

Liao-Fan's Four Lessons

THE THIRD LESSON:

THE WAYS TO CULTIVATE GOODNESS

A Family that Accumulates Kind Deeds is Sure to Have Abundant Prosperity

Ten True Accounts of Virtuous People

I Ching, the Book of Changes explains that, "Families who perform good deeds will accumulate prosperity which can outlast many generations". Let me give an example. Once there was a family by the name of Yan. Before they agreed to give their daughter in marriage to the man who later became Confucius' father, they looked into the past deeds of the family. After finding the family to be one that practiced kindness and accumulated virtues, the Yan family felt assured that their daughter would be marrying into a family that would be prosperous with outstanding descendants.

I Ching, the Book of Changes is used as the introduction for the principle in this lesson. A family that accumulates good deeds is bound to have prosperity to spare. Even if we could not enjoy all the good fortune during this lifetime, we would have enough left over for our descendants to enjoy for generations. There is profound meaning within this.

People in the past were very different from those of today. Since ancient times in China, the decision of the parents and the advice of the matchmakers have always determined a union of marriage. When we compare freedom of love in today's society with the traditional ways, the latter has its advantages. Parents who were well-educated and high in moral standards undoubtedly chose the best and most promising spouse for their children. On the other hand, the disadvantage is that parents, who had no education and did not know better, often sold their daughter out for a good price. Therefore, children were unwillingly forced together as they followed their parents' wishes and were unhappy for the rest of their lives. This is an obvious disadvantage but we should not let this overshadow the advantages.

Liang-Ge Shu was Confucius' father. The maiden name of Confucius' mother was Yan. The "Yan family" spoken of here is Confucius' maternal grandfather who married his daughter to Confucius' father, which proved that careful thinking went into this match. He knew that the family had accumulated virtues and practiced kind deeds for several generations. This proves that "by the decision of the parents and the advice of the matchmaker", many happy families have been joined since ancient times.

In ancient times, all those who held power, whether it was an emperor who ruled an empire or a mayor who ruled a city or town were to faithfully follow three guidelines. They were to "act as leader, parent and teacher". First, it was necessary to act as the leader of the governed area. To act as the parent meant to be the parent of the citizens in the area that he was responsible for. He

was supposed to behave towards the people as if they were his relatives in terms of protecting them, caring for them, nurturing them. To act as the teacher meant that he should be a role model for them and teach them what they did not understand. Consequently, the responsibilities of acting as the leader, the parent and the teacher all fell upon the shoulders of the ruler. If he could fulfill these responsibilities, then he had performed infinite goodness. Unfortunately, these three guidelines do not exist in today's democratic system.

Confucius had once praised Shun on his filial piety, saying, "Due to his great filial piety and sincerity, Shun could deeply move even his ancestors to accept his offering. His accumulation of merits and good fortune would last for many, many generations." These sayings were later proven true by history. Now I will show in some true accounts that merits can be attained through performing good deeds.

Confucius highly praised Emperor Shun. In ancient Chinese history, Shun was the first person recorded in history for his greatness in filial piety. He saw only his own faults, not those of others. In Buddhism, he was a prime example of a practitioner. The Platform Sutra says that, "A true practitioner does not see the faults of others". Shun accomplished just this. As history proved, the virtues he had accumulated guaranteed his descendants prosperity. As they continued his practice of honoring ancestors, these descendants continued to accumulate goodness and virtues. Even the ancestors of others benefited as Shun's practices were gradually adopted by innumerable generations of Chinese.

The examples of the people who had performed kind deeds are all supported by historical fact. All of the people and events, which Mr. Liao-Fan used as examples, were from his own time, the Ming Dynasty. All of the events that happened were only a few decades apart and were familiar to everyone of his time. He used these examples to encourage people to practice good deeds and accumulate goodness because these would result in good rewards.

In Fujian province, there was a prominent man named Rong Yang who held a position in the imperial court as the Emperor's teacher. His ancestors were boat people who made a living by helping people cross the river. Once, there was a storm, which lasted so long that fierce flooding washed away all the houses. People, animals and belongings were carried downriver by the current. Other boaters took advantage of the situation and strove to collect the floating belongings. Only Rong Yang's grandfather and great grandfather took interest in rescuing the drowning people. They did not take any of the goods that floated by. The other boaters all laughed and thought them to be very foolish. Later, when Rong Yang's father was born, the Yang family gradually became wealthy.

When I was young, I lived in Jianou for six years and often went with schoolmates to play in what had formerly been Rong Yang's house. It was of an ancient style filled with many antiques. There were two stone lions on either side of the front door. Lanterns were also hung in front of the door, similar to those outside of a way place.

At the time of this account, when there was too much rain, the rivers would overflow and cause serious flooding, destroying houses and washing away belongings. Other boaters took advantage of the situation by collecting the victims' belongings in order to make a small fortune. Only Rong Yang's grandfather and great grandfather were the exceptions as they were concerned with rescuing those who were drowning and took no interest in any of the passing possessions. The other boaters all laughed and thought they were very foolish in passing up such a great opportunity to become rich and instead chose to save lives. It was only with the birth of Rong Yang's father that the family's living conditions improved.

Consider how much money they could have made rowing people across the river. Sometimes, the passengers did not have had money to pay the fare, but they would still have to be transported across the river. Therefore, the fee was given at will and depended on how much the passenger was able to pay. A small container was placed on one side of the boat and the passengers would put in whatever amount they wished. There was no set rate. This was the accepted practice in Fujian during that time. Students did not even need to pay. With good causes, there will be good rewards.

One day a heavenly person manifested as a Taoist monk came to the Yang family. He told them that their ancestors had accumulated much hidden merit. Consequently, their descendants would enjoy wealth and prominence. He said that there was a special place where they could build their ancestral tomb. So, they followed the Taoist's suggestion. Today it is called the White Hare Grave.

Feng-shui, which is an early science of placing buildings in a way that will take maximum advantage of the natural chi or energy of the landscape has its factual basis. However, we need to have the good fortune to receive good Feng-shui. Good or bad, it depends largely on our good fortune, virtues and conditions. It has a natural course. If a knowledgeable person shows us a good Feng-shui spot, this will only enable us to receive what we are supposed to have sooner rather than later. If we do not deserve good Feng-shui, then not only will we not benefit from it, it will actually bring us misfortune. This is because we do not have the good fortune to enjoy it. Therefore, do not be too happy seeing a good thing coming. Think first whether we will be able to bear it.

After reading Liao-Fan's Four Lessons, we will realize that everything that happens does so for a reason. Indeed, for an ordinary person "one sip, one bite all is predestined". If we do not acknowledge this fact and do not go about reforming our faults and practicing good deeds, then there will be no variable in our life; it will always remain a constant. Only when we truly understand the way to accumulate kindness and reform faults will we have changing factors and be able to truly change our lives and create our destiny. In our lifetime, we have seen many happenings that have been totally proven by Buddhist and Confucian principles.

Shortly after, Rong Yang was born. He passed the imperial examination when he was only twenty years old and later received the imperial appointment of Master. The Emperor even bestowed his

grandfather and great grandfather with the same imperial honors. Today, his many virtuous and prosperous descendants are still very prominent.

In ancient China, males were initiated into adulthood at the age of twenty. We can see here how young Rong Yang was when he passed the highest imperial examination, the Jin-Shi level and attained the highest academic degree at that time. It is equivalent to earning a doctorate degree today. His appointment was extremely high, similar to today's National Affairs Advisor. In other words, he was an advisor to the Emperor, obviously a very prestigious position. Later, he received the rank of Imperial Teacher.

The Emperor also conferred the same honors on his grandfather and great grandfather. In ancient times, it was a great honor to the family's ancestors if an individual became an imperial official. Although Rong Yang's father, grandfather and great grandfather were only common citizens, due to Rong Yang's high position, the Emperor bestowed upon his ancestors the same honors although they had already passed away. This was the way to honor ancestors during ancient times in China.

Today, we encourage and reward good deeds. Governments praise and cite good people and their accomplishments. Frankly speaking, the methods used in citing good deeds were a lot more effective in ancient times and had a deeper educational meaning. Because the descendants of a particular family had contributed to the country, it could bestow honor on the individual as well as on his ancestors. Today, the praise or honor ends with the individual and does not extend to his ancestors; whereas, in ancient times, the Emperor could bestow the same honor on the three previous generations.

We may not see any reason in bestowing an honor upon a person who died so many years ago. What was the point? Actually, there is a very good one for there is a valuable lesson to be learned from this. It can help us to realize that our achievements are most likely based upon the good deeds and merits that were accumulated by our ancestors. We have been rewarded with the good fortunes that stemmed from them. Realizing this, why would there be any reason not to practice good deeds? If this situation arose when the ancestors were in the Six Realms then they could still obtain an honor that was bestowed by the Emperor, regardless of which realm they were in. If they were in the hungry ghost realm, then all the kings of ghosts would respect them. Being great virtuous persons, they would gain the respect of heavenly beings and spirits. This is why it is such a valuable lesson. It can provide a wonderful incentive, which can encourage people to practice acts of kindness. Therefore, the true merits and virtues from this lesson are inconceivable.

Mr. Liao-Fan wrote how Rong Yang's descendants were still very prominent in his time. This happened because so many generations had accumulated goodness, had built a solid foundation. They held official positions for generations thus these descendants also had virtue and remained very prestigious and prosperous.

Zi-Cheng Yang, from the county of Yin in Zhejiang province, is another example. Zi-Cheng worked as a member of the staff of the county courthouse. He was kind and humane, fair and law-abiding.

Once, the county magistrate punished a criminal by beating him until his blood spilled out onto the ground. The magistrate's anger did not subside and as he was about to continue, Zi-Cheng knelt and pleaded with him to stop beating the prisoner. The magistrate said, "It is all right for you to plead, but how can I not be angry when this person has broken the law!" Zi-Cheng replied that when those in a position of leadership in the government do not follow the proper path, ordinary people would lose their way. Once we realize this, we should feel sorrow rather than joy. And if we should not feel joy, then how could we feel anger? Thus, a case like this called for more understanding. The magistrate was touched by Zi-Cheng's speech and ceased the beating.

Mr. Zi-Cheng Yang had a job in the county courthouse, which is similar to today's section chief. It was not a very high-ranking position. He had a kind and generous heart and he was very honest, impartial and law-abiding. At the time of this incident, the county magistrate also handled judicial matters. The magistrate was also the judge. When the criminal refused to tell the truth and even talked back, the magistrate became angry. He beat the criminal severely until his blood fell on the ground. But even then, the magistrate remained infuriated. When Zi-Cheng saw this, he felt compassion for the prisoner, kneeled and pleaded with the magistrate to stop. Because of the seriousness of the prisoner's offense, the magistrate was infuriated.

This took a great deal of courage because what he said was a direct accusation against the behavior of the government. If the superior officer had not agreed and blamed him for being so blunt, Zi-Cheng could have gotten himself into serious trouble. However, if the superior officer were virtuous, moral and wise, he would not become angry. He would have realized that his staff was only reminding him to be rational.

Zi-Cheng spoke of those in positions of leadership in the government. He was talking about the provincial and city magistrates. Zi-Cheng said these officials did not follow the "Proper Path", which means that the government did not do a good job in political education. What is the "Path"? It is the Three Guidelines for a ruler to follow, to act as "the leader, the parents and the teacher". When a district government official who presided over the local administrations did not fulfill the duties similar to those of a parent or a teacher, then he did not properly look after his people. When a citizen had committed an offense, it was because the ruler did not teach them well. This is why Zi-Cheng said that when those in a position of leadership in the government do not follow the proper path, fellow citizens would lose their way because they had no guidelines to follow and no one to turn to for advice. If the administration behaved properly, then the people would have set principles to comply with.

During the Han Dynasty (approximately twenty-one hundred years ago) the philosophies of hundreds of scholars were replaced by those of Confucius and Mencius. Confucianism was used as the basis for the educational system. Before this time, during the Spring Autumn period, there

were so many philosophies and scholars that it was difficult for the people to know which one was appropriate. In the numerous volumes of books written by hundred of scholars, each one had its distinct point of view and its own theories. Upon a rough examination, each seemed to make sense; however, with so many selections, people were at a loss as to which one to choose. This was why it was imperative to choose one as the model. The teachings of whoever was chosen had to be widely accepted, even by those with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Once this model had been chosen, then the works of other scholars could be used as supplementary references. Thus this established the objectives of the national education.

In China, the main moral standards derived from the philosophies of Confucius and Mencius. This system was used from the Han Dynasty up to the time of the Qing Dynasty. It naturally became the basis of the teachings for the Chinese people. Confucius and Mencius taught us the Five Human Relationships and the Ten Moral Responsibilities. These are the fundamental principles for people to follow, they are the proper path.

The Five Human Relationships concentrate on relations among people. They start with the basic relations between a married couple within their own bedroom. The husband should fulfill the responsibilities pertaining to his role as a husband and the wife should do likewise. Those responsibilities are a form of obligation. Each person must fulfill his or her obligations. A harmonious couple is the basis of all prosperous families. Outside of the bedroom is the larger family. There are the parents over us, children under us and siblings around us. Each holds a different role with different responsibilities, which we need to fulfill. These duties are innate, not assigned by another. Nor are they ideas of a particular person. They are moral principles, the proper path.

Beyond the family are society and the country. At the top is the leader of the country. Below the leader are the government officials. On the same level with us are our friends. The Five human Relationships refer to husband and wife, parent and child, siblings, friends, and political leaders and the public. To expand into a broader view, everyone in this world is like a sibling to one another. Therefore, the five relationships among people are the unification of a country. In this way, the entire country is like a big family. This is the proper path.

In the minds of the ancient sages and virtuous people, government officials would be considered as great people and so they were addressed as such. They had the responsibility to educate their people, nurture and lead them in proper thoughts and behavior by establishing moral guidelines. As long as people followed these guidelines, there would be no wrongdoing. In addition to these guidelines, they were to teach their people proper moral principles (such as loyalty, filial piety, humanity, faith, honesty and peace).

The basic educational goal in Confucianism is to “sever material desires, obtain awakening, have a sincere mind and a virtuous heart, discipline ourselves, have a harmonious family, rule a country and foster world peace”. Today, schools do not teach these anymore. Emphasis is now placed on

technology rather than humanity. Therefore, our thoughts, viewpoints and behavior have no guiding principles. The latter teach us that when we see the misdeeds of others, we would do well to take a hard look at ourselves and see if we have fulfilled our duties as a government official.

Once we know the motive behind a criminal offense, we should feel compassion for the offender rather than joy at having solved the case. Why should we not feel joy? Because we have yet to fulfil our own responsibilities. And if we should not feel joy, then we certainly should not become angry. Fortunately for Zi-Cheng, in ancient times, in order for a person to hold a government position such as that of a county magistrate, he would have to pass an imperial examination. In other words, he would be well-educated. Therefore, the magistrate immediately realized his error when Zi-Cheng reminded him of it.

It was extremely brave for Zi-Cheng to speak up on behalf of the prisoner. The magistrate immediately recognized this and ceased to be angry. From this example, we could see that Mr. Yang had considerable wisdom, virtue and insight. Thus, it was good for him to accumulate virtue and merits in the court because he could do many good deeds.

Although Zi-Cheng came from a very poor family, he never took any bribes. If the prisoners were short of food, he would always take food from his own home even if it meant going hungry himself. One day, several new prisoners needed feeding. Zi-Cheng's home was short of food. If he gave them what he had then his family would go hungry. But, if he kept the food for his family then the prisoners would go hungry. He felt that the prisoners needed the food more than his family did. A deplorable situation. He discussed it with his wife who asked where the prisoners came from. Zi-Cheng answered that they were from Hangzhou. They had to tolerate hunger along the way.

Zi-Cheng's family was very poor. At that time, government officials received only a small salary and a lot of them retired with hardly any savings. If an official retired with a lot of money, it was most likely that he had taken bribes or embezzled money during his office. Where else could the money come from? In ancient times, scholars did not learn how to run a business. If a scholar became a high-ranking official and contributed great services to the country, then he would in turn receive rewards in the form of farmlands and houses. So, it was possible to become wealthy in this way. However, if he held just an average position, then his salary would be quite meager. Zi-Cheng only held a very low rank in the county government.

Regardless of this, he refused any gifts that were offered to him. Sometimes relatives of the prisoners would offer him bribes in exchange for a lighter sentence or better care in the prison. It was inevitable that he would receive such offers. However, he never accepted any of them and always acted justly and fairly in all circumstances. It was difficult to be so honest in such a tempting environment. Also, at this time the amount of food provided for the prisoners was meager. Often when the prisoners were moved over a long distance, they went without food. Zi-Cheng always did his best to try to help them.

It is quite a distance from Hangzhou to Ningpo. The prisoners had to walk with shackles so the travelling time was considerably slower than usual. At the maximum, they could cover maybe fifty or sixty kilometers a day. This means that they would have to spend several days on the road. Zi-Cheng felt great compassion for these prisoners who went without food for all those days. If he gave his small amount of rice to the prisoners, his family would go hungry. If he gave the rice to his family, the prisoners would go hungry. So, after discussing the situation with his wife, they came to a solution. They would take what little rice they had, make a pot of rice porridge and share half of it with the prisoners.

Later, Zi-Cheng had two sons. The elder's name was Shou-Chen and the younger was named Shou-Zhi. Both sons became very prominent and held important government positions. His eldest grandson became Vice Minister of the Ministry of Justice. His second grandson was a member of the government staff in Sichuan Province. They were both prominent. Today, the government official, Chu-Ting Yang, who is known for his virtuous deeds, is also their descendent.

The two sons received the good fortune, which was accumulated by their parents. The government office they worked in would be equivalent to today's Ministry of the Interior. There were only six ministries at that time. Today, there are over a dozen in Taiwan. Therefore, the positions held in ancient times would be higher and entailed greater responsibilities than a similar position today. Zi-Cheng's two sons were both in what was then called the Department of Civil Personnel. Their rank would be similar to a vice-minister. Usually, there was one minister and two Vice-Ministers. One handled administrative matters and the other took care of general matters.

The eldest grandson was a vice-minister in the Ministry of Justice. The second eldest grandson was on the administrative staff, which was one rank lower than the Governor. He supervised each county's magistrate and oversaw approximately eight to twelve counties. Both grandsons were well known for doing a good job. A current descendant, Mr. Chu-Ting Yang also held a government position and was known for his honesty and fairness. This proves that the goodness accumulated by this couple benefited the following generations.

Here is another true example that happened during the Zheng-Tong period during the time of Emperor Ying-Zong. Once, a group of rebels appeared in Fujian Province. Many intellectuals joined them. The Emperor appointed Imperial Censor General Zhang to go south and subdue them. The general tricked the rebels and captured their chief. Later, official Zhang dispatched General Xie to subdue the remaining rebels, in eastern Fujian Province. General Xie managed to attain a list of those who belonged to the organization and commanded that a white flag be secretly given to those who did not belong with the rebels. They were told to place the flag on their door when the imperial army came to town and the soldiers were ordered not to harm the innocent. With this one thought of goodness, General Xie saved tens of thousands of people from being killed. Later, his son Chian Xie achieved first place in the imperial examinations and later became an advisor to the Emperor. His grandson Pi Xie, also placed third in the imperial examinations.

This happened over five hundred years ago. The rebels were actually a revolutionary army preparing to revolt. This talks about the effects of preventing unnecessary killing. When we look back in Chinese history, we see very few descendants of famous generals who had good fortune. Why? They caused too many deaths. They made too many mortal enemies. There are probably less than ten generals in Chinese history who have descendants who received good fortune and General Xie was one of those few.

Another prime example of the Law of Cause and Effect is the famous General Zi-Yi Guo who lived during the Tang Dynasty, (approximately thirteen hundred years ago). He had prominent descendants because he accumulated goodness and virtues. During the Song Dynasty (approximately one thousand years ago), there were two generals under the leadership of Emperor Zhao, Kuang-Yin; Bin Cao and Han Cao. The descendants of Han Cao had very little good fortunes, which did not even last three generations. The daughters became prostitutes and many family members became destitute. Bin Cao, on the other hand, was a very benevolent general. He did not kill any innocent people and his descendants were all quite prosperous.

So, if a general did not strictly discipline his troops to keep them from harassing the civilians, then the burden of the blame would be on his shoulders. So in this example, we talked about the consequence of unnecessary killing. General Hsieh was smart. He taught his troops how to distinguish the rebel supporters from the civilians. In this way, he would not mistakenly cause the death of innocent people. The prestige and prosperity of his descendants' proved that there is no escaping the Law of Cause and Effect.

Another example is the Lin family from Putian, in Fujian Province. Among their ancestors was an elderly lady who was very generous. Everyday she made rice balls to give to the poor and always gave as many as they asked for. There was an Immortal who manifested as a Taoist monk and came everyday for three years and each day, would ask for six or seven rice balls. She always granted his request. The Taoist monk then realized her deep sincerity.

This is another example of an ancestor who accumulated good fortune for her descendants. She made some rice balls every day to distribute to the poor. She treated everyone the same and gave the rice balls to whoever asked for them. It is easy to be good occasionally, but to be continuously generous is very difficult. She was tireless in this good deed. A heavenly being who manifested himself as a Taoist monk requested six or seven rice balls from her every day for three years. Thus, he knew that the elderly lady was indeed sincere in the good deeds that she did. Sincerity is an accumulation of virtues and giving is an accumulation of goodness. She had no other wish but to help those who were poor.

He said to her, "I have eaten your rice balls for three years with nothing to show my gratitude in return. Perhaps I can help you in this way. On the land behind your house, there is a good place for you to place your grave. If you are placed there in the future, the number of your descendants who

will have imperial appointments will be equivalent to the number of seeds in a pound of sesame seeds". Her son followed his recommendations and buried her there.

Having some knowledge of Feng-shui, the Taoist monk suggested to her a good place for her grave. If his advice were followed, then an unimaginable number of her descendants would receive imperial appointments. Just imagine how many sesame seeds there are in a pound! When she passed away, the Lin family followed the heavenly being's suggestion and buried her at the designated place.

The first generation after that, nine men passed the imperial examinations and it continued that way for every succeeding generation. There was a saying in Fujian that the results of the imperial examination always had the surname Lin on it.

Because of the good fortune, the elderly lady had accumulated from her good deeds, not only did she have many descendants but they were prosperous as well. The Lin family in Fujian province was the largest family and was very prosperous. This is the effect from the cause of sincerely giving away food to the poor.

Another example comes from the father of an imperial historian whose name was Zhuo-An Feng. One winter many years ago, Zhuo-An Feng's father was on his way to school when he encountered a person lying frozen in the snow. Finding the man still breathing, he quickly took off his coat to wrap around the frozen man. He carried him back home and revived him.

This example tells of the good fortune accumulated by saving someone's life. Zhuo-An Feng held his official duties in what is equivalent to the National Academy. When Zhuo-An's father was a young scholar himself and was on his way to school one morning, he saw a person alongside the road lying frozen in the snow. We can imagine that the person must have been poor and ill to have fallen to that state. Zhuo-An's father touched the poor man and realized that the man was on the verge of death. He immediately took his coat off to wrap it around the man, carried him home and nursed him back to health.

A lot of common sense is needed when treating a person who is suffering from a freezing condition. Northerners are familiar with this kind of procedure; however, southerners tend to be ignorant of it. In a case like this, cold water must be used. Use a towel soaked in cold water and rub it against his body in order to let the cold within his body slowly seep out of the pores.

That night, Zhuo-An's father dreamt of a heavenly being telling him, "You helped a dying man out of utter sincerity, this is a great virtue. I will bring the famous General Qi Han of the Song Dynasty to be reborn as your son". Later, Zhuo-An was born and was named Qi.

When we see a person in dire circumstances, no matter who they may be, as long as we sincerely try to save his or her life, it will be considered a great act of goodness. Qi Han was a very famous general during the Song Dynasty. He was greatly admired by the Emperor who bestowed a noble

honor to his title. General Qi Han was highly regarded in Chinese history; so, the heavenly being arranged for Qi Han to be reborn into the Feng family by being reincarnated into the Human Realm. It was because Zhuo-An's father saved someone's life that he was rewarded with a good son. This also exemplifies that reincarnation within the Six Realms is factual. The ancient Chinese all deeply believed in it.

Another example is Mr. Ying, the Minister who lived in Taizhou. When he was young, he used to study in remote mountain areas. At night, he often heard the sounds of ghosts and spirits but was never afraid of them. One night, he heard one ghost say happily to another, "There is a village woman whose husband left home a long time ago and has not returned. Her in-laws think that their son is dead and are forcing her to remarry. Tomorrow night, she is going to commit suicide here and will replace me. Then I can be reborn!"

In times past, when scholars wished to study, they usually lived in Buddhist way places, because only they were equipped with extra rooms and a library. Each way place had its own library of sutras and the collections were quite complete. Not only did they have Buddhist sutras, but also would have had the Four Books and the Five Classics. Most would also collect the works from the numerous schools of thinkers from the late Zhou Dynasty (over twenty-two hundred years ago). They usually referred to the library as the sutra collection chamber.

During ancient times, there were no public libraries. Buddhist way places were often regarded as a school and the sutra collection chamber was essentially the local library. Most scholars preferred to reside in these way places, which were usually located in the mountains or in some woods. They provided a quiet and fresh environment for pursuing academic study.

Ghosts do actually exist and they live among humans. They usually appear in sparsely populated areas or when a person's energy is low. Mr. Ying's mind was pure and honest; he neither paid heed to nor was afraid of them. However, one day he overheard one ghost telling another that a young woman was going to commit suicide. Anyone who commits suicide needs to find a replacement before he or she can be reborn. If no replacement can be found, then the ghost would undergo much suffering. Another person must commit suicide in exactly the same spot, in exactly the same manner for the previous ghost to be set free. The same applies to car accidents. Although the deceased did not commit suicide but was the victim in an accident, he or she would still need to find a replacement. Thus, it is very unlucky to die in an accident so we need to be careful of places where fatal accidents frequently occur for they may have spirits waiting for substitutes.

This example is about a ghost who had hung himself and was looking for a replacement. He had known in advance of the death of the young woman. He said that there was a family whose son was away from home on business and had failed to return home for a long time. The family knew nothing of his whereabouts and consequently, was forcing the daughter-in-law to remarry. She did not wish to comply and planned to commit suicide in the same spot the next day. The ghost said

that his chance for freedom was soon to materialize because she was to be his replacement. It was this conversation that Mr. Ying overheard.

Mr. Ying heard this and immediately set out to sell a parcel of land that he owned. He received two hundred grams of silver for it, made up a letter from the daughter-in-law's husband and sent it to her home along with the silver. The in-laws knew that the letter was not in the son's handwriting, but examined the silver and said, "This letter may be false, but the silver is not. Perhaps our son is truly alive and well." Consequently, the daughter-in-law did not need to remarry and her husband returned home after a while. The couple got back together and were like before.

This was a critical matter of life and death. But, Mr. Ying was a poor scholar. Where would he get the money? He immediately went home to sell his land and obtained two hundred grams of silver. He then made up a letter and sent it along with the silver to the family. The parents knew right away that the letter was not from their son, but who on earth would send them that much money? The silver was certainly real. They decided that their son must still be alive and well. Not long after, their son returned home.

Mr. Ying saved the breakup of a family, an act of great merit. When he was selling the land and sending the money, he did not consider for one moment that he would be accumulating merit. He simply acted out of compassion by wanting to help the woman, to save her life and keep the family intact. He thought no further of what he had done and returned to the way place to continue his studies.

Mr. Ying heard the first ghost say, "Originally, I was supposed to be able to leave this place to be reborn, but Mr. Ying messed up my chance!" The second ghost asked, "Why don't you get even with him?" The first ghost replied, "I cannot. The heavenly beings have recognized his goodness and virtue and he is going to receive a prominent position in the future. How can I harm him?"

The first ghost was so upset because it took a long time to find a replacement and Mr. Ying had just destroyed his chance to be reborn. When the other ghost asked him why he did not get even with Mr. Ying, he answered that the heavenly beings had already recognized his goodness and virtue and so he could not hurt him. From this, we know that if a spirit or a heavenly being can harm a person, it is because that person did something to deserve it. If a person has committed no wrongdoings, then the spirits would not be able to harm him or her.

There is an old Chinese saying, "There is a thirty percent possibility that people may be afraid of ghosts, but a seventy percent probability that ghosts are afraid of people". It is silly for us to be afraid of ghosts because they are much more afraid of us. Only when we have done something wrong do we need to be afraid of them because only then, are they able to harm us. If our conscience is clear, then malevolent spirits can do nothing to us. There are several books, which tell of such accounts. They are collected in several volumes, such as, Notes from Yuwei Chamber by Xiao-Lan Ji, Spiritual Collections by Sung-Ling Pu and the Twenty-five Books of Official

Records. In the first year of the Republic of China, there was a publication called A Record of Response and Retribution in History. These all provide numerous examples of the Law of Cause and Effect.

Seeing Mr. Ying's goodness, the heavenly beings had already planned for Mr. Ying to hold a prominent position in the government as a Minister. Later in his life, Mr. Ying did indeed hold the position of Minister. Having overheard the ghost, he knew some of his future in advance.

Mr. Ying heard this and became even more diligent in practicing kindness and accumulating merits. Whenever there was a famine, he would give grain from his storehouses to the poor and needy and was always eager to do whatever he could to help relatives in emergencies. When things did not go his way, he always reflected within himself rather than complain of external conditions. Thus, he always quietly complied with conditions. Even today, his descendants are still very prominent.

When people were rude to him or infringed on his rights, Mr. Ying always examined his own actions first to see if he was at fault. He took everything in stride and never argued with anybody or had any thoughts of revenge but practiced tolerance. Not only did he reach the high position of Minister, but his descendants who were also very capable and virtuous were likewise prominent. All of this happened because Mr. Ying had saved a family from being torn apart.

There was another person, Feng-Zhu Xu, who lived in Jiangsu province. His father was very wealthy. Whenever there was a famine, his father would be the first waive the rent on the rice fields, hoping that other wealthy people would follow suit. He also donated grain from his storehouses to the poor.

Feng-Zhu was his courtesy name; his formal name was Shih. At that time, wealthy people owned all of the land, which they rented to farmers. When there was a disaster or a bad harvest, Feng-Zhu's father would waive the rent to help the farmers hoping that other wealthy landowners would follow suit. Most of the farmers would be able to survive a bad year as long as they did not have to pay the rent. This was a great act of goodness. Not only did he waive the rent, but also he shared his stored grain with the poor.

One night, he heard ghosts outside his home, "No kidding! A county scholar in the Xu family is going to pass the provincial imperial examination!" This went on for several nights and indeed, that year, his son Feng-Zhu passed the examination. After that, Feng-Zhu's father became even more diligent in accumulating good deeds. He spent money to repair roads and bridges and provided food for monks as well as the poor. He would do anything he could to help others. Sometime later, he heard the ghosts again, "No kidding! The provincial scholar from the Xu family is going to hold a high position in the government." Eventually, Feng-Zhu became the governor for Zhejiang Province.

People who live in the countryside hear many ghost stories. Sometimes ghosts can be seen or heard clearly. Outside the house of the Xu family, they sang that a family member was going to pass the provincial imperial examination. Indeed, his son Feng-Zhu passed the examination. Good fortune is the reward for good deeds. Those who are aware of this will try even harder to accumulate goodness. The ghosts sang that Feng-Zhu would receive a high position in the government. He first became an imperial judge in the Supreme Court. Later, he became governor of Zhejiang Province. All of this resulted from his father sincerely helping the poor.

Another example is Kang-Xi Tu who lived in Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province. Mr. Tu used to work in the courthouse and would spend nights in the prison cells, talking with the inmates. Instead of making a name for himself, he would write a secret report to the Minister of Justice, telling him why a prisoner was innocent. The Minister would then question the prisoner accordingly and clear the case. Through Mr. Tu's effort, more than ten innocent people were released and all of them were extremely grateful to the judge praising the Minister of Justice for his wise judgement.

Helping a prisoner who had been wrongly accused was most admirable. No matter how careful one might be when examining a case, there was always the possibility of a wrong judgement. Even when an error has not been made intentionally, it is still a misdeed. From this, we can see how difficult it is to be a good lawyer or judge.

What Mr. Tu did was very rare. He would spend nights with the prisoners so that he could learn everything about each case to clear up any wrong accusations. When the prisoners were being questioned in the courtroom, sometimes they would become extremely frightened and would not be able to tell the true account of the circumstances of the case. Trials usually began at the break of dawn so that the courtroom was still very dark. It was quite similar to being held for judgement in hell. The whole atmosphere was frightening. Therefore, it was like taking the prisoner to meet the king of the underworld, which is quite different from trials today.

Mr. Tu worked in the judiciary department, which is similar to today's Supreme Court. His position was similar to that of section chief. It was not a high rank. When he stayed with the inmates to find out the truth behind each case, he did not take the credit himself. Instead, he wrote out the details of the case and gave this to the Minister of Justice so that all the credit went to his superior officer. His superior was, of course, very pleased with this for when he tried the cases at dawn, he already knew the truth of what had happened. After detailed questioning, he acquitted over a dozen innocent men. This was talked about throughout the imperial city and everyone praised the minister for bringing true justice to the system.

Soon after, Mr. Tu also made a report to the Imperial Judge saying, "If even in the Imperial City so many innocent people are imprisoned, there must be many more throughout the country. I recommend that the Imperial government send investigators to check the prisons for innocent people every five years. The sentences can be reduced or canceled in order to prevent the innocent from remaining in prison." The minister, his superior, took his request to the Emperor, who

agreed to Mr. Tu's suggestion. Mr. Tu was chosen as one of the special agents in charge of reducing sentences for those who were found innocent.

The imperial city, which was where the Emperor resided, was considered the best area. Circumstances there should have been a model for the country. Therefore, the capital city was called "capital master". Master means to be a model for all the other cities. Mr. Tu understood that if the capital city had unjustly sentenced prisoners, then there must be many more such cases outside the city. So, he suggested that there should be a thorough investigation at least once every five years. An investigator appointed by the Emperor would re-open all of the questionable cases and free any innocent prisoners. The Imperial Judge carried this recommendation to the Emperor who willingly agreed. The Imperial Judge was very fond of Mr. Tu and knew him to be an honest, just and humane individual. After this investigation system was established, a new position became open, Agent in Charge of Reducing Sentences. The Court appointed Mr. Tu as one of the agents who were assigned a number of districts to investigate.

One night, he dreamt that a heavenly being came to him and said, "You were not supposed to deserve a son in this life, but this act of reducing prison sentences for innocent people accords with the wishes of the heavens. You will be bestowed with three sons and they will all attain high positions." After that, his wife gave birth to three sons who all became prominent men in society.

Similar to Mr. Liao-Fan, Mr. Tu was not destined to have sons. Mr. Liao-Fan sought a son and received one. Mr. Yu received a son due to his accumulation of good deeds.

Another example of attaining good outcomes from practicing kindness is Ping Bao who lived in Jiaxing. Ping was the youngest of the seven sons of the magistrate of Chizhou, Anhui Province. He married into the Yuan family in Pinghu County, Zhejiang Province, and was a good friend of my father. Ping Bao was very knowledgeable and talented, but he was never able to pass the examinations. He spent his time studying Buddhism and Taoism.

Once, while traveling to Lake Mao, he came to a village and saw a way place in desperate need of repairs. The statue of Great Compassion Bodhisattva was wet from the rain that leaked through the roof. Ping took out all his money and gave it to the Abbot of the temple, asking him to please use it to restore the way place. The Abbot replied "It will be a very big project, I am afraid this amount is not enough to complete your wish." Ping Bao then took out all his luxurious belongings and handed them to the Abbot. His servant tried to persuade him to keep his best outfit, but he refused, saying, "It does not matter to me. As long as the statue of Great Compassion Bodhisattva remains undamaged, I do not care if I have to go without clothes."

This was an act of sincerity, donating money to restore way places. Ping's father was the head of the local government. Ping had failed in several attempts to pass the imperial examinations. Therefore, he had given up the hope of a government career. The finances of his family were adequate, so he was able to spend his time studying Buddhism and Taoism. One time, he

happened upon a Buddhist way place and saw that the statue of Great Compassion Bodhisattva was wet from a leak in the roof. It was obvious that the way place was in desperate need of repair. When he saw this situation, his immediate thought was to help repair it. So he opened his purse and took out sixteen ounces of silver, all the money he had and gave it to the Abbot to repair the damage. Doing this was an act of pure sincerity.

This was quite a large amount of money at that time and yet the Abbot told him that it was not enough. When Ping heard this, he took out the four bolts of cloth that he was carrying with him along with some fine clothing from his luggage to donate to the Abbot so that he could trade them for silver. Some of the clothing was new, made out of very good material and very expensive. Ping's servant advised him to keep it for himself. Ping answered that if it would help to fix the way place and protect the statue of Great Compassion Bodhisattva he would donate all of his clothing.

The abbot, with tears in his eyes, exclaimed, "To give up money and clothing is not a difficult deed to accomplish, but your deep sincerity is truly rare and precious to encounter". After the way place was repaired, Ping Bao asked his father to visit the temple and together they spent the night there. That night the Dharma Protector of the way place, Qie-Lan, came in his dream to thank him and said, "Since you have accumulated these merits and virtues, your children and descendants will enjoy having imperial appointments for generations to come." Later, his son and grandson both passed high examinations and were appointed as imperial officials.

It was not hard for a wealthy individual to donate money in aid of others, but his sincerity in thinking only of the statue and not of himself was very rare. He was the sole benefactor in repairing the way place, so they issued an invitation for him to return and view the restoration. He took his father with him and that night, he dreamt of the Dharma protector Qie-Lan, who thanked and told him of his good fortune, which he deserved due to his kindness in repairing the way place. Like the other examples, the good fortune was also rewarded to his descendants. So good results come from good causes and bad results come from bad causes.

Li Zhi from Jiashan County, in Zhejiang Province is another example. His father used to be a clerk in the provincial courthouse. Once, Li's father learned of an innocent man who was given the death penalty and tried to save his life. When the prisoner heard about this, he told his wife, "I am so indebted to this man who has spoken on my behalf but I have no way of showing my gratitude. Will you invite him to our house and offer yourself to him? Perhaps this will please him and increase my chances to live."

Li Zhi's father, knowing of the prisoner's innocence, took pity on him and pleaded with his superior to spare the inmate's life. If he could save the prisoner, he would also save the entire family. The prisoner knew of the clerk's intent so when his wife came to visit him in prison, he told her to try to repay the favor by giving herself to the clerk. He felt that by so doing, he would have a greater chance for a reduction of his sentence.

The wife cried as she listened to his request. However, it was the only way she could help her husband at this critical time. Therefore, the next day when the clerk came to visit, she offered him wine and told him of her husband's wishes. The clerk refused, but continued to do all he could to clear the case. When at last the prisoner was released, he and his wife both went to the clerk's house to thank him. The man said, "One with such virtue as yours is truly rare these days, how can I show my gratitude? You do not have a son. Please allow me to offer my daughter in marriage to you, this is the only way I can repay you. Please accept."

Li Zhi's father refused the prisoner's offer of his wife because he did not wish any reward for his action. He had acted out of a sense of morality and justice, feeling that it was part of his job. Li Zhi's father was not wealthy. His only source of income came from the small salary paid by the government. He had been married for many years, but had no sons. So, the prisoner offered his daughter to be a second wife to the clerk hoping that she would be able to bear him a son and continue the family name. This was an accepted custom at that time.

So the clerk accepted and soon afterwards, she bore him his son, Li Zhi. Li passed the higher level imperial examination when he was just twenty years old. Later, he was appointed to a high government position. Li's son Gao, grandson Lu and great grandson Da-Lun all passed the examinations and received imperial appointments. These ten examples all tell of the different deeds cultivated by different people. Although their actions differed, their intent was the same: doing good deeds.

Li Zhi's final appointment was similar to present day First Secretary in the Central Research Institute. It was a very prominent position. This was the reward for saving an innocent life. In this lesson, Mr. Liao-Fan told of ten examples. They illustrate how good fortune is the result of accumulating goodness. These numerous examples serve to prove that the good fortune that the families experienced was not mere coincidence. The dates of these events all happened quite close to Mr. Liao-Fan's time. Some of the cases were those that Mr. Liao-Fan knew of personally or which had been related to his family. All this shows that goodness will result in good fortune, while meanness will result in bad fortune.

What Is Goodness?

To Recognize Goodness

If we were to examine goodness closely, we would find that there are many different kinds. There is real goodness and false goodness, honest goodness and crooked goodness, hidden and visible, apparent and actual, proper and improper, full and half, big and small, and finally, difficult and easy. These different types of goodness each have their own reasons, which are to be carefully learned and understood. If we try to practice good deeds but do not learn how to differentiate between right and wrong, we may end up doing more harm than good. Then, all of our efforts would have been in vain.

Sincerity is the most important factor in practicing goodness. It is to do so without asking for anything in return. This is true goodness. However, good acts based on certain conditions would not be considered true goodness but as wrongdoing. For instance, some people, especially Buddhists, do not understand that Buddhism teaches us to break through and eliminate wandering thoughts and attachments. When they go to a way place to pay their respects to the Bodhisattvas, they do so to ask for something. If there is nothing that they want, they do not go. They burn incense in front of the Bodhisattvas and pray for assistance and guidance. If the Bodhisattvas would just grant what they want, then they vow that they will return the favor with special offerings. This is trying to strike up a bargain! Not only are they not sincere, but they view the Bodhisattvas as beings who are bribable. This is a serious offense!

Li Zhi's father was a virtuous man. The prisoner's offering of his wife as a reward inadvertently reduced him to being immoral. Li Zhi's father was not offended and continued to help the prisoner. This was an act of generosity. Therefore, it was only right that he received such good fortune. The previous ten accounts are examples of good actions. Now we will look at the concepts that they illustrate. We would do well not to be ignorant of principles and proper ways to accumulate goodness. First, we will talk about the difference between real goodness and false goodness.

What is "real goodness and false goodness"? In the Yuan Dynasty, a group of scholars went to visit Master Jung-Feng. One of them asked, "Buddhism often speaks of the karmic reward for good and bad, saying that 'It is like the shadow, following the form wherever it goes.' Then why is it, that there are people who practice good deeds, but their family and descendants are neither prosperous nor successful? On the other hand, there are bad and wicked people who behave immorally, but their family and descendants do quite well. What has happened to the Law of Cause and Effect? Are there no standards in the Buddha's teachings?"

Master Jung-Feng lived during the Yuan Dynasty (approximately seven hundred years ago). His name should be quite familiar to many of us because he edited the Thrice Yearning Ceremony Book, which we use. This is one practice of the Pure Land method. At that time, some scholars went to visit the Master and asked him some questions. Buddhism and Taoism both teach that the Law of Cause and Effect is immutable, is permanent. But, they said that nowadays, good people did not have good descendants yet those of bad people prospered. So, the scholars posed the question to the Master saying that this contradicted what they saw.

Master Jung-Feng answered, "Ordinary people are blinded by worldly views, they have not cleansed their minds of impurities and cannot see with true perception. Therefore, they look upon true goodness as wrongdoing and mistake wrongdoing as goodness. This is very common nowadays."

Ordinary people only see ordinary things. When our minds are impure due to worldly emotions, we are still bothered by many wandering thoughts and attachments. We do not have the "eyes of wisdom" to discern the truth. This is why people often mistake good for bad and bad for good. This

is delusion. Although many people were like this, the Master was very courteous in his speech and only said that these people do exist.

The Master continued, "Furthermore, these people do not blame themselves for failing to understand, but instead, blame their misfortune on the heavens. This is unfair!" The scholars questioned how good and bad could be mistaken for each other.

The Master explained that not only did these people not examine their actions to determine good from bad, but they blamed their misfortune on others, complaining that the heavens were not fair. But the scholars were still confused and asked the Master how people could mistake good for bad and bad for good.

Master Jung-Feng asked each of them to express their thoughts on what was good and what was bad. One scholar said that to yell at and hit others was bad, to respect and treat others in a mannerly way was good. The Master replied, "Not necessarily". Another scholar then said that being greedy and taking another's money was bad, not being greedy and behaving properly was good. Master Jung-Feng again replied, "Not necessarily". The remaining scholars all expressed their views on what was good and what was bad, but Master Jung-Feng always concluded, "Not necessarily".

Upon the Master's request, the scholars gave their opinions on what was bad and what was good. The Master said that their standards of good and bad were unreliable and did not agree with any of the examples provided by the scholars. With this, everybody asked the Master to explain his standards, since his differed from theirs.

The Definition of Goodness

Master Jung-Feng said, "To do things with the intention of bringing benefit to others is good. To do things to benefit oneself is bad. If what we do is for the sake of benefiting another, then it does not matter if we yell at or hit that person, it is still considered good. If our intention is for self-benefit, then regardless of our appearance of respect and courtesy, it is still considered bad."

This talks of the standard for good and bad in Buddhism. Anything done with the intent to benefit others is considered good, even if a certain amount of corporal punishment is involved. On the other hand, anything done with the intent to benefit only the self is considered bad, no matter how courteous and polite we may be towards others. For example, we may ingratiate ourselves with or fawn on others.

Master Jung-Feng continued, "Therefore, when we practice good deeds with the sole intention of benefiting others, this is considered public benefit. If it is for the public, then it is real goodness. If we only think of ourselves while doing good acts, then that is considered private benefit and that is false goodness."

This is the true standard for goodness: to benefit others, to provide goodness for every living being. If in the act of doing good, we are still concerned about our own welfare and reward, then the act is no longer sincere or pure. It has become tainted by traces of badness. In addition to "true goodness and false goodness" there is "full goodness and half goodness". To understand full and half goodness, we need to be able to differentiate between "full and pure goodness" as opposed to "half and mixed goodness".

All the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, sages and virtuous people think only of others and not of themselves. This is true and full goodness. We have seen a good example of this in Zhong-Yan Fan. His actions were those of true and perfect goodness and thus he was an excellent role model. He never had any concerns for himself or of his family, but only of the country and how to benefit society to create good fortune. When we read his biography, we can see that not only he himself, but also his descendants practiced and accumulated good deeds. Mr. Fan served as Prime Minister and two of his five sons became Prime Ministers as well. The Emperor appointed another son High Scholar.

When Mr. Fan died, he did not have enough money left for his children to purchase a coffin. Where had all the money gone? He had given it to help others. This was why Master Yin-Guang praised Mr. Fan as having virtuous conduct second only to Confucius. Until the early 1900s, his descendants remained prominent and prosperous for eight hundred years. It was the result of having accumulated an abundance of virtues and goodness.

Today, when we practice good deeds, we do so sparingly, exerting only one or two percent of our effort. And yet we consider ourselves good people. Not only that, we also expect numerous benefits in return for our little bit of goodness. Many people go to temples to burn incense and make offerings. Why? Because they believe this has the most profit in it. A dollar invested for millions in return. So they burn incense and worship the Buddha because they think that by doing so, they will gain good fortune in return. They think that maybe if they donate a dollar today, they will win ten thousand dollars in the lottery tomorrow. This kind of thinking degrades the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas into someone with no character at all.

Therefore, when we see that these apparently sincere people, their families and even descendants suffer from bad fortune, we will know the reason why. They do not intentionally view the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as bad, but inadvertently view them as beings who take bribes. Although it is not obvious, this attitude is still there. This is a major mistake! Sometimes when some people want something from a government official, they offer a bribe. This is the same as offering money to the Buddha in hopes of receiving what we want. People who accept the bribe are not good people. Consequently, if a Buddha accepted the bribe, would that not make him a bad person as well? That would be a major offense!

Master Jung-Feng further explained that, "When goodness springs from within the root of the heart, it is real goodness. When we do good just because others are doing so, it is false. In addition,

when we do good without expecting anything in return, it is considered real goodness. When we practice good deeds for some purpose other than to benefit others, it is false. Those who wish to practice true goodness need to contemplate all these differences."

The "root of the heart" is generated from true sincerity. It is true goodness. What is true goodness and false goodness? We must look into our hearts to see if we are really practicing goodness. When we simply follow others, we are not acting out of sincerity for this is "false goodness". When we wish for nothing in return, it is "true goodness". When we hope for a return, it becomes an act "with a purpose" and thus is false goodness. We would do well to consider this and examine the difference to see if we are doing things correctly. The scholars said greed and excess possessions were bad, but Master Jung-Feng said "Not necessarily". If money and possessions were used to do good deeds, to benefit the public, then this is also considered good, not bad.

Often, businesspeople who are Buddhists have come and told me that they felt they could not abide by one of the Five Fundamental Precepts, which is not to speak vainly or falsely. Consequently, they asked, "When in the course of doing business, our main objective is to convince others to entrust us with their money, how can we do so if we always speak truthfully?" My answer to them was "When you use the profits to solely benefit others, to practice the Bodhisattva Way then it is OK."

Nowadays, when we encourage people to practice good deeds, they may be unwilling to do so. However, if we set out to trick or to lie to them to get them to perform a good deed, they would be perfectly willing to do it. Where does the problem lie? It lies within us. Do we really have the same intentions as the Bodhisattvas? If we resort to using deception (of course, this would be under extreme circumstances) to trick them into handing over the money, but we in turn use it to do good deeds on their behalf, then we are practicing the Bodhisattva Way. But, if we cheat them out of their money with the intent of enjoying ourselves, then it would be a bad deed. Ordinary people do not know how to perform good deeds. They do not know how to practice goodness so we do it for them, we create good fortune on their behalf. This is a good thing. If we see things only from the surface, then sometimes it really is hard to differentiate between what is good and what is bad. It all depends on the heart. The accumulation of great goodness and merit all arise from the heart of sincerity. This is especially true for great Bodhisattvas. Appearing as ordinary people, they do not dwell on the fact that they are Bodhisattvas nor do they dwell on trivial matters, but purely on benefiting all beings. Therefore, their viewpoints are very different from those of ordinary people.

What is "honest goodness and crooked goodness"? People nowadays often look upon an extremely conservative and nice person as good and kind.

"Honest" means being virtuous, dignified and just. "Crooked" means being corrupt and dishonest. When we see a "Yes Man" who is very respectful and subservient to others, we think he is a good person. Presently, many people prefer to employ this type of person. Why? Because he or she is compliant and willing to do whatever he or she is told to do. People think this type of person is

good and they like to have them around. He is like a “servant/slave” obeying every command, attending to every need with a respectful demeanor.

However, the ancient sages and virtuous people have shown that they preferred those who were aspiring and dignified. As for those who appear to be compliant and careful in their everyday actions, they may be liked by all but, sages often speak of them as “thieves of virtue”. From this, we can see that the viewpoint of ordinary people on good and bad differs greatly from that of the sages and virtuous people.

The great sages and virtuous people do not favor those who appear to be compliant and careful although most people consider these individuals good. They prefer people who have ability although they are stubborn, arrogant and sometimes, even a little rude. Why? These individuals possess particular skills. They may not always agree with us, but are capable of high achievement. Those who are compliant, who are considered nice and kind, sometimes cannot accomplish given tasks because they act according to convention and lack initiative. This is why sages and virtuous people prefer those with courageous and aspiring characters who are not caught up in trivialities.

Although most people may like those who are compliant, sages often call them “thieves of virtue”. They are usually confused about the truth of a matter and cannot tell right from wrong. And this is why they are called “thieves of virtue”. Virtue refers to customs and morality. When people cannot differentiate between right and wrong, then they have broken the moral tradition, like thieves who have broken the law.

Because of this, it is possible that our judgement could be erroneous. Beings and spirits of Heaven and Earth all look upon good and bad from the same viewpoint as do the sages. They do not view things from the same perspective as ordinary people.

We cannot always differentiate between real goodness and false goodness. Why do spirits and gods of Heaven and earth hold the same standards as the sages and virtuous people? Because they all have the same viewpoints and intentions.

Therefore, when we wish to accumulate merits, we must not give way to greed or be affected by the sights and sounds of the world. We need to be aware of our deviated thoughts as soon as they arise and to purify them.

Honest goodness comes from the thought to sincerely help all others. Crooked goodness arises from the thought of flattering others to obtain what we want. Loving others is being honest. Hating others and being jealous is being crooked. Honest goodness is when we are respectful and crooked goodness is when we act without sincerity. These are all to be carefully differentiated.

We must aspire to eliminate all that is bad and practice all that is good. We start from the self. First, we cannot allow ourselves to be affected by worldly phenomena. In other words, we must not be attached to the Five Desires and the Six Sense Objects but be able to let go of them. As long as

we cling to them, we will never be rid of our selfishness. The thought of benefiting ourselves is the root of all negative karma. Any good deeds, which are done out of bad intentions will become bad. This is why Master Jung-Feng did not agree with what the scholars categorized as good because good things done with selfish intent would be considered as impure and false. Therefore, we must become less attached to worldly desires. Slowly, one by one, try to eliminate each of them until we are totally unaffected by them. In this way, we will be able to detect the desire as soon as it arises in our mind and immediately act to curb it. Also, we would do well to eradicate the deviant and impure feelings from our hearts. The Infinite Life Sutra explains this as “cleansing our hearts and correcting our past erroneous ways” to attain a pure and bright mind, which is filled with wisdom.

Honest goodness comes from sincerely trying to help others. It takes only one sincere thought to benefit all beings. We help them to understand the true reality, to break through delusion and attain awakening. As soon as they do this, they will naturally learn how to eliminate the bad and practice the good. Therefore, the foremost merit in Buddhism is that it helps people to learn about the true reality of life and the universe. Once they have accomplished this, then they will be free to choose their existence within any one of the Ten Dharma Realms.

The Buddhas will not interfere with our choice nor will they try to change our minds. Buddhas do not teach that becoming a Buddha is the best goal for all beings. It is their hope that eventually we will become Buddhas, but they will not force us to do so. If we prefer to be reincarnated as human beings, then the Buddhas will teach us the principles in becoming good people. If we wish to be born into the Three Bad Realms, then we can just immerse ourselves in greed, anger and ignorance. Then we will smoothly sail into the Three Bad Realms. Buddhas will not try to stop us nor will they try to help us. They only teach people how to break through delusion and attain awakening. This is the supreme benefit. This is honest goodness.

Crooked goodness arises from thoughts of flattering others so that we can obtain what we want, for example, fame and wealth. But, this is not the proper way to achieve fame and fortune. Any good acts performed out of motives such as this would be “crooked”, not “honest”. We should be careful and respectful when interacting with beings, matters and objects. Acting without sincerity is a fault and we would do well to be able to recognize it.

What is "hidden goodness and visible goodness"? When we do something good and people know about it, it is visible goodness. When no one knows about it, it is hidden virtue.

It is very important to be able to understand hidden and visible goodness. Ancient sages and virtuous people all taught us to accumulate hidden virtues. What are hidden virtues? Any good acts or deeds that are known by others are considered “visible”. When others praise us for what we have done that praise is our good fortune. For example, if the government commends our deeds and rewards us with a certificate or a plaque honoring our actions, then that is our good fortune. In other words, we have used up all that good fortune in the form of praise from others.

This is why it is so important that we realize the best way to accumulate goodness is to let our good deeds remain "hidden" and unknown. There is no need to let others know about them, just keep on accumulating, while asking for no rewards. This is how to accumulate goodness. Once people know about our deeds, then the good fortune that comes with it will begin to diminish because people will start to reward us for our actions. If we receive immediate reward for every good deed we do, then there is no accumulation at all. In fact, we might start to accumulate faults without realizing it. The more faults we accumulate, the worse our outcome will be.

Those with hidden virtues will naturally be known by the heavens and will be rewarded. Those who practice visible goodness will be known by people and will enjoy fame. Fame itself is good fortune, but it is forbidden for heaven and earth do not favor fame. We can see that those who have great fame, but lack the virtue supporting it will eventually encounter some kind of overwhelming adversity. A person who truly has not done any wrong but continues to be falsely accused by others will have descendants who will suddenly become prosperous and successful. From this, we can see how important it is to understand the minute differences between hidden and visible goodness.

If we have greed for popularity and fame, they are considered one of the good fortunes. Then, our reward for our good deeds may be popularity and fame. But actually, they are not considered a good return because they can cause envy amongst people as well as amongst beings and spirits of heaven and earth. Even worse, if we falsely take credit for virtuous conduct we do not have, then adversity will surely follow.

On the other hand, if we do not have faults but were wronged or despised by others for bad deeds, which we did not commit, then we are actually accumulating goodness. The more unsatisfied people are, the more jealous they are and the more they slander us, the better it is for us. Why? Because this slander and these obstacles will reduce our negative karma. When we accumulate virtues, it is best to do it quietly with the least amount of people knowing about it. There is no need to seek praise and respect from others. When all of our negative karma has been eliminated, then our accumulation of goodness will become even stronger. Consequently, our good fortune will be greater. This will result in the sudden prosperity of our descendants. When we carefully observe those who attain sudden prominence, we can see that most of their ancestors possessed a great deal of hidden virtues. Once we understand this, we will truly know the value of hidden virtues.

What is apparent and actual goodness? In the Spring-Autumn Period, there was a country named Lu that made a law, which rewarded those who paid the ransom to free their fellow citizens who were servant-slaves. At that time, Confucius had a very rich student named Zi-Gong. Although Zi-Gong paid the ransom to free his people, he did not accept the reward for doing such a deed.

This example addresses the difficulty of differentiating between "apparent and actual goodness". The difficulty arises because ordinary people's standard for goodness is different from that of sages and virtuous people.

How would someone have become a servant-slave in the homes of the nobility? Because they had broken the law and been sent to the homes of various nobles to serve their sentences. However, the government passed a law, which stated that as long as someone was willing to pay their fine, they could be released and regain their freedom. This was a good deed and the government encouraged the wealthy to perform the good deed of paying the fine for the criminals. The intention was to provide the criminals with the opportunity to reform. Therefore, Zi-Gong paid the fines for a servant to be released from the house of a nobleperson, but did not accept the reward offered through the government.

When Confucius heard this, he was very unhappy and scolded him saying, "You acted wrongly in this matter. When sages and virtuous people undertake anything, they strive to improve morality, teaching people to be good and decent. We do not do something just for personal virtues or reputation. In the country of Lu, the poor outnumber the wealthy. By refusing the reward, you lead others to think that accepting the reward money is being greedy. If this happens, no one will pay the ransom to free our people again".

Confucius was displeased with Zi-Gong's action. Why? Because Zi-Gong did not see the situation as clearly as virtuous people did. A virtuous person's perception of right and wrong is sometimes different from that of average persons. His or her goal is to improve social behavior and moral standards. Their teachings are set up for all people, not for any particular individual. Zi-Gong's action, from an individual standpoint, was extraordinary and praiseworthy. However, he went against local customs and disrupted a set pattern. And that was where his fault lay.

At that time in Lu, the poor greatly outnumbered the rich. Therefore, the reward offered by the government was designed to help motivate the average citizens. Because Zi-Gong refused the reward, everyone praised him as a good man. Consequently, anyone who performed a similar good deed would not dare to accept the reward, for to do so could result in others thinking that the deed was done solely for the reward. If this were so, then no one would be willing to pay the money to free the servants anymore. This would ruin the system established by the government. If the purpose was to encourage everyone to perform good deeds, then Zi-Gong should have accepted the reward, not for the benefit of the individual, but for the benefit of the public. This exemplifies how the sages and virtuous people interpreted things differently from average people.

Another student of Confucius, Zi-Lu, once saw a man drowning in the river and rescued him. Later, the man thanked him by giving him a cow as a token of gratitude. Zi-Lu accepted his gift. Confucius was happy when he heard this and said, "In the future, people will be willing and eager to help those who are drowning in deep waters or lakes".

If we look from the eyes of ordinary people, Zi-Gong, who did not accept the reward money, was good. Zi-Lu, who accepted the cow, was not as good. Who would have known that Confucius would praise Zi-Lu and scold Zi-Gong? From this, we can see that those who practice good deeds

must not only consider the current outcome but that of the future as well. We would also do well to not only consider our own gain and loss but look to see the impact made on the public.

Zi-Lu was traveling along the road when he saw a man drowning. He immediately jumped into the water to rescue the man. Out of gratitude, the man gave Zi-Lu a cow, which he accepted. Confucius praised Zi-Lu because when others realized that a reward might be given out of gratitude when a life is saved, then it would become a good incentive for people to be braver in helping others in need. These are some examples of Confucius' truthful and honorable teachings. We can learn much from them.

When Confucius praised Zi-Lu instead of Zi-Gong, his viewpoint was diametrically opposed to that of ordinary people. However, he had sound reasons for doing this. When we look at the sages and virtuous people, we will see that their vision is much farther than ours and that their viewpoints are much deeper than the apparent superficial meanings. Ordinary people have very limited vision. We only see the immediate results. We do not realize the long-term effects that our actions may cause. We need to consider matters from the aspect of benefiting society, the country or even the entire world. We should also consider how history will regard events. When we realize the broad scope involved, our viewpoints will be very different than before and we will understand that Confucius' viewpoint was correct. Therefore, good and bad cannot always be determined by present actions. We need to see whether the long-term effects are positive or negative in order to make a wise judgement.

What we do right now may be good but with the passing years, it may bring harm to others. Therefore, what seems like goodness may actually be bad. What now appears to be bad may actually have positive long-term effects, turning out to have been goodness after all. So, what seems like a bad deed may actually be goodness. There are some examples of what appears to be good but actually is not. Apparent responsibility may be actual irresponsibility, apparent propriety may be actual impropriety, apparent trustworthiness may be actual untrustworthiness, apparent kindness may be actual unkindness. In these instances, we need to differentiate carefully and know how to behave properly.

What we see superficially may appear to be goodness, but actually, it is not. It may be good for a particular individual or it may be good at one particular time. However, it may not be good for society as a whole and it may not be good for future generations. This is why in Buddhism, the determination of good and bad is never based on "current action". What appears to be good throughout history is the real goodness for it is good for generations thereafter. What is good now but is not good for future generations or that which has destined us to be born into the Three Bad Realms or the hells is not true goodness.

Before the First World War, world leaders were discussing peace in an atmosphere of apparent trustworthiness. After the war began it became clear that some had acted with actual untrustworthiness. High technology has seen the development of weapons of mass destruction.

The intent, to keep the peace was apparent responsibility. The terrifying reality that countless people now have the means to destroy our world and every living being on it makes it clear that such development may well prove to be the ultimate actual irresponsibility.

In the case of Zi-Lu, who accepted the cow as a reward, his actions may not have seemed to be good at that time; however, since the long-term effects were good, it was good. This is a good example of what is "apparent" and "actual" goodness. What are responsibility and propriety? What are trustworthiness and kindness? There is "apparent" and "actual" goodness in all of these. If we are unable to differentiate between them, then we may have often actually committed great offenses when we thought that we were doing good. If we wish to practice to accumulate good fortune, we must first possess wisdom. Without wisdom, no matter how hard we try, we will not be able to obtain good fortune.

What is "proper goodness and improper goodness"? In the Ming Dynasty, there once was a Prime Minister named Wen-Yi Lu. When he grew old, he retired to his hometown where he was widely loved and highly respected. Once, a drunken villager went to his home and proceeded to insult him. Mr. Lu was not angered by his words but instead, told his servant, "This man is drunk. Let's not argue with him". With this, he closed the door and ignored the onslaught of insults.

A year later, the same man committed a grave crime and was given the death sentence. Upon hearing this, Mr. Lu said with great remorse, "If only I had taken him to the authorities for punishment that day, perhaps a little discipline could have prevented this. At the time, I was only thinking of being kind and unknowingly encouraged an arrogant and malevolent personality. Now he has been given the death penalty". This is an example of doing something bad while having good intentions.

Although Mr. Lu had already retired from office, his virtuous conduct and great merit had earned him respect from virtually everyone. When a drunken dissatisfied man came to his home and verbally abused him, Mr. Lu, who was tolerant and patient told his servant not to argue but to just close the door. He did not take the incident to heart. Later, Mr. Lu heard that the drunkard had committed a serious crime and was sentenced to death. Mr. Lu then felt deep remorse and believed that he had mishandled the situation when the drunkard had insulted him. Had he pressed charges and sent him to jail at that time, then he might have learned to discipline himself a little more and avoided the deadly offense he had committed.

We see many examples of "doing something bad while having good intentions". This is especially true with today's young parents. They unwittingly spoil their children so that when they grow up, they do not respect their parents and may even commit various crimes. Then, too late, the parents realize the serious mistake they have made. Children must be properly taught when they are young. The personality of the child will become the character of the adult. If children are not disciplined when they are young, then it will be too late to do so when they have grown. They

would undoubtedly rebel against their parents' every wish and be disgruntled at the slightest disagreement of opinions. When this happens, it is outrageous!

In ancient China, a criminal sentence could be issued under the heading of "Parental rights". This meant that if a parent went to the judge and complained that the child did not fulfil his or her filial duties and he wished the child to be sentenced to death, the judge would immediately do so without even holding a trial. "Parental rights" were given the highest consideration. This was why children were petrified of their parents because if the parents were to file a complaint and wished a particular sentence issued, there was no recourse. If the parent wished the child to go to jail for three years, then that was exactly what the judge would sentence. Why? "By order of the parents" was indisputable. No trial was necessary because everyone took the side of the parents. After all, what parents did not love their children? If our parents did not love us, then we would not be able to survive in society, we would be discriminated against.

"Parental rights" existed through the 1940's but was abolished soon after. With this kind of a law, no children dared not to fulfill filial duties. They could not even ask for a lawyer because with "parental rights", no defense was allowed. This law helped people practice filial piety and is worthy of reflection.

There is also an example of those who achieved goodness although they had acted from improper intentions. Once, a famine devastated the land and people stole food from others in broad daylight. A rich family reported these losses to the authorities. However, the government, did nothing to stop the thieves. Eventually, the poor grew more daring and chaos was imminent. So, the rich family took the law into their own hands and proceeded to catch and punish those who had stole from them. In this way, peace was restored and people stopped their stealing. Otherwise, the turmoil would have gotten completely out of hand.

When a famine strikes, those who are poor may turn to robbery. In this account, when the wealthy complained of the robberies, the authorities ignored them for fear of starting a revolt. The thieves became more daring and the authorities had no way of controlling them. So the wealthy people formed a vigilante group, caught and punished the thieves. Peace was restored. If this had not occurred, then order would have been completely disrupted. The action was bad and was done with selfish intentions; however, the result benefited everyone.

We all know that goodness is proper and wrongdoing is improper. However, there are cases where deeds done out of good intentions resulted in bad. This is called the "improper within the proper". There are also deeds done out of improper intentions that resulted in good. This is called the "proper within the improper". We can all benefit from understanding this.

Good intentions are "proper" and bad deeds are "improper". In the previous example, Mr. Lu had committed a bad deed although his intention was good. This is the "improper within the proper". The standard for good and bad are determined by the effect an action has on morality and on

society. For instance, becoming a vigilante and punishing someone on our own is obviously not considered good. But in this situation, the authorities had ignored the criminals and the riots were getting out of control. Thus, some action needed to be taken to protect their own lives and possessions. By taking the law into their own hands, the wealthy family restored order. They stopped the thieves from creating further chaos and disrupting a proper way of life. Thus, a good deed was done through selfish intentions. This is "proper within the improper".

What is "half goodness and full goodness"? I Ching, the Book of Changes said, "People who do not accumulate virtuous deeds will not achieve honor. On the other hand, people who do not accumulate bad deeds will not bring about self-destruction". The Book of History said, "The last emperor of the Shang Dynasty, Zhou, had committed the worst of crimes". The dynasty ended with his death.

This is a lesson taught by ancient sages and virtuous people. Such lessons were later called and respected as sutras for they teach the truth. They are a truth, which surpasses time and space. If we do not practice goodness, we will not attain integrity. On the other hand, if we do not commit wrongdoings, we will not suffer self-destruction. This is the absolute truth.

It is like collecting objects in a container. With diligence, it will soon be full. If we are lazy, then the container will be only half full. This is one example of full goodness and half goodness.

This analogy of a container is easy to understand. If we want to accumulate goodness, it will eventually become filled if we persist in our efforts. But if we are not persistent, the container will not become filled. This shows the importance of accumulating goodness. And most importantly, we must not accumulate wrongdoings or we will destroy ourselves.

Once a poor woman went to visit a Buddhist way place and wished to make a donation. Being extremely poor, she only had two cents but she freely gave these to a monk. To her surprise, the abbot himself came to help her regret for past offenses and dedicate her merits. Later, she was chosen to enter the imperial palace and obtained wealth and prestige. Clad in her riches, she again went to the way place to make a donation, this time bringing thousands of silver pieces.

To her dismay, the abbot only sent his student, another monk to help her dedicate her merits. The lady did not understand and questioned the abbot, "In the past, I only donated two cents, yet you personally helped me express my regret for past offenses. Today, I come with great wealth to give and you will not help me perform my merit dedication. Why?" The abbot replied, "Although the amount of money you gave in the past was small, it came from a true and sincere heart. It was necessary for me to repay your sincerity by personally performing your dedications. Today, although your donation is much greater, the heart of giving is not quite as true and sincere as before. Therefore, it is fitting and sufficient that my student performs your dedications for you." This is an example of how thousands of silver pieces are only considered "half goodness" and two cents are "whole goodness".

This is a true account in Buddhist records. A laywoman wished to make an offering to a Buddhist way place but she was so poor, she only had two cents with her. Nonetheless, she donated them to the way place. Because her sincerity was true, the abbot personally helped her to dedicate the merits from this good deed. Later when she moved into the imperial palace and became wealthy, she returned to the way place and brought a thousand ounces of gold as an offering. To her surprise, the abbot did not greet her personally and only asked one of his students to dedicate the merits for her. Confused, she asked why. This abbot had very high moral standards. This is unlike what we all too often see today, where we witness many Buddhists exhibiting improper behavior.

In the past, those with high moral standards judged people by their sincerity regardless of the amount they donated. If people were truly sincere, then no matter how little they donated, the abbot would have personally performed the dedications. If not, then the abbot was not obligated to do so. With a heart of sincerity, the donors nurtured good fortune by making offerings to the Buddha. With the heart of sincerity, they had only to donate a little to gain infinite benefits in return.

However, in this example, the woman had become wealthy and prestigious and her sincerity had been covered by her new manner of living. Therefore, by sending his student to greet her, the old abbot was actually trying to awaken her from her deluded state. This is the greatest kindness and compassion. He was trying to show her where she had erred in the hopes that she would feel remorse, acknowledge her mistake and correct her behavior.

When the woman had donated two cents on her initial visit, her return of good fortune was full and complete. But on her second visit, her return of good fortune was only half-full and incomplete. When we are practicing to accumulate good fortune, it is important for us to realize that the determining factor is not the amount of money or the number of good deeds done but the heart of sincerity. As long as we do things with utmost sincerity and effort then we will accomplish full and complete goodness.

When we dedicate our merits, we do three things to show our heart of true sincerity. We think to ourselves, "Today, when I practice, I do the following. First, I dedicate my merits to returning to the state of reality. I wish to attain clarity of the true mind to uncover my original self-nature. Second, I dedicate my merits to awakening. I wish to awaken from my state of delusion and to understand the truth of the universe. Third, I dedicate my merits to all living beings. I wish that the Buddhas will help all to break through delusion and attain enlightenment, to leave suffering and gain happiness. I dedicate my merits for all others, not for myself". If this is truly our intention, then with this thought, we will be able to achieve full merits and virtues. But, if there is the slightest thought for ourselves, for example, for fame or wealth, then we will not be able to gain anything in return, not even a "half" return. In fact, we will have probably achieved much negative karma instead. Therefore, never look at things superficially, but learn to look into the profound truth of reality.

Another example is of Li Zhong, an immortal of the Han Dynasty. He was teaching his student, Dong-Bin Lu, the art of transforming iron into gold. They would use this gold to help the poor.

Dong-Bin asked his teacher, "Will the gold ever change back to iron?" Li Jung answered, "After five hundred years, it will return to its original form". Dong-Bin said, "In that case, I do not want to learn this art for it will harm those who possess the gold five hundred years from now."

These are two of the "Eight Immortals" who are highly respected by the Chinese. Li Zhong offered to teach Dong-Bin alchemy, the art of turning iron into gold. Then, Dong-Bin could help the poor. But Dong-Bin was very cautious. He wanted to know if the transmutation would be permanent. Li Zhong told him that it was not. Dong-Bin's immediate response was that he did not want to learn alchemy because although it could benefit people for a few centuries, it would hurt those who possessed the gold five hundred years later. This would have been a bad deed. When we look around today, most people are only concerned with what they can get now. They do not think about how it might affect others in the future. From this, we can sadly see how moral standards have decayed over the years.

Li Zhong said, "To become an immortal, one must complete three thousand virtuous deeds. What you have just said came from a truly kind heart. Your three thousand deeds are fulfilled". This is another example of whole goodness and half goodness.

In Taoism, it is said that in order to practice the art of immortality, we must complete three thousand virtuous deeds. These requirements are more lenient than those in Buddhism. In the latter, we must possess purity of mind before we can achieve the state of mind of Buddhism and become a Dharma repository. Taoists do not seek to attain purity of mind; they seek the compassionate heart. It is more difficult to cultivate purity of mind than the compassionate heart.

With this single good thought, Dong-Bin had instantly accomplished the three thousand virtuous deeds required to practice immortality. His concern about not harming any sentient beings had actually surpassed the three thousand kind deeds. Thus, one single thought was sufficient to fulfill the requirement. This is similar to what Mr. Liao-Fan did in the act of reducing the taxes on the farmers. That one kind thought alone fulfilled the vow of ten thousand kind deeds. This teaches us the benefits from practicing from our hearts.

When we perform a good deed, it is best for us to not attach to how much we have done. If we practice in this manner, then all our good deeds will reach fulfillment and success. If, instead, we always think of the deeds that we have performed, looking for a reward of some kind, then no matter how diligently we practice, even for an entire lifetime, the deeds will still be considered as half goodness. For example, when we donate money to the poor, we can practice what is called "pure donation". In this type of giving, we do not linger on the thought of "I" who is giving. We do not dwell on the importance of the object that is given. We do not think of the other who has received. We are simply giving out of true sincerity and respect. When we give with this "pure donation" then one pound of rice can bring infinite good fortune and the merit from giving one cent can wipe away the transgressions of a thousand eons.

If we always keep in mind the good that we have done and expect rewards for our actions, then even a donation of two hundred thousand gold pieces would not bring us the reward of a fully good fortune. This is another way of explaining whole goodness and half goodness.

If we have tried our very best then we will achieve full goodness. If we still have any reservations and have not done all we can then we have achieved only half goodness. Therefore, the thing to remember when we are accumulating virtuous deeds is to do everything with complete sincerity. Many people in this world do not understand the true reality and consequently, they hold many doubts about Buddhism. This doubt is what we discussed earlier as one of the Five Poisons of greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance and doubt. They believe and act according to what we have told them. However, in the act of practicing good deeds and in donating, they still want to reserve something, to hold something back. They are still unable to let go of everything. They are afraid that if they give everything away, then they will have nothing left to live on. This is doubt. They do not have the understanding, the wisdom or the determination to practice full goodness. They can only achieve half goodness. This is why although many people are practicing good deeds, they do not obtain good fortune in return and why they do not see any immediate results. Do we want to understand where the problem lies?

If we truly want to practice for good fortune then we must fully understand and believe in Buddhism without the slightest doubt. (Sometimes, worldly people will say that we are foolish and superstitious and when we think about it, we may think this is reasonable.) Consequently, we may refrain from thinking kind thoughts and doing good deeds. When this happens, our heart of kindness has already been affected by deviated viewpoints.) When we truly believe and act accordingly, then the results will become easily recognizable.

They will be so much more than what was described in Liao Fan's Four Lessons; they will be incredible! After reading this book, we must believe that we have the courage within us to undergo anything. As long as we act with sincerity, we will gain a return of a thousandfold for a fraction of our effort. This is a fact. However, if we act with the hope of gaining a lavish return for our efforts then we have not acted with the heart of sincerity. We could give everything that we have but we would only gain "half" of the good fortune, not the "whole". Also, by keeping the good acts in mind, we have been unable to eliminate all of our longings. This is another reason why we can only gain "half goodness".

When we are willing to let go of our wealth, we will gain wealth. When we give teachings we will gain wisdom. When we give fearlessness, we will gain health and long life. The Law of Cause and Effect is a fact. It is as natural as the laws of heaven and earth. If we perform good deeds without expectation of reward, without the wish for prestige, wealth, wisdom, health or long life, without the wish for anything, then we are bound to receive full and complete everything. Is this not being free and at great ease?

Of course, we will still gain something if we perform good deeds as we seek, but it will not be full and complete. Why? When we no longer have wants and desires our hearts will be pure and our behavior will be a reflection of our true nature. When our true nature and virtues are uncovered, what we will receive is incredible. And what is most wonderful is that we will be able to go to the Pure Land, the Hua Zang world. The pure land of each Buddhaland is manifested from the true nature. But, if we possess just one longing, then this is no longer a reflection of our true nature. And all the prestige, wealth, health and long life that we have gained through practicing good deeds will eventually be lost. What we will have gained is limited, for it is measurable and one day, it will be used up.

Only a virtuous nature is similar to our true nature. It neither arises nor ceases. This is what freedom is all about. Only someone with great merits and wisdom is willing to let go of all belongings. No ordinary person would be willing to do so. This is why we can only find Bodhisattvas and Buddhas practicing great merits because even Arhats cannot practice them. They do not wish to be bothered with problems. For example, if we want to help someone and they rejected, slandered or embarrassed us, we would become angry and abandon the attempt. This would be incomplete.

Bodhisattvas, however, are very different. Bodhisattvas are aware of the bad habits, problems and rebellious ways of ordinary people. They would not mind these obstacles and would use their patience and compassion to help them. Therefore, the heart of a Bodhisattva is different from that of an Arhat or a Pratyekabuddha. The latter two still use a false heart, whereas, a Bodhisattva uses his true heart. We seek wealth and prestige not realizing that these do not have to be sought because they are already within our true nature. People who practice Buddhism are trying to uncover their true nature and the abilities that lie within it.

Therefore, one of our goals as Buddhists is to return to reality, to uncover our self-nature, our intrinsic nature. This self-nature possesses everything. There is no need to seek outside, only within. The self-nature has infinite wisdom and abilities that are inexhaustible. Everyone has this self-nature, we just do not yet realize it. Until we do, we can rely upon the Buddha to teach us how to develop it. This is why the benevolence shown to us by the Buddha is so magnificent! This is the true reality behind all the reasoning. We would do well to understand this. As long as we are sincere in our every good deed, then it is true that freely giving one pound of rice can bring infinite good fortune because it fulfills the integrity of the self-nature. And the good fortune from freely offering one cent to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha can wipe away the transgressions of thousands of eons.

The Surangama Sutra tells us that, "During the Dharma Ending Age, the number of deviated teachers is as numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges River". They may appear to be teaching Buddhism, but their actual deeds are those of demons. Since this is the case, where should we go when we want to plant the seeds of good fortune and to practice virtuous deeds?

What if the way place we choose to visit is run by people with deviated viewpoints? Then, not only will we not plant the seeds for good fortune, but we might even unknowingly commit some bad deeds!

We all would do well to understand that Buddhism is a teaching of practicing within. If our true intention is to go to the way place and pay our respects to the Buddha, then the Buddha will become Buddha Amitabha or Buddha Shakyamuni, according to what our heart is giving rise to. If the heart were true and honest then even if we went to a way place run by bad spirits, the Buddha would be true. However, if the heart were improper to begin with then even if we were practicing at a proper way place, we would still be corresponding with deviated people.

This is not to say that there are no good places to practice Buddhism during the Dharma Ending Age. The real way place is within our heart. The Vimalakirti Sutra tells us that "A sincere heart is the way place, a pure heart is the way place and a compassionate heart is the way place". A way place is within our heart. When our mind is on the path to enlightenment then no matter where we are, there will always be a way place. As long as our hearts are proper, then no matter where we go, there will always be proper teachings. This is what we mean when we say "the environment changes according to our minds". It is the mind within that changes the surroundings around us. If we can understand this reasoning and be diligent in our practice, then society and countries would be enveloped in good fortune. If we do not rid ourselves of wandering thoughts and our attachments to our good deeds then even if we gave away tens of thousands of gold pieces, our merit would not be full.

What is "big goodness and small goodness"? Once there was a high ranking official named Zhong-Da Wei, who was led into the underworld to be judged for his good and bad deeds. The judge ordered his records of good and bad to be brought out. When the records arrived, Zhong-Da was astounded at the courtyard filled with his bad records and at the single scroll, which contained his good deeds.

The official then ordered the two to be weighed. Surprisingly, the bad records, which had filled the courtyard, were lighter than the single scroll of good deeds, which was as thin as a chopstick. Zhong-Da asked the judge, "I am barely forty years old, how could I have committed so many wrongdoings?" The judge answered, "When you give rise to a single thought that is improper, it is considered a bad offense there and then, it does not have to be carried out through action to be counted as a wrong".

Good fortune and kindness come in both big and small sizes. The above account tells of a man named Zhong-Da Wei who was led before the king of the underworld for judgement. The king asked the judge to bring out his records.

Everyone has committed both good and bad acts during his or her lifetime. Consequently, there would be a record of both kinds of conduct. These records are kept with the king of the Underworld

and the ruler of the spirit world. This is why Mr. Liao-Fan taught us to have respect and fear within our hearts. After the records of Zhong-Da had been brought out, he saw that he had a massive amount of records, which told of all his bad deeds. On the other hand, the records that recorded his good deeds were as thin as a chopstick. However, after these records were placed upon a scale to see which was heavier, it turned out that the thin scroll of good deeds out-weighed the volumes of bad deeds! This was probably because he did not commit any serious offenses but many minor faults. Therefore, one large kind deed would be able to offset numerous small faults. Upon seeing the result, the judge was quite pleased. Zhong-Da was a good person after all.

Therefore, when Zhong-Da questioned how he had been able to commit so many faults before he had even reached the age of forty, the judge explained to him that even if it were just an improper thought without any resultant action, it would still be recorded as a fault. Thus, even if we did not actually commit any major transgressions, we have had thoughts about them. Luckily, Zhong-Da had one great good deed, which outweighed all his minor faults.

Zhong-Da then asked him what was recorded in the single scroll of good deeds. The judge replied, "Once the Emperor planned to build a great stone bridge but you proposed against the project due to the hardship and toil it would cause the tens and thousands of people needed for the work. This is a copy of your proposal to the Emperor". Zhong-Da said, "I did make the proposal, but the Emperor dismissed it and proceeded with the project anyway. My proposal had no effect on the matter at all. How can it bear so much weight against my numerous offenses?"

The judge replied, "Although the Emperor did not accept your suggestion, that one thought of kindness you bore for the tens and thousands of people was very great. If the Emperor had listened to you, then the good performed would have been even greater". Therefore, when one is determined to do good for the benefit of all people, a small deed can result in great merits. If one thinks only about benefiting oneself, then even if many deeds of kindness were performed, the merits would still be small.

The content of the scroll was a description of the major good deed, which Zhong-Da had performed. When the Emperor wanted to construct a bridge, Zhong-Da foresaw that it would waste money and cause hardships for the citizens, so he submitted a proposal asking the Emperor to reconsider the matter. However, the Emperor ignored his proposal and went ahead with the plan. From this, we can see that the most important factor is in our original intention.

Zhong-Da's concern was not for himself, but for the hundreds of thousands of citizens who would suffer from such a major construction project. Even if they did not have to contribute in labor, they would have to pay heavy taxes in order to offset the cost involved in building the bridge. If the Emperor could forego the idea and avoid any unnecessary expenditure, then all the citizens would benefit from it.

Therefore, we can see the magnitude of goodness behind this single thought. Although the Emperor did not listen to Zhong-Da's suggestion, this does not alter the fact that Zhong-Da was sincere in his proposal. This signifies that his heart was true and the deed was an example of full and complete goodness. Of course, had the Emperor accepted Zhong-Da's proposal, then the significance of the act would have been even greater. But still, the thought itself was to be commended.

Herein lies the difference between big and small goodness. It is determined by our intentions, by whether we are thinking of all the beings in the world or whether we are thinking of just ourselves and our families. We should understand this logic when we dedicate the merits after we recite sutras or a Buddha's name. Usually we would dedicate the merits to a particular person, wishing that the Buddha would help him or her in gaining various benefits. This is what is called a small goodness. The benefits gained would be small as well.

In fact, we are not even sure if the person being dedicated to would actually gain any benefit. Therefore, in cases like this, when one or more of our family members is in a crisis, we should recite sutras and a Buddha's name and then dedicate the merits to all beings throughout the universe. We should wish that all living beings would be void of illness and suffering and that they would all be happy and healthy. When we are sincere in this thought, our family members will gain as well. Why? Because our heart is truly broad! We can see an example of this in the Earth Treasure Sutra where the Brahman girl called "Bright Eyes" made a vow on behalf of her mother.

People often say, "I have dedicated all my merits to others and have gained nothing for myself. What is the use in practicing goodness?" This could only come from a narrow mind. If we prostrate in front of the Buddha but do not feel any response, it is because our hearts are selfish. We are totally self-seeking and do not know that we should magnify our merits so that they encompass the entire universe. When we dedicate the merits to all living things, it is like passing on a light. We use our own flame to light those of others, so that the whole world is alight with brightness. This results in great benefit with no loss to the self. This is why people who practice Buddhism need to dedicate the merits from practice to all living beings in the universe, to awakening, and to reality, in order to uncover the perfect complete Buddha nature.

The heart and roots of Chinese culture lie in two things, namely, "Ancestral Memorial Halls" and "the classical Chinese language". The reason China became a country with so much cultural history that extends back over thousands of years is because of the strong foundation of the normal human relationships in the Chinese ethical tradition. Classical Chinese must be preserved because if we cease its use, then the Chinese people would suffer great adversities and the race could never be restored. Also, we must preserve "the Mahayana teachings". As long as we can preserve these three things, then not only will our country and culture have a bright future, but the world will also benefit.

What is "difficult goodness and easy goodness"? The knowledgeable scholars of the past used to say, "When one wishes to conquer one's greed and desires, one should start with what is most difficult to overcome". When Confucius talked about how to cultivate one's humanity, he also said to start with what is most difficult to practice.

This section cites the teachings of the ancient sages and virtuous people, which tell us that we possess innumerable afflicting habits and desires. Therefore, they taught us to start with whatever is the most serious one. If we can overcome our most serious faults, then we can overcome other matters, which would appear trivial in comparison. When we want to eliminate the bad and practice the good, we must know where to begin. This is also why when Confucius was teaching about the cultivation of humanity, he believed that we should start with what is most difficult to practice. The following are a few examples.

For example, the old teacher, Mr. Shu of Jiangxi, gave two years salary to a poor family who owed money to the government. Thus, he saved them from being torn apart if the husband was sent to prison.

This is a very good example. He did something, which was difficult to do and gave up something, which was difficult to give up. During ancient times in China, the students used to give their teacher a small gift during holidays. Originally, it was "strips of dried meat", which were tied into a bundle. Later, the strips of dried meat became acknowledged as a student's gift to the teacher, although they may not necessarily have been dried meat. Teachers would teach at a "private school" and the number of students varied. Twenty to thirty students would be considered a very good number. The smaller "schools" might have had only dozen or so students. Therefore, the gifts (or pay) the teacher would receive could be quite meager. For Mr. Shu to donate two years' salary to help the couple pay off their debt was a considerable undertaking and yet, this is exactly what he did.

Another example is Mr. Zhang from Handan. Mr. Zhang gave his ten years of savings to a poor man so he could repay a debt. This saved him from going to jail and enabled him to remain with his wife.

The first example was to give away two years of salary and this example was to give away ten years of savings. In both cases, they were given to pay back the money owed to the government. In most case, an offense such as not being able to pay back public funds would entail a jail sentence for the offender. By paying back the funds, the family would not have to be torn apart.

Such examples as Mr. Shu and Mr. Zhang are rare, for they gave what is most difficult to give. What others could not sacrifice, they did so willingly.

People depend on money and materials to survive. Therefore, to be able to give away money is extremely difficult to do. Especially when it is all the savings that we have. This is to "to conquer

what is most difficult to conquer, to start with what is most difficult to practice". It is also a good practice for curbing our desires.

Another example is Mr. Jin from Jiangsu Province. As he was old and without any sons, his neighbor offered their young daughter in marriage to him to give him descendants to carry on his lineage. Mr. Jin refused the offer and sent her back home. This is another example of being able to overcome what is most difficult to conquer in oneself.

Mr. Jin had no sons. During ancient times, it was an acceptable custom for him to take a second wife to bear him an heir to carry on the family name. To have an heir was very important. A neighbor wanted to give their very young daughter to Mr. Jin. However, he recognized the great age difference and although he really wanted a son, he felt that he could not ruin a young girl's future and happiness just to serve his own purpose. Thus, this is a good example of restraining one's desires even when it is most difficult to do so.

Therefore, the heavens showered down good fortune, which was especially good for these three men. It is easier for those who have money and power to accumulate merits and virtues than for those who are poor. However, if one refuses to cultivate kindness even when it is easy and one has the chance to do so, then it would truly be a shame. For those who are poor and without prestige, doing kind things for others is very difficult. However, if in this difficulty one can still manage to help others then it would be even more valuable.

These are the differences between "difficult goodness" and "easy goodness". Upon understanding this logic, we should learn to grasp the opportunities for us to practice good and accumulate merit. Once we lose an opportunity, we may not get another chance in the future when we really want to practice some good deeds. Wealth does not last forever. A person's luck will change every five years. During our lifetime, there will be the best five years and the worst five years. If the good years are during our old age then this will be true good fortune. On the other hand, if the worst five years occur during our old age, then the hardships will be even more difficult to endure because physically, we are already at a disadvantage.

Therefore, we should learn to practice goodness at an early age, to let everyone share in our good fortune because once we give it away, we will still gain whatever we are destined to have. We need to understand this. When we are young and strong, we would do well to not exhaust all of our good fortune. If we do not use it up, then it will be kept intact for us to enjoy later in life. Similarly, if we suffer hardships first, then there will be none left for us to endure when we reach our old age. This is why we must learn to practice to cultivate and accumulate good fortune for us to enjoy during our old age.

It is most important that as Buddhists, we know exactly why we are practicing. We do so to accumulate the ultimate good fortune for when we die. What is ultimate good fortune? That of no illness, of knowing that when our time is up, we can leave this world in a sitting or a standing

position and that we know exactly where we will be going. This is the greatest good fortune. Most people have overlooked this most important matter. It is up to those who practice Buddhism to help others who are willing to learn, so that we can all share in the same good fortune.

It is easier to help others when we have prestige and status and therefore, it is easier for us to accumulate merits. Thus, when we have prestige and status, we must remember not to use it in a bad way against others. Instead, we should use it to our advantage to perform more good deeds and to help more people. If we have the means to do this but we choose not to, then we are missing a great opportunity. On the other hand, when we are poor and do not have the means but still choose to help others, then the difficulty of the task makes the act even more valuable.

Practicing the Ten Good Deeds

When the Condition Arises

There are many ways to help others whenever the opportunity presents itself. In short, the ways of helping others can be simplified into ten important categories. The first category is "supporting the practice of kindness". The second is "revering love and respect". The third is "helping others to succeed in doing good". The fourth is "persuading others to practice kindness". The fifth is "helping those in desperate need". The sixth is "developing public projects for the greater benefit of people". The seventh is "practicing merits by giving wealth". The eighth is "protecting and maintaining the proper teachings". The ninth is "respecting elders". The tenth is "loving and cherishing all living things".

This is what is often referred to as being joyful over others meritorious deeds. We do our best to help everyone at every possible opportunity. Because there are so many kinds of virtuous conduct that can be accomplished when the right opportunity arises, they have been summarized into these ten main categories. They are truly beneficial to everyone and we would do well to do all we can to achieve them. In the following, we will examine each one separately.

What does 'supporting the practice of kindness' mean? In the Yu Dynasty, there once was an emperor by the name of Shun. One day, before he became emperor, Shun was watching some fishermen on Lake Leize. He noticed that all the younger and stronger fishermen took the spots where the water was deep and the fish were abundant, while the older and weaker fishermen were left with the rapids and shallow water, where there were very few fish.

Mr. Liao-Fan used an example here to teach us how to interact with other people and how to lead and persuade others to practice kindness. Lake Leize is located in Shandong province. During ancient times, fishing was an important part of daily life. The older fisherman were forced to fish in the rapids and shallow waters where the fish were scarce and not easy to catch because the best spots had all been taken by those who were young and strong.

When Shun saw this situation, he felt sympathy for the older fishermen. He decided to join in the fishing. Whenever he saw fishermen grab the good fishing spots, he would not speak of their faults. When he saw those who were humble and yielding, he praised them everywhere he went and even followed their humble and polite ways. Shun stayed and fished like this for a whole year until the other fishermen got into the habit of yielding good fishing spots to others.

Feeling saddened by the situation, Shun thought of an inventive way to remedy it. He was wise, patient, skillful and clever, so he joined the fishermen in catching fish. His true intention was not to catch fish but to try to reform the younger fishermen. When he saw people competing for a spot, he would say nothing. However, when one of them yielded to the other, he praised them highly. He used the method of "concealing faults and praising kindness". After persisting in this way for a year, the young fishermen were all reformed by Shun and ceased fighting over the fishing spots as they yielded to others.

In our society today, much effort has been spent in highlighting bad deeds and conduct. As soon as someone acts contrary to customs, behaves immorally or breaks the law, the media greatly publicizes it. Good deeds are often not publicized. When this is done, then there is bound to be more bad than good people for when no one recognizes good deeds, there is little motivation to practice goodness. In fact, it would be even more encouraging to practice wrongdoings.

We should follow the examples set by ancient sages and virtuous people. They did not speak of others faults but waited for those people to reflect upon themselves until they had awakened. This is the proper way to teach people. Everyone has a conscience. Sometimes it can be overwhelmed by the desires for wealth and power. As long as we use the expedient way to help others to see the truth, they will eventually come around. This was what Emperor Shun did with the fishermen. In the following passage, we can see why sages and virtuous people acted as they did.

A wise and intelligent man such as Shun could have easily influenced others with a few words of advice. Why did he not just say something instead of changing others by setting a good example? Shun's painstaking and good intentions were like the expert craftsmanship that comes only as the result of long practice and hard work.

Shun did not want to use words to influence others, preferring to set an example for them through his own actions. Although it took a longer time, the effects would be much more lasting because "actions speak louder than words". From this, we can see Shun's wisdom.

In today's era of low morality, social breakdown and loss of proper thinking, it is most difficult to find a good standard of behavior. Therefore, when those around us have shortcomings, we do not use our good points to highlight their deficiencies. When others are unkind, we do not use our kindness and compare ourselves to them. When others are not as capable as we are, we do not purposely surpass them with our abilities. Even when we are intelligent and competent, these skills are to be kept hidden and not boasted of. Instead, we need to behave even more modestly than ever. When

someone makes mistakes, we tolerate and conceal them, providing the opportunity to reform without the loss of self-respect.

We need to painstakingly refrain from these acts. Just because we have certain good points or advantages that others lack, it does not mean that we can gloat over them. Instead, we must learn to conceal our abilities and to accommodate the faults of others. Remembering this and not flaunting our skills and intelligence is true broad-mindedness and tolerance. If we need to show off every time we can do something, then we will accomplish little. If we were truly capable of great achievements, we would not be as superficial as many people are. We would have more depth. By being tolerant, not speaking of the faults of others and praising the goodness of others, we will truly be upholding the precepts and cultivating good fortune.

When we allow others to keep their dignity, they will be even more careful of future actions. When we see strengths or small kindnesses in others, we can learn from them and praise them to others.

If we can set an example with our own behavior to the extent that others learn moderation, then we have done very well. When we see the slightest goodness displayed by others, we should be happy about it and praise the person more for it.

When I first met my late teacher, Mr. Bing-Nan Lee, he taught me not to talk about the faults of others and better still, to hide them. I understood that. However, he also told me not to praise others. That confused me. I realized that discussing the faults of others was not a good deed but on the other hand, praising others should be fine, so why should I not praise others for their goodness. He later explained, "When you praise somebody, the harm you have caused is even greater than when you scold him for his faults". How could that be? He continued, "It takes great wisdom to know how to praise others. Thoughtless praise can cause a person great harm. If others display a little bit of ability and we praise them excessively, then they might become so proud of the fact that they would think that they were incredible. Thinking in this manner would prevent them from making further progress. When they do not progress, they regress. Now, haven't you done more harm than good?" After thinking about this, I understood the logic in what he had said.

So, what sort of a person should we praise? In Buddhism, we praise the one who is unaffected by the "eight emotions of others". The emotions of gain, loss, fame, disgrace, praise, blame, pleasure and pain. We can praise this kind of person because he or she will not be harmed but will remain unmoved by our praises. In fact, the more we praise such an individual, the more modest he or she becomes and the more he or she will strive to improve. We should give special praise to people such as this. Therefore, we should be extra careful with our praise, not inadvertently allowing our good intentions to lead to bad deeds. So from this passage, we can now see how much care Emperor Shun used in taking an entire year trying to help the young fishermen to correct their faults and bad habits.

In daily life, we can refrain from speaking and acting with selfish intentions, but instead, seek to benefit society. We can set standards for others to follow. These are the qualities of a great person, who thinks of the public welfare as more important than his or her own.

When we set standards for others to follow, we should set an example with our own conduct for others to follow. What are the qualities of a great person that Mr. Liao-Fan was talking about? It is someone who disregards his own personal welfare and thinks only in terms of benefiting all others as opposed to the selfish person who only thinks of benefiting himself or herself. For example, Bodhisattvas would be considered "great beings". In the Sutra on the Eight Realizations of the Great Beings, the term "Great Beings" refers to the Bodhisattvas and the eight kinds of realizations. It discusses the ways and the practice of the Bodhisattva.

What is meant by "revering love and respect for others"? Sometimes it is hard to tell from appearance whether one is an honorable person or a fraud, since frauds can pretend to be honorable. The difference lies in their intentions. The difference between them is like black and white. So, Mencius said that the difference between truly honorable people and ordinary people lies in their intentions.

Confucianism talks about "honorable persons, sages and virtuous people". In Buddhism, there are "numerous Buddhas and Bodhisattvas". What differentiates these two from ordinary people lies in "intention". It is extremely difficult to distinguish just by appearance alone and this is why we have often misunderstood virtuous people. For example, in the past, there were three monks from Tiantai Mountain in Zhejiang Province, named Han-Shan, Shi-De and Feng-Gan. It was recorded in the Diary of Tiantai Mountain, that at the time, everyone viewed the three monks as suffering from mental disorder because their behavior was so unusual. Nobody would associate with them. This shows how appearances can be so deceiving.

Feng-Gan's job was to pound the rice in order to remove the husks, which was what the Sixth Patriarch of Zen, Master Hui-Neng did while he was in Huangmei. Feng-Gan was actually the transformation body of Buddha Amitabha, who husked the rice to feed everyone. Han-Shan and Shi-De were the transformation bodies of Great Wisdom Bodhisattva and Universal Worthy Bodhisattva. They worked in the kitchen too, lighting fires for the stoves and performing other miscellaneous chores. They went shoeless, dressed raggedly and acted absurdly. No one felt that they were worthy of anything. It is true that judging by appearances alone, it is difficult for ordinary people to differentiate those who are truly virtuous people. Feng-Gan was the one who revealed to us that they were actually transformations of the three great virtuous people.

At that time, there was a local government official, Magistrate Lu, whose mother fell ill while they were travelling to where they were to report to office. Mr. Lu became very anxious after several doctors failed to help his mother. When Feng-Gan was passing through the neighborhood, he sought out Mr. Lu and said, "Someone is ill in your household and I am able to cure that person". Naturally, the Magistrate felt immense gratitude toward Feng-Gan afterward. He saw that Feng-

Gan was a monk and therefore inquired as to which way place he belonged. Feng-Gan replied, "I live in Tiantai Mountain". Mr. Lu asked, "Are there any sages or virtuous people residing in your way place?" Feng-Gan answered, "Great Wisdom Bodhisattva and Universal Worthy Bodhisattva live there". Mr. Lu asked, "How will I be able to recognize and learn from them?" Feng-Gan replied, "One is named is Han-Shan and the other is Shi-De".

A few days after Magistrate Lu reported to office, he went to Tiantai Mountain to pay his respects to the two great Bodhisattvas. When he got there, he found them in the kitchen doing chores and acting strangely. He immediately knelt on the ground and paid his respects to them. The two monks seemingly ignored him, then quickly turned on their heels and ran. Magistrate Lui ordered his attendants to follow and see where they were going. Then, he saw that the two monks ran to the base of a mountain and the mountain opened up. The two monks backed inside and the mountain closed up again. But, before they vanished inside the mountain, they were heard saying, "Buddha Amitabha talks too much". Magistrate Lu then realized that Feng-Gan was actually Buddha Amitabha!

The two Bodhisattvas complained that Buddha Amitabha should not have meddled and revealed their true identities. So, these three persons were actually great sages. At that time, the way place held a very important Buddhist ritual twice a month to recite the precepts. Han-Shan and Shi-De often gathered outside the way place, made fun of the other monks and were therefore disliked by everyone. When the other monks realized that Han-Shan and Shi-De were actually the transformation bodies of Bodhisattvas, they then felt ashamed that everyday these three great sages had served them their food. This shows how the "intentions" of Bodhisattvas differ from those of ordinary people.

The heart of a genuinely honorable person is filled with loving-kindness and respect for others. There are thousands of different types of people in this world, some are close to us while others are strangers, some are in high positions while others are in low, some are smart while others are not and some are virtuous while others are corrupt. Nevertheless, they are humans like us and are thus, all one entity. I should neither hate nor disrespect anyone.

The first of the Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva is to pay respect to all Buddhas and others. From the aspect of principle, despite the apparent differences among people, all people are one to those who understand. However, from the aspect of phenomenon, of appearance, we know that differences exist. But regardless of this, we are all part of humanity, are all part of one another. Once we realize this, we will truly view others as we view ourselves. The Buddha once said, "Throughout all time and space, there is only the one self". Thus, the kindness and compassion of the Buddha is "affinity without condition in great kindness and the embodiment of all in great compassion". This is wisdom, which we would do well to understand, respect and pass on. We should have loving-kindness and respect for all beings, animate and inanimate.

When our hearts are filled with loving-kindness and respect for others, it is the same as if our hearts were filled with loving-kindness and respect for the sages and virtuous people. When we understand and agree with others, it is the same as if we understand and agree with the sages and virtuous people.

In ancient China, people who were well educated knew how to "respect the sages and virtuous people". This is different from our society today. Our technological society is immersed in greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance. When we show respect, our thoughts and intentions are different from those of the past when this respect was sincere and sages and virtuous people were role models for society. Upon seeing a sage, others would immediately try to correct their behavior in emulation. Today, people often go through the formalities of showing respect to the Bodhisattvas, heavenly beings and spirits, in the hope of gaining something in return. All too often, this is the sole intention.

Mr. Liao-Fan said that understanding and agreeing with other people is the same as understanding and agreeing with the sages and virtuous people. Their main objective is to create goodness and happiness for all people. Who among us would not prefer to live in a peaceful and prosperous society? The Chinese often wish for the "five good fortunes" of (1) wealth and prestige, (2) longevity, (3) merits and virtues, (4) happiness and no adversities and (5) a good death. These are the wishes of virtually everyone in this world. But what most people wish for are the good effects, the good results. What they do not know or have forgotten is that good effects come only after we have accomplished good causes. If we do not practice good causes and do not perform good deeds, then there is no way that we can expect good results. The sages and virtuous people also want everybody to attain good fortune. The difference is that these virtuous people possess great wisdom whereas we ordinary people are confused and ignorant. This is why the virtuous people teach everyone how to practice good deeds and accumulate merits in order for everyone to receive good fortune.

Practicing goodness and accumulating merits starts from our learning to have loving-kindness and respect for all beings, objects and matters. This loving-kindness and respect must be sincere. This is why the first of the Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva is "To respect all Buddhas and others". The first phrase of Book of Rites is "Qu Rite said to respect all". This teaches us how to have sincere respect for everything.

Why? Because all the virtuous people and sages want the people on this earth to obtain what they wish for. Therefore, if we can have loving-kindness and respect for people and help them to achieve in their endeavors, we are doing the job of a sage or a virtuous person.

The sole intention of sages, virtuous people and Bodhisattvas is to teach all beings how to properly obtain what they wish for. For those who are outstanding and intelligent, the virtuous people will try to guide those who wish to be a Buddha or a Bodhisattva. For those who do not wish this, the

virtuous people will try to help them achieve what they wish for. Therefore, we too would do well to have loving-kindness and respect for all beings.

What does "helping others to do good" mean? If we threw away raw jade, it would be like any other worthless stone. But if we carve and polish it, it will be transformed into a valuable object.

We need to help others to achieve in their endeavors. Helping others is one of the virtues of our true-nature and enhances our merits. We use jade as an example, because jade is considered one of the most delicate and beautiful stones. If we carve and polish it, it can become a valuable jade object. In ancient times, these were often used as tokens of a promise. The most preferred shape was round and flat with a circular hole in the middle. This was called a "Bi". Another style was called "Guei" and "Zhang". Their use was similar to a memo pad and served as a reminder of something important to be done. Usually, the size of a "Guei" was larger than a "Zhang". Examples of several of these jade objects from different dynasties can be found in the National Palace Museum (in Taiwan). They have extremely high historical value.

So, when we see people whom we feel have good potential for doing a good deed or working towards a proper goal, we can guide, support, praise and encourage them, helping them to succeed in their endeavors.

This is talking about nurturing talented people. When we see others whose hearts are kind and who have a loyal and generous nature, or whose goals in life are good and ethical, then we should help them in every way possible to accomplish their endeavors. We need to encourage them to follow the right path and nurture them until they achieve their objectives.

The Flower Adornment Sutra is a very good example of this. We see Sudhana, who as a student has fifty-three benevolent teachers or spiritual guides. Although he is very young, he is our elder, a senior in high standing. His virtues, merits and knowledge are truly deserving of respect. We can learn much from him. As Sudhana met each of the spiritual guides, he bowed and paid his respects. The spiritual guide would then ask him, "Where did you come from, why did you come here and what is it that you seek?" All fifty-three spiritual guides asked Sudhana the same questions and all received the same answer. Therefore, this phrase makes a very deep impression because it was said repeatedly. The first part of the answer is "I have vowed to attain perfect complete enlightenment and I wish to achieve unsurpassed Bodhi, but I do not know how to practice or what intent to have. Thus, I have come here to ask for your guidance." Making a vow is what we mean by setting a goal. If the goal is worthy and the student is diligent, then we must do our best to help him or her. Therefore, as long as we have a proper goal, then no matter whether the teachings are of this world or beyond, we will have a bright future and great accomplishments. If we see others who have this potential, then we can encourage and assist them in achieving their endeavors. If they suffer hardships, then we should alleviate their difficulties so they can concentrate on accomplishing their learning.

If others wrongly accuse them, we can try to clear their name and share their burden of slander. Only when we have helped them stand on their feet and become a part of society will we have fulfilled our responsibility in helping others to do good.

During the practice to become a sage, regardless of whether in this world or beyond, people are bound to encounter jealousy and slander. This can create confusion and possibly even discourage them from pursuing their studies. If this were to happen it would truly be tragic. This is when we have to share in their worries. When others slander them, we need to help them to clear their name, to do all we can so that they can stand on their own and become a worthwhile member of society. If we have achieved this then we have accomplished great knowledge, wisdom, virtue and merit. They will then be able to contribute to society partly because we have helped them reach their goal. However many virtues and merits they may accumulate, the person who helped them to achieve will receive an equal amount.

In ancient China, if someone were to recommend a person of great worth to the emperor, that person would be rewarded. Why? Because whenever this person contributed to the country and created benefits for others, it was all because of another's recommendation. The good deeds that have been done by this person are the same as the person who recommended him. Therefore, in ancient China, people often recommended those who were good, filial, honest and talented to the imperial palace so that true talents could be cultivated.

Why would others want to cause trouble for us if we were good? As an old saying goes, "good things do not come easily". There are many obstacles. If someone wants to commit bad deeds, then Mara would be very happy because he loves bad deeds. Not only would he not obstruct the person from wrongdoing, but he would do all he could to help. On the other hand, if we want to perform good deeds that would be going against his wishes so he will do everything he can to deter us.

Mara is one factor, which causes trouble. Another is our own karmic creditors from past lifetimes. When they see that we are practicing well and might transcend the Six Realms of Reincarnation, they want to stop us. This is because we have not yet paid what we owe them from the past. This debt may be money. It may be a life. These creditors will not stand idly by and watch us succeed in our practice but will create obstacles to prevent us from achieving our goal. Thus, the path to awakening is filled with obstacles.

Through innumerable eons, we have created infinite karmic obstacles. How then are we to rid ourselves of them? We should dedicate our daily studies to our karmic creditors, to share our merits with them. By passing these merits on to them, we will have achieved full virtue. What do we want? Nothing. If we do not commit to this vow, it will be difficult for us to achieve awakening without encountering karmic obstacles. When we make this vow, we need to commit to it by following the principles in the Diamond Sutra. We need to sincerely and honestly abide by them.

Most people dislike those who are different from them.

Most of us prefer those who are similar to ourselves. For instance, those who practice Buddhism feel closer to others who are also practicing and more distant from those who are not. This difference is especially noticeable within the family. If our parents and siblings do not practice Buddhism and we are the only vegetarians, then there will be conflicts. This is actually our own fault. It would be helpful to determine what we are doing wrong. Why would other family members disapprove of our practicing Buddhism?

Sometimes, when fellow Buddhists come to visit us it seems that they are very close to us, even closer than our own family. We might appear happier with them than with our own mother. When she sees this, she is bound to feel unhappy. Therefore, we should love and care for our family members in the same way that we do other practitioners. In this way, our family will not oppose our practicing Buddhism. There are many cases where family conflict has arisen when only one member practiced. Often, that one member did not reflect upon his or her behavior and was blinded to the causes of the discontent. Only when we are watching from the side can we see the problem. If we would only spend some time to reflect, we will easily understand the situation.

When other practitioners come to visit us, we should show even more respect to our parents so that our family will feel better. In this way, they will no longer object to our practice. They might even come to like it and encourage friends and relatives to follow suit. Therefore, when interacting with family members, we should not use "verbal education", but learn from Emperor Shun and use "behavioral education". We need to set a good example for them. Then, when they see the good results from practicing Buddhism, they will automatically help us to advocate it.

There are always more bad people around than good people. Therefore, those who are good often have difficulty standing on their own.

Good people comprise one group and bad ones another. The latter has a lot of people and more power. Those who are good are in the minority and have little power. Because of this, they often have problems standing on their own. It becomes more difficult for them to perform good deeds because the bad group will use their power to create obstacles for them. Ever since Buddha Shakyamuni gave us the teachings, the above situation has occurred for each succeeding generation of Buddhists.

After Master Hui-Neng attained enlightenment, he went into hiding with a group of hunters for fifteen years. Why? Because of the jealousy and obstacles, he encountered. Good people often do not have the opportunity to learn. Because those who are bad outnumber those who are good, the former will often be able to obstruct the latter. This is why sometimes when good people are trying to stand on their own, they may not get the opportunity to practice goodness as much as they wish to. Thus, many can only keep themselves unpolluted and pure but lack the strength to help others.

If we want them to be able to “do good for the whole world” then those of us who possess wisdom, good fortune and virtue must do our best to help them.

Good people have good abilities and virtues, which allow them to achieve fame. They usually do not care much for their appearance. They can easily be wrongly accused, so striving to do good turns out to be a challenge. When this happens, it is entirely up to virtuous people and elders to protect and help those who are good and need to stand on their own. They can provide what the good people need to practice goodness. The merits of these virtuous people and elders who do this will be great.

Those who have good abilities and virtues that exceed others usually achieve fame. Locally, everyone would know them. In other words, they are highly “renowned”. These people are skilled and talented; however, their life styles are easy going and they do not pay much attention to details. Unfortunately, this often offends others. We know that when we practice Buddhism, we must be extremely respectful towards the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. However, we need not be overly concerned with trivialities. If we pay too much attention to them, it will interfere with our practice. We should feel and show respect; but if we see others who are disrespectful, we should not mind them. In the course of our practice, we need to grasp the main principle, “The pure heart will give rise to the pure land”. Night and day, always remember to chant “Amituofo”. Everything else is insignificant.

If we are older and less agile, then it is not necessary to kneel when reciting a sutra. We need to not attach to formalities. To seek a bond between Buddha Amitabha and ourselves is of the utmost importance. We can continue our practice even when we are lying down. If we are weak or aged, we can use the most comfortable position while chanting "Amituofo" or reciting the sutra; kneeling, sitting or walking. If we feel weak, we can lie down and listen to the sutra on a tape. Lying in bed listening to the sutra or chanting "Amituofo" can achieve the same merits as when we are sitting or walking. But we must remember not to chant aloud while lying down because it is harmful to our health.

Mahayana Buddhism is liberal, without many restrictions. So what are all the rituals and rules for? They are used for others. It is “behavioral education” to initiate respect from others and to motivate their wish to practice Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism, on the other hand, emphasizes the formalities. Mahayana focuses on the “mind”, not on matters.

Exceptionally talented people are not bothered by minor details and consequently, can easily offend others and cause gossip. Therefore, “attempts to do good deeds often fail” because good people often suffer from accusations and slander. When this happens, those who are trying to do good must depend on virtuous people or an elder with wisdom and virtue to help them overcome their difficulties so that they can truly contribute to society. The virtuous people and the elders will achieve the greatest merit because they are not helping just an individual, but all of society so that everyone may enjoy the same good fortune. This is truly a great merit.

If we were able to encourage, nurture and help a Dharma master so that he or she could teach Buddhism to others, the merits would be incomparable. However, many people do not know this. They believe that if they donate money to restore a Buddhist way place, the merits would be greater. Actually, such merit is limited. In fact, sometimes we may even have committed a bad deed although we had good intentions. Therefore, only in nurturing talented people have we truly achieved great merit. Only with these masters can we guarantee the propagation of the teachings so that Buddhism will never be forgotten in our world.

If is extremely difficult to encourage and help talented teachers of Buddhism. They must seek self-enlightenment as well as help others to achieve enlightenment. Their minds must be pure and non-discriminatory without selfish thoughts. These are the necessary qualities for someone to teach Buddhism. If we do encounter such a true Buddhist successor, we should do our utmost to help him or her. Once this person is accomplished and is able to contribute greatly to Buddhism, the merits we have achieved in helping will be equal to his or her own.

In our present society, why are there so few people teaching Buddhism? The opportunity to do so may have not yet presented itself. Or the individuals may not be sincerely dedicated to propagating the teachings to help all beings. The vow, the quality of some people is dubious and flawed. And often laypeople like to flatter and listen to older masters and do not go to listen to newer ones. This can cause the newer masters to become discouraged so that they might turn to conducting ceremonies. This happens because the laypeople did not fulfill their responsibilities in providing proper opportunities. Therefore, when newer masters vow to lecture on the sutras, we should go and listen if what they teach is accurate.

However, if their teachings are inaccurate, then we should not listen so that they can see the reactions of others and learn to reflect and correct their faults. Once they have corrected these faults, we can then listen to them and encourage them to propagate the teachings. This is the proper way to praise newer masters and encourage them in their vows to pursue enlightenment. We must provide a suitable learning environment for them. The value of this merit is boundless because it can truly extend the life of Buddhism.

What is meant by "persuading others to practice kindness"? Since we are all humans, we all have a conscience, but chasing after wealth and fame has kept us constantly busy and we have forgotten our conscience. Although we want to do good, the necessity of surviving in a world filled with hardships can result in our forgetting to do good. When a friend is about to ignore his or her conscience to do something unworthy, we can remind and warn this friend, hoping to wake him or her from delusion. It is like waking up someone when they are having a nightmare. It is up to us to shake them into reality. When a person is undergoing a long spell of depression, we can pull this person out of it and help to clear his or her mind. We are most virtuous if we can treat our friends with such kindness.

Virtually all people would prefer to be good. Even the worst person will say that he or she would like to practice goodness. From this, we can conclude that a good heart and good conduct is the true nature of humankind. Buddhism teaches us that this is a virtue of our true nature. So, if this is the case, why do people resort to bad conduct? Two reasons. First, people commit bad deeds because of their afflictions and bad habits. Second, because of bad conditions. But, despite the fact that some people commit bad deeds, there are very few who are not bothered by their conscience. Unfortunately, they do not have any good friends to remind and help them to reform. Consequently, they become more and more deluded, more and more confused. We see many cases where this has happened.

Mr. Liao Fan expressed it very well in the above example, "Although we want to do good, the necessity of surviving in the world filled with hardships can result in our forgetting to do so". While trying to make a living, we do many things to maintain a certain standard of living for our families and to further our careers. Due to this, the environment in which we live has a strong influence on our behavior. This could become unfortunate in our immoral society. For instance, today, many people like to gamble. This is obviously not a good sign. Many young people become obsessed with it, which has proven very harmful to themselves, their families and society. This is very dangerous. However, this is the present trend and it seems to be slowly affecting the entire world.

With the aid of the media, negative effects become magnified and can reach into the farthest corners of the world thus causing even more damage. Therefore, when we see our friends and relatives, we should do our best to try to help them see reason and lead them away from bad influences. We can encourage them to start by reading Liao Fan's Four Lessons because everything in this book is true.

Sometimes, it is quite easy to become wealthy through the stock market. But, the wealth we gained from trading stocks was still destined to be ours. If our destiny does not include wealth, then the money will soon be gone. If we carry the cash with us, we are afraid of being robbed. If we deposit it in the bank, all we can do is look at it. What is the difference? When we think about it, we will realize that wealth only increases our greed, anger and arrogance. It has absolutely no redeeming factors whatsoever.

There is an old saying, which sums it up well. As long as we are in this world, all that we need are "three meals a day and a six-foot bed at night". Therefore, would it not be better if we were to use our good fortune a little at a time rather than exhaust them all at once? Thus, we should help family members and friends to realize, through logic and reason, that they are on the wrong path and that they should not gamble with their life. This is the proper path, one that can last for a long time.

Buddhism is both flexible and inventive. We must assist those who wish to learn by helping them to feel happy. Then they will be more accepting of what we say. In this way, we will be able to help others understand how they would do well to change. We can then lead them away from confusion, away from a seemingly endless bad dream. When they suddenly wake up, it will be similar to

awakening in Buddhism. Once they awaken, all they need to do is practice. This is like getting rid of the roots of all afflictions. All that remains is a sense of serenity and freedom. This is wisdom. We must help others with what is most beneficial to them.

A scholar named Yu Han once said, "By word of mouth, one can only persuade and influence others for a while. If one can persuade and influence others through written works, one's words can be passed on for hundreds of generations around the world." We can use either speaking or writing, whichever is appropriate for the circumstances.

This is showing the flexible and expedient method of teaching. When we are analyzing matters trying to help others to awaken, we are doing it "by word of mouth", which only benefits others in the current lifetime. If we are trying to guide many others as well as future generations, then the best tool to use would be "written words". By recording our kind words and deeds, we can pass these down for future generations to use. This will ensure that these good words will be preserved.

An example of this is Liao-Fan's Four Lessons. Mr. Liao-Fan's objective in writing the book was to alert his son of the dangers in committing bad deeds. He did not intend for these four lessons to be so widely read for so many generations. So, he has unintentionally performed a great deed of goodness. Many people have followed his teachings and have succeeded in changing their destinies from those of suffering to happiness. They all have benefited from Mr. Liao-Fan's written words. This thin volume, is a prime example of teaching people to be good. He used his own experiences as an example for his descendants, hoping that they would understand and learn to practice all that is good. This is the most effective, outstanding, profound and all-encompassing goodness.

Actually, writing is something each of us is capable of doing. We may think that we lack a literary background and are thus incapable of writing. But this is not so. If we can just record one or two occurrences that we hear or see each day, the outcome would be quite similar to the lessons in this book. From this, we can conclude that "persuading people by speech and persuading generations by written works" is not difficult, as long as we have the heart of sincerity and the persistence to pursue this act of benevolence.

We can persuade others by word of mouth as well as by writing books to promote virtue. Compared with teaching others through behavior this is much more direct and obvious. Sometime, we do not have time to teach others through behavior. Then verbal or written education will be more effective. However, if we can apply it like the right medicine for an illness, often it will prove to have wonderful effects. Therefore, we cannot give up.

The previous category is referred to as "Associate Embracing" in Buddhism. This means that we should interact with those whom we are trying to help and use our own actions as examples to influence others, similar to what Emperor Shun did with the fishermen.

In Buddhism, four guidelines are used to guide and influence all sentient beings. This is called "Fourfold Embracing Methods". The first method is "giving", which is a way to establish a good affinity and amicability with others. Once we have earned the confidence of others, then whatever we say or do will create a positive effect on them and they will be willing to follow our suggestions. The second method is "kind words". This does not mean we use glib talk or honeyed words to sway others. Kind words means to act with flexibility with others and help them to be comfortable. As explained by Master Jung-Feng earlier in this lesson, when our motivation comes from loving-kindness for others, then even if we scold or hit them for their own good, it would be an act of kindness. But when we are scolding, we should take into consideration their ability to withstand and accept the reproach. If they reject it when it is overdone then our words will have a negative effect. Therefore, when we intend to speak to others of their faults, we should make sure that no one else is present so that they will not feel embarrassed or antagonized. This is an example of being flexible and making the person feel comfortable. The third method is "beneficial and advantageous conduct". This means that our words and actions must be truly beneficial to others. The fourth and last method is "cooperating with and adapting oneself to others". This is to participate in the same activities as others and to be a good example to guide them.

When the Buddhas guide all sentient beings, they do not exceed these four methods. When we are encouraging others to be good, we are using "verbal education". When we are joining others to teach them kindness, we are using "behavioral education". Herein lies the difference.

If we make the mistake of "losing a person" (it was proper for us to guide this person but we did not) or "wasting our words" (it was improper for us to persuade this person and we tried to) we would do well to reflect and generate the wisdom not to make the same mistake again.

When we are able to advise someone but we do not then we have lost an opportunity to teach. If a person has potential to do good but we do not lead him or her to the right path, then we have "lost a person". On the other hand, if someone is set in his or her ways and will not listen to us but we persist in trying to change him or her to no avail, then we have "wasted our words". When interacting with others, we should learn to use our common sense to observe how they are reacting. This will prevent us from "losing a person" or "wasting our words". Master Hui-Neng explained it very well in the Platform Sutra. When others are willing to listen and accept, we teach them but when they are not, we simply put our palms together and wish them happiness.

What is meant by "helping those in desperate need"? During one's lifetime, people will often suffer from serious difficulties. If we meet someone like this, we can help that person as if we were the one who was suffering. We immediately come to this person's aid. If a person has been wrongly accused or convicted, we should plead on their behalf as well as provide aid in any way we can. Scholar Cui Zi once said, "It does not matter whether a favor is big or small. What is important is that it is done at a time when others need it most". These are words of loving-kindness.

Everyone is bound to encounter some misfortune during their lifetime. This is especially true during a war when we are forced to suffer overwhelming losses such as that of our home. In such situations, as we drift from one place to another we will have no idea what is going to happen next. Therefore, since the age of ten, all the children in my family were taught how to be independent, how to manage on our own if and when we were separated from our family. Also, we were taught how to survive alone in the woods.

Presently, we are living in a relatively peaceful world in which parents have many opportunities to spoil their children. However, will our world always be this peaceful? If we look honestly at the way we are currently headed, the future looks bleak. It would be most unfortunate if the aforementioned hardships and sufferings were to occur during our mid-life or old age. Therefore, when we meet others who are suffering, we should treat them as if we were suffering the same hardships and quickly do everything we can to help. This is the giving of fearlessness.

When others are oppressed or wronged, we must help them by pleading on their behalf and do whatever we can to prove their innocence. When they suffer from continuous hardships and we are unable to help them by ourselves, then we must alert others and encourage them to join in the effort. Scholar Cui Zi said that whether we are able to help a great deal or just a little, what is important is that we help when others need our help the most. However, while we are able to provide assistance in an emergency, poverty is a different issue. The best way to assist those who are in poverty is to help them learn ways to earn a living, to learn how to support themselves and to become independent. This is the greatest act of kindness.

What is meant by "developing public projects for the benefit of others"? Small construction works are needed for villages and big construction jobs are needed for cities. As long as it is beneficial to the people, it should be built.

On a small scale, we can benefit a village. On a larger scale, we can benefit a city or a county. Today, this is known as "social welfare". Every citizen, every governing body would do well to consider it their responsibility to do good deeds for the benefit of all.

We should do anything that benefits an area. Only when everyone has good fortune, do we have it as well. Everyone would do well to have this perception. But, if we alone enjoy good fortune while others are suffering, then adversity is not far behind. A Chinese proverb says, "One family's wealth can cause resentment from thousands of families". If we share our good fortune with others, this will help to create a stable society and a peaceful world. This will then become true good fortune. When we share our good fortune with others, this is a sign of exhibiting great wisdom, great good fortune and virtue. Today, when we speak of "developing public projects for the benefit of others", we can do so by advocating and encouraging others to practice the teachings in Liao Fan's Four Lessons and of Mahayana Buddhism.

Public projects can be the construction of systems to irrigate farmlands, dams to prevent flooding or bridges to facilitate travel. Also, we can give food or water to those who are hungry or thirsty. Whenever we have the opportunity, we need to encourage others to do their share as well to help accomplish the project, either through the sharing of wealth or of labor. Do not be afraid of what others might say and do not become frightened when the job becomes difficult. Do not allow the jealousy and hatred of others to weaken our resolve to do good deeds.

In China, agriculture was the foundation of the country. Thus, the construction of irrigation systems was of paramount importance. Dams were also necessary in order to prevent flooding. These construction projects were not built to benefit oneself, but for the benefit of everyone. Therefore, even when obstacles occurred during the course of construction, they were not allowed to deter the completion of a good deed. A good deed completed despite obstacles is considered full and complete. There may be opposition at the beginning of a project but once it is finished and everyone has benefited from it, they will know its value and appreciate our efforts. Therefore, our vision must be all-encompassing and far-reaching. We need to possess wisdom, loving-kindness and perseverance in order to accomplish good, the standard for which is to benefit all sentient beings. To be selfish, to benefit only ourselves is not goodness. It was this standard that Master Jung-Feng spoke of.

What is meant by "accumulating merits and good fortune by giving wealth"? In Buddhism, giving is considered the foremost practice among all the methods.

This is the way to practice for good fortune. In Buddhism, there are infinite ways of practice. For the sake of simplicity, Buddhism has organized these infinite methods into six major categories, the Six Paramitas. Mahayana Buddhism often teaches the "Six Paramitas of infinite practices". If we were to summarize the categories, then all six become one, become "giving". There are three major categories of giving; that of wealth, teaching and fearlessness. Actually, all of the Six Paramitas are giving. For instance, the Paramitas of abiding by the percepts or self-discipline and patience can both be considered the giving of fearlessness. The Paramitas of diligence, deep concentration and wisdom can be considered the giving of teaching. Thus, these three types of giving have encompassed all the methods of practice in Buddhism. No matter how many other ways there are, they would all be within the method of giving. In the Diamond Sutra, the Buddha taught us not to be attached in the practice of giving. This is the ultimate perfect guideline for all the ways of practice.

Therefore, to give is to practice good fortune. This is the practice of Bodhisattvas. Since the Six Paramitas are the ways to practice good fortune, wisdom is a part of good fortune. When we practice the giving of teaching, we will gain intelligence and wisdom, which is considered good fortune. When we practice the giving of fearlessness, we will gain health and longevity. When we practice the giving of wealth, we will gain wealth. The Chinese speak of these as the five good fortunes of wealth and prestige, longevity, merits and virtues, happiness and no adversities, and a good death. The last is a good death because it can in turn lead to a good birth. And the best death

is to die while chanting a Buddha's name to be born into the Pure Land. During my lifetime, I have seen many instances where this has happened.

If we wish to attain perfect happiness in this world, we will not go wrong if we practice according to the teachings in this book. If we wish to attain perfect happiness beyond this world, then it would be enough to practice according to the Infinite Life Sutra. If we just lead our lives according to the guidelines of the Infinite Life Sutra and Liao-Fan's Four Lessons, we will attain the great liberation in both this world and beyond. Thus, here we are encouraged to practice good fortune through giving.

What is giving? Giving is to let go. A wise person who understands this principle would be willing to give away everything, even to the point of letting go of our attachments to the six sense organs within. Externally, one can also give away that which we see, hear, smell, taste, touch and think.

To give is to let go, to give away. The more we give, the freer we will become. "A wise person who understands this principle" is someone who has true wisdom, is like a Bodhisattva. When we speak of letting go of the six sense organs and the six dusts, we are not talking about letting go in the physical aspect. Think about it, how could we really detach ourselves from our physical body? Even if we were able to discard our body, it still would not solve our problems. Therefore, when we speak of letting go of the six sense organs, we mean to detach ourselves from the aspect of our mind. This means we do not have any attachments or discriminations within and are not tempted by external phenomena. The Diamond Sutra tells us, "Do not attach to form. Remain unmoved within". Do not attach means to let go of the six senses. Once we have severed our attachments within and on the outside, we will no longer be deluded but will have uncovered our self-nature and become Buddhas.

In our innumerable past lifetimes, we have been deluded and thus remained mired in the cycle of birth and death. However, from now on, we will not create any more life and death karma. Therefore, those who are wise would want to transcend our Saha world, to be mindful of Buddha Amitabha and to be born into the Pure Land. We will maintain clarity of mind and await Buddha Amitabha to escort us to the Pure Land while we are alive, not dead. If we can go to the Pure Land after we die, then it means that the transcendence ceremony really works. Actually, transcending the spirit from suffering only has a limited effect. We cannot transcend a spirit into the Pure Land, just reduce the suffering.

For instance, the Venerable Master Bao Zhi was the manifestation of Great Compassion Bodhisattva. He transcended the spirit of Emperor Liang-Wu's favorite wife. But, he could only transcend her spirit to the second level of the Desire Heaven. He could not help her to advance any further. He could not help her to be born into the Pure Land. Although we wish that we could transcend others to Pure Land, it cannot be done. It is only our wish. Being born into the Pure Land depends on our own belief, vow and practice. So, we must do our best to learn the ways of practice

while we are still healthy and strong; we must chant "Amituofo" and vow to be born into the Pure Land.

To let go is to do so from the mind. It is to detach ourselves from the Five Desires and the Six Dusts of the mind. We should learn neither to be attached to our bodies nor to our minds. As ordinary people, we are filled with discriminatory thoughts and attachments and find it extremely difficult to detach ourselves from them. We always have wandering thoughts. The Pure Land way of practice is to change our thinking, so that we are mindful only of Buddha Amitabha. Once we change our thinking to only those thoughts of Buddha Amitabha, we will finally be free. Truly cultivating the Bodhisattva way is concentrating only on Buddha Amitabha and chanting only "Amituofo".

There is nothing we cannot give away. When we find ourselves unable to do so, we can start with the giving of wealth. Ordinary people regard their clothing and food as dearly as their lives. Therefore, they consider wealth to be of the utmost importance. When we practice giving without hesitation, we can cure stinginess and at the same time, help others in dire need. However, for many this is very difficult to do, especially at first. But, gradually it will become more natural the more we give. This is the best way to cure selfishness and to rid ourselves of attachments and stinginess.

The Diamond Sutra tells us that "Everything with form is illusion, is false". This teaches us to give, to let go and be free of worries and attachments. If we find it difficult to do this, then we need to start by giving away our wealth so that we are not tempted or affected by it.

This is also the method that the Buddha taught us to escape the cycle of birth and death, to transcend the Six Realms and to transform ourselves from ordinary people to sages. It is always a little difficult when we first learn to give, so we often do so grudgingly. We may feel upset and perhaps even regret what we have done. This is when we need to use our wisdom and be determined to gradually make giving a habit. Then, it will become quite natural. Everyone will experience such a stage in their learning and cultivation. Eventually, as we give, we will experience a lessening in worries and stinginess. When we no longer attach to wealth, to our enjoyments, our body, heart and mind will feel great ease and liberation. This is when our self-nature will start to be uncovered and we will gain complete contentment and freedom. The Law of Cause and Effect never changes, either in this world or beyond. Therefore, the more wealth we give, the more wealth we will gain. We do not even know where this wealth will come from. The more teaching we give the more wisdom we will gain. So, we do not want to withhold any of our wealth or knowledge. Poverty is the result of not giving wealth. Ignorance is the result of not giving teaching. Illness and short lives are the result of not giving fearlessness.

The five good fortunes are all gained through giving. Giving is the cause; therefore, if we wish to have the good result, then we must practice the good cause. It is a wandering thought to think that we can gain the result without first planting the cause. This is impossible.

What is meant by "protecting the proper teachings"? For millions of years, proper teachings have been a standard of truth and provided spiritual guidance for all living beings. Without proper teachings, how can we participate in and support the nurturing of heaven and earth? Without proper teachings, how can we help people to attain achievement. How can beings in all the realms succeed in their endeavors without a standard to live by? How can we be free of the Five Desires, the Six Dusts, our delusions, our afflictions? Without proper teachings, how can we set a standard in the world and help people transcend the Six Realms.

Proper teachings are the personal achievement of wise sages, which have been proven by using the standards of truth and wisdom, such as those found in the great teachings of Confucius and Buddha Shakyamuni. This shows how important it is to protect the proper teachings.

In China, when we protect the proper teachings, we first safeguard those of Confucius, Mencius, Lao-Zi and Zhuang-Zi, for they provide the foundation for Buddhism. This was no problem during Mr. Liao-Fan's time because during the Ming Dynasty all scholars had studied the work of Confucius. By learning the Four Books, the Five Classics and the various schools of thought that were developed over the centuries, everyone had a good foundation in Confucianism. We need to understand this to see why Buddhism is currently undergoing difficulties and has declined. As it is the root, Confucianism taught us how to properly conduct ourselves. If we cannot even be a decent person, how can we possibly become a Bodhisattva, much less become a Buddha? Our learning and practice to become Buddhas and Bodhisattvas is built on the foundation of the humanities.

Although we may not completely read the Four Books, which are Great Learning, Doctrine of the Mean, Analects and Mencius, we should at least have read the first three so that we will know how to conduct ourselves. This is the foundation of Buddhism, the basic of the basics. We can compile good excerpts from the commentaries from the past to present times and widely distribute them. In the past, the books we printed were the version of stone printed books of China, without any copyrights; they were the commentary of the Four Books written by Scholar Xi Zhu. It would be good for us to print, distribute and advocate it.

Therefore, Buddhists would do well to read the Four Books. Truthfully speaking, we can only give rise to the heart, which loves the country and its people, if we have completely read the Four Books and understand China's historical culture. Today's Chinese people have forgotten the country and its people due to the fault of poor planning in the educational system. Nowadays, education places great importance on technology, forgetting the importance of the humanities. No matter how advanced our technology, if we have not studied the humanities, then as the ancient people questioned, "What is the difference between humans and animals?" Humans are animals. If we do not know morality, benevolence and honor, then there will be little difference between humans and animals. Human beings are the cruelest of all the animals, the most ruthless. Therefore, in order to help all beings, human beings must be helped first. If we can turn back from all that is bad to do all that is good, then all beings will be fortunate and happy. Only then, can each sentient being

achieve what they want. This is the goal of the sages and the virtuous people in educating and reforming sentient beings.

"Proper teachings" includes both those of Confucius and the Buddha. They have been the standard of truth, which has provided guidance for thousands of years. Heaven and earth have the merits and virtues of giving rise to and nurturing infinite things. Heaven gives rise, earth nurtures. Heaven and earth have shown great kindness to all beings, animate and inanimate. Once we understand this principle, not only will we neither destroy nor harm the natural environment, we will do all we can to help the natural ecological balance to become perfect, to enable all beings to receive what they need. The merits of heaven and earth are vast and great! Those who genuinely have morality and knowledge can participate in and support the rise and nurturing of heaven and earth. The world's wise sages, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas do just this. As Buddhism says, "If we can transform objects and beings, then we are just like a Buddha". To transform objects means to change our own views, our own thoughts, to let go of selfish desires and to participate in the light of the sky, earth, sun and moon. To let go of our selfishness is true cultivation. True cultivation wholeheartedly exerting ourselves to help all beings. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas propagate the teachings and help all beings, guiding them in letting go of delusion and attaining the truth. Like Heaven and earth to nurture all beings. The merit from this is immeasurable. To be able to "transcend delusion and be liberated from confinement" means to end all afflictions and worries, to uncover our wisdom and transform delusion into awakening.

We are to use the behavior and conduct of sages and virtuous people as our models. The teachings of the sages are the classics and sutras. Their thoughts, speech and conduct are correct and without error. They surpass the dimensions of time and space. This is called "the career of the sages and virtuous people for guiding the world". We know that Buddhist sutras surpass time and space, because three thousand years ago Buddha Shakyamuni instructed and helped the people at that time. Today, as we read the sutras, we still feel that every sentence spoken by the Buddha is logical and should be practiced accordingly. This is especially true for the Pure Land sutras, which teach how to transcend this world by attaining birth into the Pure Land in one lifetime. This is to transcend the world. Buddhism was initially taught in India and was then introduced into China. India and China are very different, yet what the Buddha taught was fitting for both countries. Now as it is being introduced into Europe and the Americas it is still appropriate. This is called the teachings of governing and transcending the world.

Similarly, the Four Books are comprised of the thoughts of Confucius and Mencius and are the essence of the Chinese culture. Confucius and Mencius lived twenty-five hundred years ago. Their guidance benefited individuals, families, society, the entire country. As the Four Books are introduced abroad, people in other countries nod their heads in agreement after learning what they teach. So the teachings are timeless and beyond the boundaries of space. This is why the teachings of Confucius, Mencius, Lao-Zi and Zhuang-Zi are said to surpass the dimensions of time and space, and are genuine sutras and teachings on how to properly manage the country. Of

course, there have always been teachings on the proper running of countries, yet if we compare carefully, the best have been those of Confucius, Mencius, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Frankly, among all the Buddhist sutras, the Infinite Life Sutra is unsurpassed, for it attains the highest level. The essence of traditional Chinese culture is contained within the Four Books and thus Zhu-Zi's merit is inconceivable! The content of the Four Books is very similar to that of the Flower Adornment Sutra, which provides principles, methods and behavior for us to emulate. Of the Four Books, Doctrine of the Mean provides the principles, Great Learning provides the methods and Analects and Mencius tell us of the lives of Confucius and Mencius. In other words, they teach how to apply the principles and methods in our daily interaction with others, matters and objects. Thus, the Analects and Mencius are just like the fifty-three visits of Sudhana, for they provide us with examples to follow. The Four Books and the Flower Adornment Sutra even have the exact same structures.

To guide the world is to set a standard and to be a role model. Regarding transcending this world, actually there are no boundaries between this world and the one beyond. The differences between them lie in whether we are deluded or awakened. When awakened, we transcend this cycle. But, with one thought of delusion, we are again in this world. With another thought of awakening, we again transcend this cycle.

Therefore, whenever we see way places, memorials of past virtuous people or sages, pictures of sages, or Buddhist texts, we should be respectful. If they are in need of repair, we should repair and put them back in order.

The teachings of the sages have a direct bearing on individuals' minds within a society, trends in cultural behavior, societal happiness and peace, and the overall well being of the group. Since ancient times, the wise and virtuous have been analogizing the teachings of the sages as the "the sight of heaven and human". How do we protect and uphold them? Way Places are institutions of Buddhist education. Schools are institutions of worldly education. Both need to be protected and sustained. Today's schools have abandoned the education of morality and ethics, which is why we have such sufferings and misery. If we do not awaken to this fact, our world will eventually be destroyed.

Ancient Chinese sages were knowledgeable about science and technologies and yet they chose not to continue development of this knowledge. Why? They foresaw that in the end technology would destroy our world. So, they chose instead to concentrate on the humanities, to help people develop wisdom, to understand and practice morality and ethics. To help people totally understand the relationship between humans, between humans and spirits and between humans and nature. To become a person who is fearless and indomitable. Only in this way, will individuals experience true happiness and well being and will countries and citizens be able have a real future. This is genuine education.

In the early 1900s, the Chinese government abolished Chinese classic education. At the time, many wise and virtuous people felt deep sadness over this decision. The bad seeds that were planted then are now bearing fruit. If even after we have tasted the bad fruits we are still not awakened, then we are lost. This way of thinking can destroy countries and races. The result of our abolishing Chinese classics education is the destruction of the proper teachings! And if Confucian and Taoist teachings cannot be safeguarded then Mahayana Buddhism cannot be established. Buddhism has flourished for two thousand years in China because it was based on the foundation of Confucian and Taoism. But today we are digging away the roots, destroying the foundation. If this continues, the teachings of the Buddhas will become mere empty words.

In the past, books were not privately owned so writing in them was not allowed. They were carefully passed down from generation to generation so others could read them. Those who wished an individual copy would hand copy one for their personal use. They were cherished, respected and protected. If any of these ancient texts were damaged, then individuals would mend, copy and distribute it, so it would not be lost. This was the greatest merit.

We can propagate and carry forward the proper teachings and help others to learn their value. In this way, we can repay our gratitude to the Buddha. We should especially do our best and encourage others to do so as well.

This teaches us that we need to help propagate the teachings of Confucius and the Buddha, to encourage others to do so as well and to help benefit others. In so doing, we will be truly repaying our gratitude to the Buddha. To be able to accomplish this, we need to do two things. First, we need to help train Dharma repositories who can properly propagate the teachings. Second, we need to establish way places where the teaching can be taught enabling these people to have a good educational environment for both learning and practicing. Today, few people are propagating the Dharma, so instead of relying on others, we need to rely on ourselves to do this.

We establish a way place in the hope of providing the opportunity for more people to encounter and learn Buddhism. Today, the best way to do this is TV (and the Internet) which can bring Buddhism into every family's home. We could invite benevolent teachers, to choose the sutras that would benefit society the most to take turns lecturing. Since Mahayana Buddhism is built on the foundation of Confucianism and Taoism, we could lecture first on the Four Books. Next, we could lecture on Mahayana Buddhism. In this way, people would be able to thoroughly absorb and digest the teachings, thus preventing them from becoming just empty words. So, if we truly wish to help Buddhism flourish, we need to begin with traditional Chinese culture and traditional education such as the teachings of Confucius. We should begin by nurturing Dharma repositories and establishing way places.

Establishing a way place does not mean spending a large amount of money on a building that will result in endless squabbles and conflicts once it is completed. When this happens, the effort and expenditure will become meaningless. We need to understand that once we start learning and

practicing Buddhism and attain wisdom, we will realize that wealth is like a puff of smoke, a fleeting cloud. No matter how much wealth we have, it is only something to see. Think about it, is the money we keep in our home really ours? If it were truly ours, then we would keep it instead of giving it to another. And yet, when we receive money, we pass it on to another. It was ours for a very short time. Thus, we should not place much importance on wealth.

A fellow Buddhist, who had immigrated abroad, told me that after he had made a million dollars in the stock market, he immediately lost it. I asked him why he had not listened to Liao Fan's Four Lessons. When we lose something it means that we were not supposed to have it, so there is no need to worry. We should neither be happy when we gain something nor unhappy when we lose it. To do so would be a sad waste of time. Those who understand and possess wisdom would instead use their precious time to chant the Buddhas' name. We need to understand the principles. If we are diligent in our practice and help to propagate the teachings to help others, we will gain infinite merit. Then, all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will praise us.

What is meant by "respecting our elders"? It is making an extra effort in being attentive to and respecting parents, elder siblings, leaders, superiors or elders or those of high virtue, prestige and learning. When taking care of our parents at home, we are to do so with loving hearts and a gentle, accommodating appearance. We should not raise our voice but maintain a peaceful bearing. As we cultivate these virtues, they will become a part of us and we will change into a gentle-hearted person. This is the way we can touch the hearts of heaven.

In ancient China, those who taught young children placed great importance on basic education. They taught filial piety, respect and sincerity, which are the outlines of the teachings. Thus, the character nurtured in our childhood will become our nature when we are grown. This provides the foundation for the nurturing of sages and virtuous people which will provide for a moral society and a wisely managed country. Since ancient times, this has been the Chinese social tradition. The Chinese say that, "Education is most essential to establish a nation, train its leaders and govern its people". If the basic quality of education is not clearly recognized, incorrect viewpoints and thinking are enough to destroy the entire culture, country and even its people! All the government officials in ancient China studied the works of wise sages and virtuous people. Even if some had selfish intentions, there were still some limits and rules they would only exceed so much. Doing so probably resulted in feelings of regret. Nowadays, sexual misconduct, criminal acts, wrongdoings are all viewed as matter of fact. We no longer have a "shameful heart", no longer feel remorse. We have lost our sense of morality and ethics. We have lost our conscience. And this is deeply troubling because all that separates us from other animals is our good heart.

Hopefully, fellow Buddhists will realize that sincerity and respect are the gateway to and the foundation for practicing Buddhism. "Sincerity and respect" are cultivated within our family. At home, we are filial to our parents and respectful of our elders and siblings. Accomplishing this will enable us to be in accordance with superiors, to be diligent and dependable in meeting our

responsibilities as individuals, members of society and citizens of our country. As Mr. Liao-Fan said, "habits become one's nature". Once a good habit is formed, then "we will be gentle and this will touch the heart of heaven". When we are peaceful, kind and agreeable, we will be able to move the beings and spirits of heaven and earth.

Today, we have forgotten the ethical teachings of the human relationships. We are no longer moral. Instead, most people are mired in thoughts of greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance. Malevolent spirits, beings and demons have descended. Why? Our improper thinking has formed a connection with them. Naturally, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will not come. Humans were already committing wrongdoings, but now there are malevolent spirits and demons creating chaos as well! This is why our world will have disasters of increasing severity and frequency. When this happens, there may be many deaths. Only when we personally experience these grave occurrences, will we be awakened from delusion and improper viewpoints, regret our wrongdoings and turn back to the right path. It is truly regrettable that "small" disasters cannot bring this about. It will take a major disaster to awaken us. This is unavoidable.

We need to study Chinese history and view the chaos in the world from a historian's viewpoint to realize the source of good occurrences as well as of disasters. This will enable us to detect the Law of Cause and Effect beforehand. What are people thinking today? What are they doing? Knowing this, we will know the future. The results that we are currently seeing come from causes created decades ago. The results of the causes that we are currently creating over and over will be seen in two to three decades. Previously, the seeds that were planted might have taken seven or eight decades to mature. But today, the increase of these bad causes is resulting in a shortening of the maturity period and in greater magnitude. This is horrifying! Good causes will always result in good effects and bad causes will always result in bad effects. The principle of cause and effects is correct, in unchangeable.

When carrying out deeds for our superiors or the government, we should follow the rules and not become unrestrained just because our superiors do not know what we are doing.

Before we convict someone of a crime, regardless of whether the crime is serious or not we should investigate carefully and handle the case justly. We should not abuse power and rights or be excessively harsh because our supervisor does not know what we are doing. When we face our supervisor, we should show him the same respect as if we were facing the heavens. (As the motto says), "This is the correct behavior handed down from our ancestors". It has a direct and important effect on our hidden virtues. Look at all the families who practiced loyalty and filial piety. Their descendants prospered for a long time and had bright futures. Therefore, we can follow their example and practice with caution.

If someone cultivates the virtues of loyalty and filial piety then they also will have descendants to last for a long time. But today, parents and children are more like friends and this is destroying the moral principles. Confucianism and Taoism teach us that moral principles and ethics are the nature

of virtue. Closer examination of Buddhism shows that it is the revelation of the virtuous nature. Sages and virtuous people do not experience selfishness so they have revealed their virtuous nature. Confucianism is the revelation of our virtuous self-nature. When this self-nature is revealed, it will be the same as that of Confucius. It is the same as light. When his lights up, mine does as well. One light intermingling with another light to become one, is the revelation of the self-nature. This is the true greatness, is truly inconceivable, is the perfect and virtuous self-nature.

Filial piety and respect are for the tools we use to reveal, to uncover our virtuous self-nature. To become enlightened. In Buddhism, it is said that the most important requirement to uncovering our self-nature is to generate the Bodhi mind. The same is true for Confucianism, which also teaches us to practice the sincere and virtuous mind. We would do well to interact with others, matters and objects with filial piety, respect and sincerity. To do so without deceiving others or ourselves. To do things quietly by ourselves is the true way of doing good deeds and accumulating merits. It is said, "It has a direct and important effect on our hidden virtue". Cause and effect can be witnessed throughout history and up until today. It is the truth, not false. Therefore, when we give rise to a thought or perform a deed, do not think that no one will know. Other people may not know, but all the beings and spirits of heaven and earth, all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will know. Mr. Liao Fan told us earlier, to reform and correct our faults, we need the shameful heart, the fearful heart and the courageous determined heart. To become a sage, a virtuous person, a Bodhisattva or a Buddha, we simply need to truly and to completely generate these three hearts to realize our goals in this lifetime.

What is meant by "loving and cherishing all living things"? A heart of compassion is what makes a person. A person in search of the virtues of mercy and kindness looks out for his or her heart of compassion. A person who wants to accumulate merits also cultivates a compassionate heart.

"A heart of compassion" is the heart that is kind and loving to all beings and matters. When we see animals suffering we naturally have sympathy for them. Do we all have this heart? Yes, everyone. If we shed tears while watching a sad movie, this is the heart of compassion. We possess the heart even when we know that the tragedies on TV and at the movies are not real. So it goes without saying that when we see real people or animals suffering, that we would try to help them.

Not only human beings possess the heart of compassion, animals also do. This is truly the virtuous nature, the original nature. The original nature of animals is no different from that of humans, but because they are even more deeply deluded than we are, they have become animals. All the beings in the Ten Dharma Realms share the same true nature. That is why the Buddha, in the Mahayana sutras, spoke of "Unconditional great compassion and the kindness of realizing that we are one entity". The heart of compassion is the heart of great caring and loving-kindness. They both are revealed from our true nature. This is what "a person in search of the virtues of compassion and loving-kindness" is seeking. It is also what "A person wanting to accumulate

"virtues" is seeking. It is wanting to broaden the heart to love and care for others, to truly be able to love all beings and objects. We do our best to help them.

It is stated in the Book of Rites from the Zhou Dynasty, "In January, when most animals bear their young, females of the species are not to be used for sacrificial purposes".

In the past, three animals, cows, sheep and pigs were used in major sacrificial ceremonies. Most other ceremonies would use just pigs. They did not use females for offerings that were made in the spring, because if the female was pregnant, then they would have been killing two lives. This is compassion.

Mencius once said, "an honorable person will not go near the kitchen". This is to protect a compassionate heart.

The purpose of Mencius saying this is the same as that of the Buddha in teaching of the "three pure meats", (we only eat animals when) we did not see the actual killing, hear the killing or have the animal killed for ourselves. It was the custom in India to go from house to house accepting food offerings. So whatever was offered, was eaten. No discrimination, no attachments and no choices. That is true compassion, according with conditions and not seeking affinities. Simply accept and eat whatever people offer. This tradition is still carried on today where Theravada Buddhism is practiced, for example in Thailand and Ceylon. When Buddhism was transmitted into China, at the time it was considered the most advanced and civilized country in the world regarding manners. Now there are no more manners left. In etiquette, the Chinese cannot compete with other countries; it is truly a failure of education.

When the Dharma masters were invited to China, the Chinese looked down on begging, so it would have been inappropriate to tell them to go out and beg for food. So, they were instead offered food in the palaces. The practice of going out to ask for food never really took hold in China, however the "Three pure meats" rule was always observed when offering food to the Dharma masters.

Emperor Liang Wu initially advocated vegetarianism for Buddhists. Throughout the Buddhist world, only Chinese practitioners, whether monks, nuns or laypeople are vegetarians. When we have attended international conferences, we have not seen monks or nuns from other countries practicing vegetarianism. So people need to know that, the tradition of Buddhism is to practice the three pure meat rule, not vegetarianism. The Chinese initially advocated vegetarianism. It is sanitary, protects nature and protects the compassionate heart. It is the practices of loving-kindness for all beings and things. When we understand that it is also the best and healthiest food, we will see that it is worth out efforts to advocate its practice.

Mencius taught that it was good to not be near the kitchen so one would not see or hear the killing. Then the individual would have been more at ease when eating. But actually, the mind of compassion could still not be at rest. So, it is best to not eat the flesh of living beings, especially

today when we so often hear of meat that contains toxins causing people to contract strange diseases. Where do these diseases come from? From the consumption of meat. Ancient people said, "Illness enter from the mouth". My late teacher, Mr. Bing-Nan Lee, often sighed as he said that modern people were taking poison at all three meals. How could we not get sick!

Therefore, our ancestors did not eat meat under four circumstances. First was if they heard the killing, second was if they saw the killing, third was if they raised the animal themselves and fourth was if they had the animal killed for their consumption. Even if we cannot stop eating meat immediately, we can still try to start by following these four guidelines. In this way, we are gradually increasing our compassion. We would not only refrain from killing any living creature, but insects as well, for they are also living creatures. Man makes silk from the cocoons of silkworms. The cocoons have to be boiled in water first, with the silkworms inside. When we cultivate the land for farming, how many insects have to be killed? We need to be aware of the cost in lives involved in our everyday food and clothing. We kill to provide for ourselves. Therefore, to waste food and clothing would create the same violation as killing.

This speaks of the three pure meats with an additional rule that monks and nuns may not raise animals. Raising animals and then killing them to eat is truly unacceptable. Practitioners who are unable to become vegetarian can practice the "three pure meats", and the "four circumstantial meats" rules, to cultivate great compassionate hearts.

Our life span in this world is short, only a few decades long. Yet in order to nurture ourselves we kill others. We are steeped in debt to all beings, regardless of whether we have harmed them intentionally or unintentionally. Just imagine how much bad karma we ourselves have created! This is why the Buddha said, "If bad karma had shape and volume, then even the entire universe could not contain it". We have an inconceivable amount of karmic obstacles. Only when we realize this, will we become more alert and cautious. How can we be responsible for all living beings between heaven and earth? We obviously need to strictly abide by the rules of not killing. But also we need to be frugal in our daily living, drinking and eating and not waste anything.

Modern people advocate consumption by saying that if people did not spend money then the factories would be closed down and the economy would collapse. Do you believe that this is correct? If Master Jung-Feng heard this he would say, "not necessarily". Actually, this is very incorrect. Many countries promote consumption and thus waste, yet their economies are still declining.

Only by being thrifty will people, a country, become rich, prosperous and peaceful. If there are no habits of saving, how can the country become prosperous and strong? How can the citizens have stable lives? If we have no savings, when we are out of a job we will have to depend on the country for financial aid and thus increase the financial problems of the country. If however, we have the habit of saving, then even if we became unemployed or suffered adversity, we could still live and not depend on the country. We need to be aware of this and to value our resources and powers.

How often have we unknowingly harmed or stepped on a living creature? We should do our best to prevent this from happening again. An ancient great poet once wrote, "In love of the mice, we often leave them some rice. In pitying the moth, we will not light the lamp". What a kind and compassionate statement!

The above words are for our understanding for modern society would strongly disagree with them. How can we "love mice"? Mice are harmful to human beings. Consequently, mice are often exterminated. People do not understand about the Six Realms of Reincarnation. When we kill mice, they will seek revenge. This cycle of revenge will continue, growing worse each time. Does killing them really solve anything? Are there not any other solutions to the problem? There is no such thing as walking away "Scot free" after a murder. No such thing as not paying our debts. By really understanding the reality, that the Law of Cause and Effect connects our past, present and future lifetimes, we would not do anything bad. For if we do, it will come back to us! There is no such thing as a free lunch. Once, we understand this principle, then we would never again harm any living beings, never again make an enemy of them, never again owe debts to others. This is how our minds will be at peace in this life. Only true sincerity, purity and compassion in this world can solve the seemingly insurmountable problems of human beings. So, it is essential to read our primary sutra.

There are infinite types of goodness. I cannot mention them all. As long as we can expand on the ten previous categories, we can make them into a multitude of good deeds and virtues.

The first lesson, "Learning to Create Destiny" talks about the Law of Cause and Effect. The second lesson, "The Ways to Reform" is built on understanding the Law of Cause and Effect. This third lesson, "The Ways to Cultivate Goodness" is the primary lesson, that of cultivating and accumulating good deeds. It is built on the basis of feeling regret and reforming our faults. The fourth lesson, "The Benefits of the Virtue of Humility" is the conclusion for the book.