

neutralize the transgressions accumulated over infinite lifetimes with the merit of our chanting. The Pure Land is a gathering place for the assembly of utmost virtuous people. Once we are born into it, we are a member of this assembly and are equal to such virtuous people as Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, Great Wisdom Bodhisattva, Great Compassion Bodhisattva and Great Strength Bodhisattva.

As Mr. Nian Zu Huang stated in his commentary on the Infinite Life Sutra, the Pure Land Method is for sentient beings of supreme root nature. Who are those with this utmost root nature? Those who can believe, vow to go to the Pure Land and practice mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha. Master Hui-Neng only taught those with supreme root natures. However, his students, although they had achieved, could not maintain their level of attainment. Pure Land practitioners with foremost capabilities will never regress, for they have perfectly achieved in the three non-regressions. The students of Master Hui-Neng achieved the three non-regressions, but not perfectly.

The Pure Land method is unsurpassed. We are unbelievably fortunate to have encountered it. But it is no accident that we have done so. It is due to the maturing of our good roots, good fortunes, causes and conditions that we have accumulated over infinite eons. And this is why we have encountered this method.

To practice good deeds with one sincere mind means to have no wandering thoughts, no second thought. Proper and virtuous thought is the first thought, is the absolute and ultimate proper thought. Also, it is to chant "Amitufo" to practice single mindedly Constant Mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha and wholeheartedly seek birth into the Pure Land. The most marvelous way to reform and reduce our karmic obstacles is to have no wandering thoughts. It does not mean no proper thoughts. If we are without proper thoughts, we become ignorant. Wandering thoughts are discriminatory thoughts and attachments. It is not easy for average people to achieve the state of no wandering thoughts. However, everyone can achieve this by practicing the Buddha Name Chanting Method.

What is meant by "proper thought revealed"? It is "Amitufo". "Amitufo" is the most truthful and ultimate proper thought. We would do well to understand this. The only important issue in our life is to constantly maintain proper thought, not to cling to deviated and erroneous ones. We would do well to be constantly mindful of Buddha Amitabha day and night, without interruption. If we can continue our cultivation in this way, then we will receive wonderful results after three months. If we can constantly maintain mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha, with this one thought we will assuredly reduce our wandering thoughts.

It is impossible for us to not have any wandering thoughts. Certainly, we will have some. Do not be afraid of them. Thoughts of Buddha Amitabha will occupy us the most. Six or seven out of ten thoughts are of Buddha Amitabha with only three or four wandering thoughts. No matter. But, if we are not mindful of Buddha Amitabha, then our minds will be filled with wandering thoughts. If we can continue mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha for three months, letting the thoughts of Buddha

Amitabha increase, our wandering thoughts will decrease. Then we will be at ease and free in spirit. Our minds will become more serene and our savoring the Dharma joy will indicate that our karmic obstacles have been reduced. In the past, our minds were filled with afflictions and worries, our futures darker and darker. Now we will be happy and wise. Our lives will be interesting and filled with confidence and our futures will be bright.

Everything will change as we continue our chanting for half a year. We will receive even better results. This will serve to increase our confidence and determination. Anyone, who really wants to go to the Pure Land, will find that it is achievable after three years of cultivation of Constant Mindfulness of Buddha Amitabha. Numerous people have achieved this. There are others who have said that they cannot practice this method, for they will die in three years. What can we say? Honestly speaking, many people dare not practice this method for they are still clinging to this world, unwilling to give up reincarnation in the Six Realms. This is shortsightedness. They do not know that the happiness and enjoyment of the Pure Land is peerless, even human and heavenly realms and all other Buddha Lands cannot compare with it. Such a wonderful place and you do not want to go? You prefer to stay here and remain mired in suffering. Then what can I say? Nothing.

People with true aspiration and profound insight need to know that it is the perfect and complete accomplishment to single-mindedly seek birth into the Pure Land and be with Buddha Amitabha. Naturally, we will set our body and mind free, to let go of wandering and discriminatory thoughts and rid ourselves of attachments forever. There is nothing worthy of worry, nothing worthy of greed. We follow and accord with conditions and do not seek affinities in our daily lives. How happy and free we will be for we will have truly achieved.

This is what worldly people are unable to think of, to turn affliction into awakening, to live or die at will, not just to pass away when our time is up, but to leave when we wish. If we feel we need to remain in this world for several more years, there is no harm in so doing. However, there is only one reason to remain. If we still have affinities with those who are here then we need to stay here to encourage them to go to the Pure Land with us. In this way, our time spent here will be to help others. If it were just for ourselves, then we would go early to the Western Pure Land. The purpose of staying here is to help all sentient beings, to propagate the Pure Land method. If there is someone who can assume the task of advocating this method, to continue this teaching, then we can pass on the work to them. We can leave first and let them carry on with this great matter of guiding sentient beings to transcend the cycle of birth and death. What freedom this is. Thus, everyone needs to know that those who “attained achievement and left this world in three years” had no Dharma affinities, had nobody to teach. They would certainly leave and not delay here any longer. Those who cannot leave have no choice, have no alternative but to stay. Those, who are able, will go.

As long as we single-mindedly chant the Buddha’s name without doubt, without intermingling, without interruption, we are assured of attaining achievement in three years. Look at the student of

Master Di Xian who solely chanted "Namo Amituofo" and was ignorant of everything else. After becoming a monk, the Master did not require him to be ordained for he was worried that the new monk could not withstand the hardship (of the long training session) due to his advanced age. Also, he was uneducated and illiterate and so it was not necessary for him to attend the lectures. He did not even remain in the way place to work with everybody. If the others made fun of him and he lost his temper as a result, it would have been very difficult for him.

Consequently, he was sent to the countryside of Ning Bo County to live alone in an abandoned way place. From dawn to dusk, he chanted "Amituofo" for three years. He knew in advance when he would die. How did he accomplish this? As Mr. Liao-Fan told his son, "As long as the mind is virtuous and kind, then naturally it will not generate any improper thoughts". This is to achieve from sincerely chanting the Buddha's name! Average people cannot compare to him. He succeeded and was born into the Pure Land because he did not have the ability to teach Buddhism to others. He was illiterate with no knowledge of Buddhism, but he attained achievement and was born into the Pure Land. He did not suffer any illness or pain but knew in advance his time of death. When he died, he was standing and remained so for three days, waiting for Master Di Xian to take care of his memorial service. Not at all easy! He is a role model for Pure Land practitioners. Others may say that the Pure Land method is not a good practice, but which other method of practice can present something like this for us to see? Which other method of practice enables us to be clear-headed at the time of death, enables us to remain standing for three days, waiting for others to take care of our funeral arrangements. This is truly our testimony.

The method that I teach everyone is to single-mindedly chant "Amituofo". While our body remains in this world, we have no choice but to make a living to support ourselves. But after work, we can let go and be mindful of the Buddha. When we are working, we concentrate on our job. Once we are finished, start chanting. Even while at work, when there is no thinking required, we can silently chant or play a cassette to listen to "Amituofo" while working. If our work requires thinking, then we can temporarily lay aside chanting to concentrate on work. When thinking is not needed, we can again chant or listen to the Buddha's name while working. We would do well to understand that chanting "Amituofo" is the greatest matter in our life. The rest is unimportant, not worthy of any real concern. This is the way to regret our wrongdoings, to change from our mind. People who know how to practice do so from the root, from the basics.

Demons do not appear in bright daylight. This is the essence, the key for us to turn over a new leaf. All mistakes stem from the heart; therefore, we change from the heart. It is like getting rid of a poisonous tree. If we want to put an end to it, we uproot it altogether so it cannot grow again. Why exert ourselves to no avail by pulling out its leaves one by one and cutting it twig by twig?

An example of changing through behavior is to cut down the branches, the twigs one by one, or to pull off the leaves one by one. To change from the heart is to uproot the tree. Thus, we need to know what is the key? What method do we use to change ourselves? If everybody can memorize,

follow and uphold the teaching of Master Ou-I, then everybody will change from the heart. In so doing, all the transgressions accumulated over infinite past aeons will be absolved. "Amitufo" can reform all wrongdoings. By sincerely chanting "Amitufo", we perfectly practice all the virtuous teachings, be they worldly or Buddhist teachings. Cultivating one is cultivating all. Changing one is changing all. Truly inconceivable! Many people have doubts, thinking this method is not very reliable, or thinking there is an even better one. I smile after I hear this, place my palms together and chant "Amitufo" and am not bothered by them.

The best way to reform our faults is through cultivating our hearts. If we are willing to cultivate our hearts, then it is possible to purify our faults right away.

The foremost way for us to change is from the heart. If we were able to let go of everything and continuously chant "Amitufo" for three months, for six months, our minds would be purified, the result would come forth. As for people learning to lecture on the Buddhist sutras, I encourage them to learn just one sutra. By reciting a sutra daily, we can attain purity of mind in three to five months. If we were learning many sutras simultaneously, we would not attain purity of mind in the same amount of time. Consequently, our learning would be useless. The solution is to specialize. Not many people realize this.

When our practice of Buddhism is genuine, the more we practice, the more purified our hearts will be. We will have fewer afflictions, lighter ignorance, increased wisdom as our faces glow with health. These are the effects of genuine practice! We need to keep firmly in mind what Master Lian Chi said, "Let others learn all of the Great Buddhist Canon". We need to remember that the books in the library we have are for others to read, not for ourselves. Why do we need to let them see so many books? Because they do not believe, so we let them read. If they want to travel so many roads, let them. We will take a different road, a single short road. They change their ways through their actions, but they only change on appearance and then only change minor details. We change from our hearts. From here, we can see the difference in viewpoints and the degree of wisdom between the two. This is because wrongdoings originate from the heart.

If my heart is pure, I can recognize and stop an improper thought as soon as it arises. The immoral idea will disappear the moment I am conscious of it.

This talks of changing from the heart. Wandering thoughts are afflictions, are karmic obstacles. As soon as they start to rise, we recognize them immediately and change them into "Amitufo". As a wandering thought arises when our senses come into contact with the external world, whether we like or dislike something, whether the wandering thought is good or bad, we immediately replace it with a second thought of "Amitufo". We can chant either "Amitufo" or "Namo Amitufo". Once our mind has given rise to a wandering thought, it is awakening when our second thought is "Amitufo", to be awakened and not deluded. The first thought is one of delusion but the second thought is one of awakening. To gain the tremendous effect the awakening needs to be immediate.

The delusion must not be allowed to increase or to continue. In so doing, we will truly uncover our wisdom.

If we are able to persevere like this for six to twelve months, we will attain wisdom. Our eyes will be brighten, our six senses will be intelligent and sharp. We will be able to understand completely anything that we come into contact with. Others may have to read numerous books, reference materials or other forms of information throughout the whole world to be able to judge and still may not reach the right conclusion. Whereas, having uncovered our wisdom, we may only need to see something once to totally and perfectly understand it. Ordinary people do not have this ability for this is the ability of a Bodhisattva. The Buddha teaches us to seek true wisdom.

When we have the heart to propagate the true teachings, the key is for us to harbor sincerity, purity of mind and compassion. There is really no need to search for reference materials to learn how to lecture. We do not want to use our sixth consciousness of discrimination for we may misinterpret the Buddha's true meaning. As I have said so many times before, there is no meaning within the sutras. All the Buddhas will protest that they have been wronged if we ponder the meanings within the sutras. Therefore, we only need to honestly recite the sutra without analyzing its meaning, without seeking its meanings. We just need to honestly recite to purify our minds and uncover the wisdom in our self-nature.

If someone comes to ask us the meanings within sutras, we can tell them they are infinite. By not purposely seeking the meanings, the infinite meanings will be revealed, a revelation from the wisdom in our self-nature. Having done so, when we lecture on the sutra, we would naturally do it perfectly whether the talk is complex or profound, short or long. After lectures, when people ask us what we said, we really would not know. Why? When no questions are asked, there is no meaning. With questions, the meaning arises. The generation of infinite meanings is to benefit others. Having no meaning is to benefit self. Self-benefit is cultivating a pure mind, with no thoughts arising but "Amitufo". Lecturing on sutras to explain the teachings is to benefit others not ourselves. Thus, there is no need for us to remember what we just lectured. By not knowing, our mind is pure.

We would do well to constantly maintain our purity of mind. Purity is awakening. Pollution is the mind that is moved, that has wandering thoughts. In other words, pollution is when we have wandering thoughts. Having no wandering thought is original awakening. When we are chanting "Amitufo", it is genuine practice for our every thought initiates awakening in accordance with original awakening. Indeed, the Buddha Name Chanting method is inconceivable. Thus, for sutras we only need to recite the Infinite Life Sutra and the Amitabha Sutra. There is really no need to recite any others.

When we lecture on the teachings to benefit others, we can read the commentaries of the Infinite Life Sutra. We can also read the commentaries of the Amitabha Sutra written by Master Lian Chi and Master Ou-I. The one by Master Lian Chi is very well written, perfect, just as Master Ou-I praised it to be broad and profound. Reading the commentary of the Amitabha Sutra would be the

same as reading the Great Buddhist Canon. Master Lian Chi covered all teachings, worldly and Buddhist, for reference citation thus the content indeed is abundant and enriched. Master Yuan Yin and Master Bao Jing also wrote explanatory notes on the Essential Explanation of the Amitabha Sutra commentary by Master Ou-I. These four commentaries, would be enough reference material to propagate the Pure Land School. Mr. Nian Zu Huang wrote the Commentary of the Infinite Life Sutra.

Once we have thoroughly comprehended these four commentaries, not only would we thoroughly comprehend all the Pure Land Sutras but also the Great Buddhist Canon and the teachings of all other Buddhist schools. If we study many schools, our minds will become scattered. With scattered minds, naturally our wisdom will not be uncovered. These four commentaries are sufficient for those who volunteer to propagate the Pure Land method.

There is no need to look into additional references. Do not think that because we read less we would not have enough materials to lecture on. With shorter, more concise reference material, we would require less time to lecture. Why struggle to try to talk for a certain length of time? When we speak for a shorter time, we will only speak of the essence. The more the essence is refined, the more wonderful it is. Each moment will be valuable as we do not waste any of the audience's precious time. If we compile a talk using many reference materials as if to make up one giant platter of hors d'oeuvres, others cannot even begin to savor any particular flavor. This wastes our time and energy as well as those of others.

If I am unable to succeed at reforming a fault through changing the heart, then I will try at the level of understanding, knowing the reasons why I need to make the change. If I cannot succeed with this, then I will try to reform by changing through action and force the thought to dissipate. The best way is by cultivating the heart and understanding the reasons behind the need to change. The alternative way is forcing ourselves not to commit the wrongdoing again. Sometimes all three methods have to be used to succeed at reforming a fault. It is foolish to dismiss the best way, which is to reform from the heart and to be attached to the inferior way of reforming through action.

If we are unable to achieve using the best method, then we have no choice but to try the alternative way, to try to change from understanding, to know the reasons why we need to make the change. When something happens, we need to think calmly of why it happened. After we understand the reasoning, our minds will naturally become calm. Our wandering thoughts will lessen and our anger will dissipate.

However, if as beginners, we have little sense of reasoning and cannot succeed through understanding, what can we do? We could use an even more basic level of trying to reform by changing through action and in this way, force the thought to dissipate. We need to put a check on our every action, find our faults and correct them one by one. If we cannot do this, we will find ourselves in trouble, creating even more severe negative karma, bringing even greater suffering upon ourselves. Therefore, beginners were required to strictly abide by the precepts for they did

not yet understand the reasoning. The spirit of abiding by the precepts is to “stop and refrain from committing further wrongdoings”.

Mr. Liao-Fan said that the best way to reform is to cultivate the heart and understand why we need to change. An alternative is to force ourselves not to commit the wrongdoing again. When we attain purity of mind and understand the reasoning, we will be able to uphold and maintain good conduct, which is the best way to change. Until we can do this, all three methods may have to be used to correct a fault. This indeed is achieving self-cultivation while influencing others, for we attain purity of mind while serving as a role model for beginners to follow.

Some people are very rigid about abiding by the precepts. They are attached to the behavior, to the formality of cultivation and are unable to raise the level of their state of mind. Actually, the precepts are very flexible. When we uphold them, we need to understand the logic behind them. And it is even more important that as we abide by them that we strive to attain purity of mind. The purpose of upholding the precepts is to attain deep concentration, which is the purity of mind. If we were overly attached to the formality of upholding the precepts, then it would be difficult for us to achieve deep concentration because we would differentiate and be attached to the appearance, the formality of abiding by them daily. How could we succeed? Only by severing our discriminatory thoughts and attachments are we able to attain deep concentration. This concentration is still a means, a way, thus it would not do to attach to attaining it or we would still be unable to uncover our wisdom.

Theravada practitioners are attached to achieving concentration. The Buddha talked about the Mind State of Arhats in the Surangama Sutra. They have attained the ninth level of concentration and are partial to the state of empty nirvana. They are attached and cannot let go and thus they guard the gentle and serene state. They are still discriminatory, still attached to “extinguishing all the contaminants”. For example, when Theravada practitioners try to sever their afflictions, virtually all their change is through behavior. Sometimes, they will concurrently use changing through behavior with reasoning, but not from the heart. Thus, it takes seven cycles of birth between the human and heaven realms for a practitioner who has attained the level of Arhat to sever their attachments. The sutras tell us that trying to sever attachments by changing through behavior is as difficult as “trying to cut off a raging waterfall of water that is forty miles wide”. Just imagine how difficult it would be to try to stop it all at once!

As said earlier, this is as difficult as trying to cut down a tree by plucking one leaf at a time. This is a good example of why changes should be made from the heart. How should we proceed? We could try to pluck off all the leaves one by one, then to cut off each and every twig and branch and then slowly try to dig up the root, but this would be difficult and time consuming. Wise people would go straight to the root, to uproot the tree. Then, the leaves would naturally wither and fall. So, why bother to pluck the leaves and cut off the twigs, one by one?

The Desired Result of Reform

But even when we vow to change, assistance is needed to truly reform. We will need constant reminders from genuine friends who are witnesses to our actions in everyday life. As for our good and bad thoughts, we can ask the beings and spirits of heaven and earth to be our witnesses. We also need to be diligent and to regret sincerely and wholeheartedly from morning to night. If we can honestly regret from one to two weeks, one to three months, then continuing in this way, we are assured of attaining results and benefits.

We need to generate our shameful heart, fearful heart and courageous determined heart, for they are the inner, direct cause and condition in reforming. But we still need catalytic factors, that is, good friends on the path to awakening to remind us, to help us from the outside, our visible assisting factor. If we ourselves have one virtuous thought, one sincere thought of trying to correct our faults, all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas would be happy and all benevolent spirits would praise and respect us. Thus, without our even being aware of it, they will most certainly help us. We can see that one virtuous thought can result in inconceivable results. Therefore, we need to truly change through actions when the condition is right.

We need to be diligent in our regretting, to do so sincerely from morning to night. If we are not diligent, then we will inadvertently create negative karma. So, we cannot be remiss! It is best if the Cultivation Hall has chanting for twenty-four hours a day. In the way places of ancient patriarchs and masters, the chanting continued night and day. During the daytime, everyone participated, but at night, they practiced in groups of four, with each group taking a turn.

Although we may not currently have such a Cultivation Hall where we live, we can make use of cassette tapes or chanting machines. We simply chant along with it, as if participating in a big assembly. The volume should not be so loud that it disturbs others, nor too soft for us to clearly hear. We can even listen to it when sleeping. Sometimes, we can even hear it when we dream, so we can chant in our dreams. The ancient people said this was like "hearing the drum play or the thunder roar as we slept". It would be wonderful if we could even hear the chanting in our sleep, as if still participating in a seven-day retreat.

Mr. Liao-Fan spoke of sincerely regretting for one week. Participating in a seven-day retreat, in which the chanting was for a limited time each day, is not as good as gathering a number of like-minded fellow cultivators in a quiet place to chant continuously for seven days. A seven-day retreat should continue non-stop day and night, not just during the daytime. Also, when we attend our first retreat, we should not try to participate for all seven days, because most people have difficulty tolerating the full schedule. We could try one day and night, twenty-four hours. After we feel this is effective for several times, we could try two days and nights, then three days and nights, etc. to gradually lengthen the time span.

Thus, to truly cultivate, we could chant once a week for three days and nights. If we are unable to do this, we could try a shorter period. The merit accrued from this would be effective and outstanding. Liao-Fan's Four Lessons, tells us how we can create our destiny. When there is a

sincere request, a response will follow. If we sincerely seek a way place, a good environment for cultivation, then we should be able to obtain what we seek. If this kind of effort can be sustained for one to three months, then the desired results will be seen.

What are the benefits of contrition? We may feel very much at ease and our hearts may feel light and generous. A person of low intelligence may suddenly become wise. Another might maintain a clear and relaxed mind even in a disturbing and confusing environment. We would also feel an extensive understanding of everything. Or we would be able to drive out all hatred upon seeing an enemy and maintain a happy attitude.

There are many examples of desired results. If we have been depressed or unhappy in the past, now we can become joyful instead. If we had many worries, they can be lifted from our mind after we reach understanding and instead we can become liberated and free. If we were confused, we can become intelligent and no longer be foolish. When we find ourselves in circumstances that are disturbing or agitating or we encounter many diverse and hard to solve matters, we are able to easily resolve them even as others seem overwhelmed by them. We have seen examples of this in some of our fellow practitioners. Some are able settle matters they undertake without any apparent difficulty, while others find it extremely difficult to resolve them.

Mr. Yu said in his commentary, "This is a sign of good fortune, merit and wisdom". This speaks of former enemies, those who resented us, but who now are very favorably inclined towards us, who have changed their whole attitude towards us. All this is due to our merits from cultivation, of being able to influence and change others unobtrusively and imperceptibly. It is said, "A kind-hearted person has no enemies" and has the appearance of good fortune, merit and wisdom.

We may dream of spitting out black things. We may also dream of ancient sages or virtuous people who have come to encourage and escort us or we may dream of flying in space without a care in the world. We may also dream of all kinds of colorful pennants and ornately decorated canopies. These distinctive phenomena are all indications of a successful reform and a dissolving of past offenses.

"Black things" are pollutants or karmic obstacles. In the past, we may have had numerous nightmares or dreams of great confusion, but not anymore. Although we still dream, what we see is as clear as what we see in the daytime. This is obviously very good. We may also dream of ancient sages or virtuous people who have come to help us. As Buddhists, we would dream of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas teaching us about the sutras and guiding us in our practice. We may also dream of flying in space, of colorful pennants and canopies. These are all phenomena that indicate success in our attempts to reform. Whether in our daily life or in our dreams, all these responses are signs that our karmic obstacles are gradually being reduced and eradicated, signs of good fortune and happiness gradually materializing.

However, we must not consider seeing these phenomena as a sign of perfection. Instead, we must resolve to further improve ourselves and work even harder to reform.

We should not be proud that we have made progress. If we become arrogant, then we will once again regress just as our karmic obstacles are being reduced and eradicated. Therefore, we must guard against becoming arrogant. Instead, we need to increase our resolve to attain even further self-improvement and put even greater effort into our reforming. If we become satisfied with what we have accomplished, then we will be unable to make further improvement. We would do well to be constantly diligent, to seek improvement and never limit our efforts to improve. Even when we are born into the Pure Land, we need to continue to improve. How can we be content? We need to be satisfied in our material and spiritual manner of living. However, we should never be content when seeking improvements in our virtue and cultivation, but persevere with deep-felt confidence.

When Bo-Yu Qu was twenty, he was already mindful of his faults. He analyzed his mistakes and tried to correct them thoroughly. At the age of twenty-one, he felt he still had not completely corrected all his faults. When he was twenty-two, he felt as if twenty-one was spent dreamily, without practical improvement. Thus, year after year, he continued to correct his faults. When he reached fifty, Bo-Yu still felt that the past forty-nine years were filled with wrongdoings. This was how particular our ancestors were regarding the correction of faults!

During the Spring-Autumn period in China, there was a high senior government official in Wei, named Bo-Yu Qu who was awakened when he was only twenty. He knew his faults and vowed to reform. At twenty-one, he felt he still needed to improve. This was further proof of the previous passage that "We should not consider seeing these phenomena as a sign of perfection. Instead, we must resolve to further improve ourselves and work even harder to reform." Bo-Yu Qu had accomplished this. Every year, every month, every day he would continuously reflect within and reform. This account of Bo-Yu Qu is an excellent example of how diligent our ancestors were. They persevered, practiced great willpower and patience in reforming themselves and they proved that their endurance and efforts are worthy of our emulation.

We are all just ordinary people and our mistakes are as numerous as the spines on a porcupine. Oftentimes when we look back, we do not even see our own faults. This is because we are careless and do not know how to reflect on our own actions. It is as if a cataract is growing in our eye.

Mr. Liao-Fan taught his son to observe the conduct of our ancestors, then to look back on our own conduct and reflect within. We are ordinary people who possess excessive faults and wrongdoings as numerous as the spines on a porcupine. Thinking back over today, looking back at yesterday, at last year or even earlier, it would seem that we have committed no great mistakes, that we have not done anything wrong. What is the reason for this? We are negligent and careless. It is as if a cataract has grown in our eyes, blocking us from seeing our own faults. If we do not see our faults

then we will be unable to reform. If we do not reform, we will forever be deterred from standing out from the crowd.

This is why Great Master Lian Chi taught beginners to use the Merit-Fault Chart so that they would be watchful over their every word and deed. Only when we discover our numerous faults, will we be truly afraid. As to reform, we need primarily to change from the heart. We then reinforce this with changing through reasoning. In this way, we are simultaneously practicing both the primary and secondary ways to reform.

All these are the symptoms of having accumulated too many offenses and transgressions! Our hearts may feel confused and oppressed, lacking energy and spirit. We will become extremely forgetful, filled with worries even when nothing is happening.

We receive some small benefits by practicing Buddhism. Not only the signs of our great or small karmic obstacles can be detected, but those of others as well. (When we have committed too many offenses) our hearts may feel heavy and we may become extremely forgetful at work or study. We will find that we are unable to lift our spirits. When young people unexpectedly begin to forget things like elderly people do, it is due to karmic obstacles. True cultivators will find that even in their eighties and nineties, their memories are still good.

It is also an indication of karmic obstacles when we worry even when nothing is happening. The past is past, what is the use of dwelling on it? Tomorrow is yet to come, to think about it is wandering thoughts. Some people are extremely good at worrying and thinking about the past, the future. They can do so all day long. This is to "Make a mountain out of a molehill" and this is a karmic obstacle.

We may feel embarrassed and depressed upon meeting a virtuous person. We become displeased at hearing proper reasoning and when showing kindness to others, we are in turn treated with hostility. We will constantly have nightmares where everything is upside-down and will talk incoherently and behave abnormally. All of these are signs of misfortune.

If we are just and honorable, we will neither be embarrassed nor conscience-stricken when we meet a genuinely good person. Neither would we feel listless, dispirited, dejected or unable to exert ourselves. Also, we will become displeased at hearing proper teachings. In other words, we will not like to listen to the teachings of the Buddha, Confucius or Mencius (or to those of Mohammed, Moses or Jesus or any other teachings of morality). In the earlier years of the Qing Dynasty, everyone in the Imperial court recited the Infinite Life Sutra, but due to Empress Dowager's discomfort in hearing it, the recitation was abolished. Perhaps listening to the teachings on the Ten Bad Conducts and their respective consequential sufferings in the human and hell realms made her uncomfortable, due to her karmic obstacles.

When we are kind to others, we may be met with hostility. For example, if we give someone a gift, not only do they not thank us, they may even resent us for it. Another sign of misfortune is having nightmares where everything is confused and our speech and behavior are abnormal. This means that when we speak nonsensically and disjointedly, when our behavior becomes psychotic, then we have come up against a major karmic obstacle. These are all signs of significant transgressions.

If we have any of the above symptoms, we must immediately gather our willpower and reform all faults. It is necessary to form a new life and not delay!

If we have any of these signs, we need to regret earnestly to rid ourselves of these bad habits. We no longer have the time to procrastinate or to be careless. If we do not reform, then for us there is no future. Therefore, upon discovering any of these symptoms, we need to immediately correct our faults. We need to not stray off on a deviated path and waste our whole life in the process. Only when we truly rid ourselves of bad habits and faults will we be able to accept the teachings, to cultivate good deeds and accumulate merits.

Especially in education, when imparting the teachings to others, it is important to pass the teachings to those who have qualities such as having fewer faults, purity of mind, bravery in reforming and achievement in wisdom. Without these qualities, it would be useless to teach this person. For example, we might teach a person who is not virtuous, does not have the right motivation to learn. They would not learn the true essence. We might have enabled him or her to commit even greater offenses! Without having this knowledge, then he or she would have less chance of harming others, less chance of creating negative karma. With more knowledge and more abilities, this person could commit more ill deeds of greater severity. In this case, the teacher would have selected the wrong person as a successor. Therefore, teachers need to know if the person is qualified to inherit their knowledge and ability. If not, they will not pass down the teachings to them. This is not withholding knowledge. However, if we are unwilling to teach a suitable person, then we have overlooked and possibly wasted a proper Dharma repository. So, if a person is suitable, we teach them. If they are unsuitable, we do not.

In summary, how do we accumulate merit? We need to correct our faults. This will enable us to have the abilities and the conditions to accept the great teachings. We then perform more good deeds to meet the qualifications for being a Dharma repository before accepting the great teachings.